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Who Can Tell The Dreamer From The Dream?

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WHO CAN TELL THE DREAMER FROM THE DREAM?

Do we dream the landscape, or does the landscape dream us, as we scurry over it appraising the views, fencing acres, and building the house we always dreamed of?

Even the house, shifting late at night, may be aware of its occupants as we are aware of the dreams and desires inside us, its rooms like compartments for different wishes where we sit, sleep, and eat, performing what the house wants us to perform, which is what the landscape dreams the house will do.

The landscape, with the oceans and continents, rivers and pastures curving over it, may be a ball that rolls into the corner of a dark field where no one can find it, and its houses and people may be glittering splotches of microbes stuck to its surface as it rolls.

Several hours ago, the boy who threw the ball went home to the farmhouse a mile down the road, where he was scolded at supper for losing the ball, while his sister, a year older than he, smirked and stuck out her tongue, a slight which the boy, now asleep in his room, will not forget.

We can no longer see the ball or the field, but several windows of the farmhouse are bursting with light, along with the windows of a dozen other houses down the road. Beyond them, the light-cluster of a suburb sparkles in the night but is almost obliterated by the melding of a million light sources from a city in the distance.

All this—the ball, the field, the farmhouses, the suburb, and the city ablaze with light—is a scene in a paperweight that sits on a desk in an old man's study. When he gets bored or is deep in thought, he idly raises the paperweight and shakes it, watching the snow fall on the scene inside and remembering a trip he went on with his parents. It was on that trip that his father bought him the paperweight as a souvenir—that same father who one night not long after went out for cigarettes and never returned.

For a long while after his father's disappearance, the old man's mother had grieved, moaning and clutching her chest, several times attempting to smash the paperweight, which each time the old man managed to wrestle from her grasp.

Eventually the mother met a car salesman, and one night when she was drunk she told the old man that she had never been happier, that his father had not been much in bed.

The old man never forgave his mother for this and began having doubts about himself, doubts that were conveyed by tremors of anxiety which, when he absently lifts the paperweight, are felt inside from the city to the suburb, from the farmhouses to the field, all the way to those rivers and pastures stuck to that spot on the rolling ball where the house shifts around us in the middle of the night.