

Un Chien Andalou

He left when it was still very dark. He thought about the other nights when he'd gone out with his camera and tripod. Once, when there had been no wind, not even the most meagre movement of air, a dense and heavy fog had settled in the streets, a motionless fog that glowed orange and yellow from the streetlights. And he, at two or three o'clock in the morning, had gone out with his camera and tripod to capture the fog, to capture the light the fog made manifest. He stood outside other people's houses, houses where families he didn't know slept, and photographed them in the fog because he found the silhouettes these houses hewed in the fog to be pleasing. Shutter speed turned all the way down, he used the camera's timer so the vibrations of his fingers wouldn't affect, ruin, the shot. The camera clicked and the shadow of a home that wasn't his, a shadow dark yet bright in the luminous fog, became his. He thought about that night and the other nights as he left his home with the tripod over his shoulder and the camera bag swaying and banging against his hip.

He did not let himself wonder if this time he would see it.

The light of the coming morning had not yet arrived. Although he knew the night would have to end eventually, as he walked through the silent and empty streets of the suburb, a part of him deeper than conscious knowledge told him that this night was *the* night, the only night, the long true night that comes after the final day. He did not feel lonely; he felt triumphantly solitary, as singular and incomparable as the North Star.

Photography allowed consciousness transferal. Hunched over the camera, eye to viewfinder, adjusting settings he didn't fully understand, he was not his body. Instead, he was the attention that he focused on some or other object. Astrally, he travelled through the lens and occupied whatever it was that had announced itself as worthy of his notice. He became the house that was not his. A few days before, he had become two teenage boys stood at a bus stop, framed by the blue sky above and tall, high, dry grass below. Once, he had become the reflection of his camera in someone's eye.

He had some way to go before the start of daybreak. He was walking up hill, north. This direction would lead to the sharp edge of town where the rows of houses ceased and immediately gave way to fields. These were bare and empty now, furrows of mud without any shoots. The land was asleep. The town was asleep. He was awake, in the dark.

By the time he got to the gate, which was pulling off its hinges, and started along the flinty track that ran through the fields, the dark was starting to shift into grey. This didn't worry him. What these experiments had taught him, among other things, is that dawn is a long time coming. A slow-moving radiation spreads across the sky and down onto the world below. The actual moment of sunburst can be completely lost by atmospheric haze or an obstructed eyeline.

He was not going to photograph the dawn anyway.

He was a man who had trouble sleeping. He had started going for walks in the dead hours after midnight long before he had bought a camera. Photography was a relatively recent addition to the roster of activities that distracted him from his insomnia. The camera became a kind of permission to extend these walks. Even if, physically speaking, he didn't walk that far, the camera deepened the world around him and extended his travel. He felt like he was going to find a crack in the world; and that this crack would be found in an alleyway familiar to him during the day but which, at night, when seen from a certain angle, became a limitless corridor leading elsewhere; and that it would somehow be his camera, be the scientific art of photography, that would let him find this crack.

Seeing other people at that time of night was rare. And when he did, their movements were somehow rat-like. He'd not considered what the word "furtive" actually designated until the encounter with the boy at the streetlight. He'd been trying to frame a close-up of the roofs of several houses which, when lined up against the glowing overcast night sky, suggested the teeth of a serrated knife, when a very white face flashed at him. A boy, who had to be much younger than twenty, was crossing the illuminated pool under the streetlight. The expression the boy gave him was at first simply surprise at seeing someone else on the street that night, followed quickly by confusion at what he was doing, then slipping into plain fear. The boy glanced at him over his shoulder as he stepped out of the light and into the dark sea around them, and this final expression was that of a child worried at being told on. He watched the boy's silhouette fade into complete indistinction and then heard a car door slam, an engine rev, and the crunch of tires rolling away. For days afterwards he wondered who the boy had been meeting at that hour and what they had driven away together to do. He never saw the boy again, for which he was grateful because, he eventually realised, he would have asked to follow him—wherever it was he was going, to whichever sin.

The path inclined upwards gently. He walked beyond the fields and into scrubby, hilly grass where sheep and cows grazed during the warmer seasons. It was getting lighter. He stepped off the path and headed uphill, going west, climbing up the side of an artificial mound. On the top of the mound was a concrete platform, out of which sprouted the ends of pipes with little conical tin hats. He'd wondered what was housed in the mound but suspected the truth would be dull, quotidian. The mound was the highest point nearby, and the platform was completely flat and thus ideal for setting up the camera.

It had been here that he'd seen the figure, moving across the fields, the grass, through the hills, drifting rather than walking, gliding silently and purposefully through the pre-dawn greyness. It was a dark silhouette, humanoid with natural proportions, leaning forwards slightly, leaning into its direction of travel. Strands of hair blew behind its head and something like rags or—and he couldn't account for this impression—sheets of plastic hung around it.

He had been stunned into inaction by this apparition. It had seemingly appeared from nowhere. He had simply looked up and seen it floating past. There'd been no sound, none at all. But he had heard a voice in his head vibrate the words LOOK AND SEE. And, though he couldn't make out any features on its face, or even be certain it had a face, he'd known that it was looking at him, fixing him in its sight, acknowledging him as worthy of its attention. And with that, it vanished from sight, like the image in a magic eye picture when you uncross your eyes. The day broke, and with it the silence.

He had not taken a picture of it. He had not captured it as it had captured him. He had returned to this site repeatedly. That first week, he'd gone every night, but despite his familiarity with insomnia the fatigue this created became overwhelming. His boss questioned his appearance, the greyness in his face. And when his boss said that he should feel free to ask for help if he had a problem, it was clear that a threat was intended.

He bought books about the folklore of the area, some academic and others sensational. He couldn't find anything that resembled the vision he'd seen. It was *sui generis*, uniquely his, confirmation that he was a distinct presence in the world. And he had lost it. He returned to the site at first weekly, then twice monthly. He tried to moderate his expectations. Finally, he would only go when he felt an intuitive stirring, which was never a soft and gentle movement in his heart but closer to the anxious, panicked eruption of realisation that you've forgotten something of enormous importance. And still, it never reappeared.

He opened up the tripod. He locked its legs in place. He attached the camera. He checked the aperture and the shutter speed. He looked east. He prayed that dawn would not come.

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Here is a dream he had when he started taking pictures.

If there was more to the dream than just these images, he couldn't remember. He rarely recalled his dreams in detail. They never seemed to be more than disordered mental fragments swirling into nothingness.

This is what he saw:

An eye. He was above it, looking down. The eye seemed enormous and the pupil abyssal. He saw something move towards the eye, like a scalpel or a razor blade, and with a violent gesture, it sliced across the pupil, removing it completely. He looked inside the eye. He saw a vortex of colour, bright golds and reds, a galactic coral reef seen through a whirlpool, into which he fell and, in its brilliance, gladly drowned.