

Lonely Lake

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It was nearing two in the afternoon when I turned into my driveway. Fridays almost always found me coming home early. It was a kind of supposed benefit in a world of companies trying to cater to their employees and climb their own inter-social ladder. But not that I could complain.

My job itself did not consist of much, it was mostly a kind of busy work and one I had apparently earned the right to do through years of undergraduate and graduate study. But the numbers I worked with just did not have the same appeal that they once did when my dreams had still lit my way. Now the numbers just danced on my screen as I had perfected my job to such a point that creativity went out the window in search of a new home. Some might think it a real blessing to be able to live through a workday without actually thinking about your work; being able to more or less daydream your way out of an office while still paying the bills in real time. But for me things had been different. My adaptive abilities sucked the passion out with the work. Work was no longer work and had no end but to keep me kicking in some relative comfort so that I could continue my plight. And this was beginning to wear on me.

When my car reached my garage I did not reach for the opener. I put the car in park but I let it run without getting out. There came the thought of how crossing the threshold of my home would bring little of what I once had and would now forever hope for. This place I called a home was in reality becoming more and more of a house in simple objectivity to me. It lacked the real comforts that family brought to the table and the warmth that could come with it. Though, nevertheless, it tried hard to make up for

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what it lacked in its display of its material excess. But the electric fireplace could not replace the warmth of a woman at my side, and what was more there was no longer even the possibility of satisfaction from creating the fire. The house was all run at the push of a button. A push that made life supposedly more simple and gave the operator all the more time to reflect on how little effort had been required of him. Thus I have come to the conclusion that these apparent luxuries do evil in their relationship to their user as it seemed my constant self reflection would be the end of me.

Looking out the windshield of the car I turned the engine off and rather than put it in the garage left it close to front door in the U shaped driveway that eliminated any hassle of having to drive in reverse; a skill I had never become proficient in and had rather always found a way around it. The concrete slab that served as a driveway was rather beautifully surrounded by mulch and stone that worked to steady nature's path with its own devices and make what modifications a human hand could to the work of God where we found it was intruding.

I unlocked the front door but I was already determined not to stay and give my mind free range over itself. I stooped slightly to rummage through the entryway table drawer. I only stopped to glance once at the kitchen across the living room as my hand closed on what I was looking for. So many times I had imagined a young woman's welcoming smile there with the smell of an early start on dinner. With my eyes still watching the too clean room my hand pulled the small key from the drawer and without another look back I stepped outside and back across that constricting threshold of the material. The fresh air served to remind me of the constriction in the house and the freedom to be achieved outside of it. It was a half empty moment.

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The seat of the car was still warm when I got in and pulled away from the place that I had wanted to call home for so long. But I knew my destination was more of a home than I had ever had.

As I pulled into the gravel driveway the sun was already halfway through its descent from noon. It had been quite some time since the scene of the old willow welcomed me; reaching as if with a hand to steal but only wishing to touch whatever may pass. The cabin came into view as the strands of the willow pulled back from my windshield and I saw it as it always had been. Never pretty, never perfect, but comfortable in the reality that it was enough. When my car door closed my ears were met with a refreshing sound of gravel underfoot. It was a welcome change to the concrete jungle I was used to.

I opened the door to the damp smell of lonely and aging furniture and it stung my nostrils. I walked to the sliding glass door that constituted most of the back wall and threw back the drapes. It was as if a diamond had been dropped into a pile of coal and somehow transformed what was black and bland into something quite beautiful as the sun's reflection off the water gave the room a warm glow as the light found the all wood paneling. From here I could see the little sliver of the lake visible from the back yard that ran at a slight downward angle right to the waters edge. Here the earth and water met in a confusion of elements that seemed to produce mud in an unsatisfactory conclusion to a process foiled by its own means. I remembered there had always been plans to put sand there; the human solution to a midwestern confusion; a beach transported from postcards to this almost completely landlocked state.

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Inside no one had bothered to cover the furniture and it was clear that little care was taken to clean the room before deserting it. I imagined that this had to be the first time anyone had set foot in the building for quite some time. The mantle to the small fireplace still even had its collection of pictures though the dust had obscured what the frames held beyond recognition. Blowing the dust from one of the portraits I saw the image that had haunted me for so long. It was a past I could not forget but somehow neither could I escape it. Putting the picture back on the mantle I stepped out the back door and onto a porch that gave a creak of protest.

Walking toward the water I was taken past our small boathouse and walked around the long been dry dock that leaned against the wall. The boathouse was unlocked as it always had been. The security of its contents resided in the things themselves. Anyone who found there way in would surely not wish to take anything they found. The interior was constituted by a cold dirt floor and one could see that the vegetation had finally made its timely journey under the cinder block foundation that had held it at bay for just long enough. But in the middle was perhaps the greatest example of the wisdom so often appealed to in hopes to diminish embarrassment at material stature. One man's trash will always be another man's treasure I thought as the light came in through the open door to reveal what was perhaps the least seaworthy sailboat to be found on any shore. I could imagine the archeologist whom would find this in time yet to come and laughed at the marvel he would have thought himself to have discovered. A true gem to challenge all speculation and argument as to any significant human intelligence around the turn of the century. But despite its characteristics the vessel had never failed and I felt inclined to risk it once more.

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I released the lever to let the boat out on its tracks and watched the rust fill the air as the cable withdrew from its spool.

When the small sailboat was in the water I pulled it by rope to the shoreside and made to climb in. But as my intentions made to enter the boat they were to leave my body behind as if its feet had stepped in too nearly cured cement that had caught them there. And as the lowering sun lit up the water and the boat became just a silhouette I remembered the day that had kept me from this place for so long. I must have been only fifteen at the time but forever it had stuck in my memory as if it were yesterday. Every day since seemed only to dissolve at its finish leaving no lasting memory to overtake that day long since past.

But here I stood, with chance in front of me and memory encasing me. And with a will I had not known I broke my bonds and soon the boat was gliding towards the center of the lake with its passenger by the very momentum of my movement. There was no wind today and it was not until the small craft came to a rest just over half of the distance to the center of the water that the absence of any oar or other form of propulsion of any kind came to my attention. But before any kind of panic could overtake me I began to laugh. At what I did not know at first. But as I realized my situation and the result my moment of strong will I could do nothing but shake my head with a smile.

It was no secret to me that I had spent my life preparing for something without really knowing what. As if that day fifteen years ago had foreboded some prophetic future. But now I found myself past the point of preparation and dead center in the realm

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of ill-preparedness. More than anything it was a surprising sort of relief. My routine had been broken.

I sat at the rear of the small boat and removed my shoes so that I could kick my way back to shore. But as I made to remove my second shoe my foot found where the wood, unbeknownst to anyone, had long been rotting. Able to catch my fall with a hand I now had one leg straight out and another in the hull of the boat. Water began pouring in and I was quickly becoming soaked at the knees. Extracting my leg with a little effort I retrieved my shoe and quickly removing the other leapt over the side to find the water much warmer than it should have been for the fall. I watched as the boat quickly took on water and slowly sank near me. The eerie glow it gave off was somehow beautiful as the water distorted its image just below the surface. It didn't take long for me to reach the shore again and pulling myself out I turned only in time to see the last of the bow bob once and go under. Just then the sun settled itself behind the tree line and cast the world's natural shadow back upon the water that now became dark. I turned my back on that shadow, on the memory now making its way to the bottom of the lake to join my past and to tell of my visit to it. But I did not look back as I walked around the small cabin and stripped my wet and clinging clothes from my skin.

I sat in the drivers seat of my car in only my undershorts and let down the windows to dry myself in the warm wind. My road home was dark but nevertheless free. It was that same darkness that had taken my memory to keep it till my end; until my present was no longer to be. And with it was the promise of tomorrow's new light.