

Looking at the Moon

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I told Wendell that I'm not going to call him "Daddy" until he marries my mommy. Or maybe it was him that told me not to call him "Daddy." Either way, he thinks that's fine. Our favorite cartoons are Woody Woodpecker and The Flintstone's. He lets me sit on his lap when we watch them and when I turn around to give him a hug he always hugs me back until I finally let go. The house is dark when he's not home. No matter how many times I open the drapes, she always closes them again when I'm not looking.

It's raining today, with thunder and lightning. My mother is afraid of thunderstorms the same way she is afraid of the moon. She says that if a person looks at the moon they'll go crazy. So when she's not paying attention, I say, "Mom, look!" And I point to the moon to make her look. When there's a thunderstorm she won't go outside because she thinks she'll be struck by lightning.

I walk out of my bedroom and she's sitting on the sofa in front of the TV, like she doesn't even know there's a storm outside. She has her legs stretched out in front of her, feet on the coffee table, crossed at the ankles. On the TV a man and a woman are in a living room talking real low. There's dramatic music in the background. Then the man says something that makes the woman scream. My mother has her hand over her mouth and she's mumbling, "Oh, no. Not Jake. Oh God. Oh God."

"MOM!" I say as loud as I possibly can. This startles her.

"What?" She screams back at the same volume.

"What are you doing?" I say quietly.

She reaches for her drink on the table. The ice cubes clink together when she picks it up. "What do you think I'm doing? My God. Why do you ask me questions like that? Why do you want to scare me?"

I look at the TV and see a commercial is on now.

"There's a storm outside," I say.

"Is there?" She says mindlessly, putting her drink down then fixing her eyes back on the TV.

"Can I go play in the rain?"

"I don't care what you do. You're gonna do what you want anyway. Nothing I say matters."

Her eyes don't move from the screen. This isn't what I was expecting. I thought she would tell me, "No." I thought she would start screaming because of the lightning and how I might get struck. Then I would yell back at her and tell her that she is stupid because Wendell says nobody ever gets struck by lightning in Los Angeles.

The show comes back on and she starts mumbling again. She acts like she's there in the living room with those people on TV. Like she's a character on the show and they can hear her when she talks to them. I walk in front of her toward the door, but when I get there, I realize that I'm still in my pajamas.

"I'm going," I say, as I put my hand on the doorknob.

"Okay, bye," she says in a high voice.

I hear the thunder crash outside and when I open the door, the wind blows my hair back and sprays a sheet of water on the front of my pajamas. I think then that maybe I should get a coat and shoes. I slam the door in front of me and look over at her. Nothing.

I walk in front of her stomping my feet this time. In my bedroom I find my coat and rubber boots. They're too small for me, but I curl up my toes and squeeze my feet into them. I stomp past her and step outside, slamming the door behind me.

From the porch I can see how hard it's raining. It's coming down sideways and the wind is cold. I put on my hood, tie the strings tight around my neck so that only my face is showing, and head toward the sidewalk. My coat is flapping in the wind so I have to zip it up. My pajama bottoms are already soaked and I just walked a few steps. I turn around and stare at our house. Even though it's daytime, it's dark outside from the clouds. The rain is pounding in my ears and every few seconds the thunder crackles and shakes the ground, but it still seems quiet for some reason. I don't hear any kids playing or cars going by on Tampa Boulevard.

Then the lightning makes everything daytime, just for a flash. When it's dark again, I can see the television inside our house flashing light through the window, like there's a storm there too.

Our house faces Cantara Street, but it's on the corner so the rest of our half acre runs along Tampa Boulevard. The playground is right behind our house and has a tall wood fence that you can't see through if you're driving by, but the barnyard behind that has chain link. Everyone on the boulevard can see me when I ride Buddy in a little circle. Wendell doesn't like everyone seeing our business. He says that people walking down the sidewalk try to pet the ponies and spook them. He put a sign on the fence that said, "Don't touch the ponies," but someone made him take it down. He said if he made the fence electric, nobody would try to get in our business then, now would they?

I walk up to the corner and watch a car rush by with its window wipers going full blast. The thunder crashes again and I can see lightning crackle its way down behind the rows of houses in front of me. It's supposed to be fun playing in the rain, but since I've never done it before, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do. I walk on the sidewalk past the garage and past the playground fence until I am standing in front of the chain link of the barnyard. I can see all the ponies standing in the rain when I hear a car honk its horn right behind me. It makes me jump and turn around, but by the time I look, it's already out of sight down the boulevard. I put my face up to the sky. It's easy to catch raindrops on my

tongue because they're coming from all directions. I thought they would taste salty, but they taste just like plain water. I lean back on the chain link so I can taste the raindrops better.

When I wake up, I can see the boulevard in front of me, but it's sideways. I blink my eyes a couple of times. My cheek is cold and I realize it's flat against the sidewalk. Then I remember who I am and that I came outside to play in the rain. My heart starts beating really fast. I don't remember how I ended up face down on the sidewalk but I do remember feeling like something kicked me really hard in the middle of my back. When I turn my head to look up at the fence, there's nothing there. No person. No pony. Just chain link. I can hear a car slow down behind me and I feel embarrassed for lying on the ground. I don't want to get kidnapped so I pick myself up without looking at the car and I run home as fast as I can.

When I get inside I run past my mother on the sofa and into my bedroom. I take off all my clothes and push them into the corner of the closet so I won't get in trouble for being all wet. I'm shaking from the cold, so I search around for something warm to wear.

Dawn told me that I have to pray to the devil every day or he will come up from under the ground and pull me into hell. I didn't believe her when she told me because I have never prayed to him before and I've been just fine. I wonder, now, if it was him that kicked me in the back.

I go to my record player and see that my Wizard of Oz album is still sitting on the turntable. Before we moved here, my mom let me buy it at the thrift store since I liked the movie so much. I listen to it all the time. I thought it would just be the songs from the movie, but it's the whole story, with Dorothy and stuff, only it's different. The voices don't sound the same and the magic shoes are silver, not made of rubies.

After I put the record on, I pull the blanket off my bed and wrap it around me. I get on my knees, put my hands together in front of me and look down at the braided rug. Under that is the devil.

In the TV Wizard of Oz, the good witch of the east shows up at the end and saves the day. It's different on my record, which I turn up really loud. I don't want anyone to hear me when I ask the devil not to kick me anymore.

In my story Dorothy has to go searching for the good witch by tip toeing through a land made of china.

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