

“Hell Is Empty And All The Devils Are Here.”

He trudged through the sparse, barren, wasteland, looking for anything. People. A road. A car. A house. Anything. He passes it again. The spiny, prickly, permanent being. They were all the same... two inches wide, five feet tall, with the same intricate design and cold demeanor. They mocked him as they covered that never-ending terrain.

It's been days, months, years, he can't tell anymore. The lack of water played with his mind. He saw his emaciated arms abundant in textured patches where there was once smooth skin. He has witnessed his body deteriorate. He saw this progression of vitality to lethargy. But this wasn't a pressing concern. He needed to find his way out.

The voices in his head suddenly sound from an easterly direction. In an ethereal voice he heard “Jack, Jack...” It was her voice. She continued to recite poetry at sounded vaguely familiar.

“All summer we moved in a villa brimful of echos,
Cool as the pearled interior of a conch.
Bells, hooves, of the high-stipping black goats woke us.
Around our bed the baronial furniture
Foundered through levels of light seagreen and strange.”

He turned to the sun to follow the sound.

A door. How is it possible? he thought. The calcified edifice was suddenly in front of him and strangely familiar. He saw the layers. The changes in form and direction. The rich colors and intrigue of the stone. The complex and alien-like structure reached out to him. He did as it asked him and moved his crippled, defeated body through the structure.

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He finds himself in his apartment. Everything is still the way he left it. The bed unmade. The sink filled with dirty dishes. He sees his world but he's not a part of it.

His mother and Rose are taking his clothes out of the closet. Why are they doing that? This manic energy consumes him as he sees his life being put into cardboard boxes. The suits that represented his

financial success. His favorite sweatshirt from college. The brand new pair of shoes he never got to wear. Then there are those of sentiment. The photos, the books, the medals, the records. He can't bare to look his mother in the eye. He screams until his throat burns with intensity and his lungs are over capacitated. Yet they act as if he doesn't exist.

Then he sees Rose pick up the journal. He tries to knock it out of her hands. "No don't read that." Still she carries on with her exploration. She sits on the bed and opens it up to the last page.

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Rose rummages through the room looking for any reason to deny what she feels could be the truth. Why was he out there by himself? Why didn't he have his phone? Who stands on a precipice in the middle of the desert and doesn't watch where he's going?

Rose finds a book that looks different than the others. It doesn't have a title. She asks Jack's mother "have you seen this before?" She gives a passive "no" and carries on packing. Rose sits on the bed and cracks open the book. It's a journal. Maybe the key to what happened is here. She quickly turns to the last page and reads his final excerpt.

" June 9th,

I have made my final decision. It has to end. This energy consumes me and I can't take it any longer. It's driving me into insanity. So, I made a plan. Tomorrow. It has to be tomorrow..."

Rose drops the book and falls to her knees sobbing uncontrollably. Jack's mother asks, "What is it? What happened? What did you find?" Rose lifts the book as if it weighs a ton and hands it to her. "Read the last entry." Jack's mother takes the book and reads it. Her eyes swell in tears along with disbelief. "He would never. He couldn't."

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Jack realizes that his message has been misconstrued. How does he correct them? What can he do? His only intent was to explore a new terrain in hopes of clearing his mind before meeting with Rose to end their relationship. After four years, these things take time. He was always intrigued by the desert. The dry, barren oasis. The cacti that were too guarded to touch. It was reclusive and repetitive but he was always

fascinated by its solitary nature. This attraction to the desert and the deserted drove him to take his hike there. Yes, it was stupid to lose his balance. It's not how he thought things would end. But to have them think this was intentional is torture. A wrong he may never be able to right, but he has to try.

He goes to the living room and impulsively opens the drawer to the desk and grabs a post it note and a pen. Jack mumbles to himself "what should I write?" He manically scribbles the words he hopes will convince them: "going on a hike, be back later." He wonders if it is enough, but at least it's a start. He glances around the room and stares at the fridge. Not obvious enough. He then makes his way to the door and places his message on it. They're sure to see it when they leave. He waits for them to leave.

Sitting in his old living room, he slips into a state of introspection. His body feels real. He feels the softness of the cushion beneath him, the firm pillows behind him. He remembers going to buy this couch. It was a big purchase as he went into debt to buy it. It was so important to him to have the right furniture, to impress those around him. Rose was the first one to come sit on this couch. He felt like a grownup, offering her a glass of wine while she sat on his indulgence. The couch was always there. It aged with him. It witnessed his life unfold and ultimately come to an end. The thing is, he didn't feel dead.

He sees his mother and Rose enter the room and make their way to the door; each carrying a box filled with his belongings. His mother turns to Rose, "same time tomorrow?" Rose nods and scans the room. Jack wonders, "is she looking at the couch and thinking the same things I am? Does she see me?" Suddenly Jack's mother asks "did you put this post it on the door?" Jack's excitement causes him to rush from the couch to the door. "They can see it," he murmurs. Rose shakes her head no and looks closely at the post it. With a look of confusion, she says "that's odd, who would put a blank post it on the door?" Jack tries to speak but he feels a pull on his body, like a vacuum, sucking him up and taking him away.

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Jack found himself back in the desert sitting in front of the precipice that was once a door. Now it was only rock. He got up. Was it just a dream? He wasn't sure. He was determined to find out and continued to trudge through the desert again, looking for a door. As he moved forward, the sun sunk and the air

began to chill. He passed the same group of cacti, the same monotonous landscape. He noticed the muted blues and grays of the sky, the clouds fading into the background, and the overwhelming feeling of another cycle ending. He needed to find another door.

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Rose sits in front of her make up mirror, getting ready for the day. She doesn't want to put on any makeup, she doesn't want to get ready for the day, she wants to get back in bed. People are counting on her. She stares at her reflection as if she didn't recognize herself. She carefully lines her lips and paints her eyelids. She fills in the gap in her lips with a soft pink. She hopes the makeup will disguise her swollen eyes with dark circles from not sleeping. As she glances in the mirror she notices a picture on her nightstand. It was she and Jack from the New Year's Eve they spent in New Orleans. That was the first time he said he loved her. She starts to sob.

Jack finds himself in Rose's bedroom watching her cry. He tries to stand in her eye line while she looks in the mirror hoping she will see him. He flails his arms and jumps up and down. She still ignores him. She rises from the table with a sigh and goes into the bathroom. Jack takes this opportunity to make his presence known. He grabs the soft pink lipstick and begins to write on the mirror, "it was an accident." She re-enters the room, dressed and ready to leave. She glances at the mirror one last time. Jack watches as she appears to notice something on the mirror, he becomes hopeful that it worked. Rose reaches over, grabs a tissue, and says to no one, "How'd that smudge get there?" She wipes the mirror as Jack feels that familiar pull.

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Jack found himself back in the garden of never ending cacti. His body still frail, his mouth still dry. The silver moon lit up the landscape so that he could see where he was going. He needed to find another door.