

Through the Glass

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Dark. He awoke in a dark room. Dark, save for the light from a large candle at his periphery atop a cluttered table; dark, save for a radiant beam of light that came from a source he knew not where, for he could not turn to look at it, he knew not why. Moonlight, surely, for I have not awoken out of restfulness, but as if from a dream you entertain before sleep takes you, as if by a stir in the shadows across your room as you try to rest. Awoken not from sleep, but as if by mere thought through force of will, torn from a moment frozen in time. Feverish. The candle by which he made sense of this room burned brightly and sickly, flickering with a feverish intent, its trail of smoke drew mercurial shapes on the ceiling, its shadows danced a revelry he could not hear, a reverie he knew only in that dream. And yet the candle flickered only in thought and not in time. A shadow would change only when he looked away and maybe back again. To look upon the candle straight on produced only a steady flame, unmoving, a stable shadow, undancing. The candle frightened him. Would he but reach out and touch it, to feel its warmth, yet he had no fingers to touch the flame. It seemed a force more powerful than he could resist. If wax should flee its approach, why not he? Cold. A breeze seemed to set the tablecloth aflutter, and yet the feather in his cap did not stir. Why should this room feel a cool breeze and not he, feel the warmth of the candle and not he? Out an open window, he might escape this room and that candle that frightened him so, and yet the breeze had not come but was merely there. For a breeze to have passed this room, he thought, he would have had to have noticed its passing, and yet he did not notice it passing but its presence, as if the breeze had been there all along and it only showed its force in the tablecloth and not the feather in his cap as if by his recognition alone. And why should the tablecloth not return to its unmoved stance, frozen as it is as if in constant breeze, though it does not move? As though the candle, the tablecloth only fluttered when he looked away and maybe back again, for it was in a different shape by the second gaze. Hewn. And there he saw the ship, labored after for so many days as he watched. How could he know this if he had truly only just awoken, he unable to name its builder? He did not know, but felt as if born from the same timber, as if labored after in the same mind. Impossible. And how should such a small vessel carry a host of souls? But ah, it was by ship and candle, not by ship alone, that such a voyage be possible. The ship's shadow by candlelight was cast so great against the far wall and its

shadow danced so gleefully that it seemed to chart the seas by merely sitting on this table, that he could but merely grab hold of it and sail out of this room, projection by firelight the wind at his back, and yet he had no hands to grasp with. Curses. Why must this purgatory treat me with such marvels, yet trick me only? He saw on that table, too, his violin, strung so tightly it promised to snap, and with it, too, he saw at last to which the shadows danced, his sheet music splayed across the table. Glee. It was a simple tune, known to any child, its tempo fast and its melody floating. Panic. He made to widen his eyes in shock and leap across the table to catch the sheets that cascaded from the wind, and yet he had no feet to spring with, and yet the sheets remained motionless in air, and yet they never really cascaded, they were always there from whence he awoke, suspended as if by his sight alone. How should it be that his music would inspire the air itself to ensure its floating? What fresh hell have I found myself in? Where the air conspires against the laws by which I was created, where the shadows themselves conspire to take my heart to freedom but not my body, where a fire creeps and warms beyond my grasp? Relief. It did not matter, for across the table sat his beloved of so many years, her hair as dark as her eyes, a warmth no candle could match, her smile more the ark than that ship for which he yearned. Would he but stride across the table and embrace her, and yet he had no legs to carry him, and yet she had no heart to meet him, for she was merely a painting, unfinished and unsigned. Damn it all. What cruel God would have me love that which I cannot have? Place her so near? Make me believe that she was mine to take? To curse me with the pretention to take but without the fingers to touch, the hands to grasp, the feet to- Terror. He saw it then. Fire. Not of the candle at his side. Perhaps from the candle of that cruel God, of flames licking from beneath the door frame across the room. He saw the fire spread into the room from beyond as if through a glass distorting, for as he strained to freeze the flames in time as he would the tablecloth or the sheets, it grew and burned and ate and smoked despite his gaze. And as the fire approached the table this glass distorting moved with it for his gaze could not slow the flame and that flame consumed the ship and its shadow with it and that flame snapped his violin cord and it ate the sheets that hung in the air and the flame enveloped his beloved despite the screams he tried to scream that would not scream because his mouth would not open and he watched as the oil of her face bubbled and burst and burned until she was dust. The fire ate all that there was until he was all that was left, and yet he felt no pain at the coming of his unmaking, fire eating the oil of his shirt, as the oil dripped from the feather in his cap. Why do I bleed oil?