

But a Moment

Original Story by Andrew Johnson

It took but a moment. A consecutive series of moments that when separated and laid out in any particular order, described the terrifying and tragic end for a small town to the north. After experiencing some of these moments for myself, I know not whether the events I have seen have already occurred, are in the process of happening at this moment, or will occur any day beginning tomorrow. But I am glad I saw these moments, for I believe that I can do something about it, whereas many others who might see them may not.

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On the northeastern shore of Lake Caldberg lies a small town. From said town a boat can be chartered to take you to an intriguing island within the lake, which has long been shrouded in superstition and mystery. The island is a small lump of land jutting out from the calm waters of the lake, and the first mystery about it is the fact that the island itself is covered in an inch of standing water, that does not move, even with the strongest of breezes. It was to this island that I traveled a few days past, hoping to learn more about the phenomena causing the islands existence.

A local fisherman rowed me to the island for cheap, but he refused to dock on the island itself. Instead, I jumped out into the waters of the lake when they were still thigh-deep, and I splashed my way to shore. Upon stepping onto the land that jutted from the lake, it rippled. A nonexistent gust of wind stormed past me, pushing me forward and seemingly fracturing the ground, causing cracks to form in the previously still water. Looking forward, the spidering cracks filtered towards the exact center of the island, where in but a moment I watched as a giant tree grew. The tree was made out of the same water that covered the island, as if the water displaced by my stepping on the island had caused water to rush towards the center, piling on top of itself to create this tree. I stepped forward to the tree, and instinctively reached my hand out toward it. But as the tip of my finger brushed against it, the tree shattered. Water exploded into the air, falling around me in a downpour stronger than any I had ever felt. But as hard as the deluge was, it was also slow. I could see every individual raindrop as they plummeted past me, and in each droplet I could see an image. I began to spin in place, trying to see every image and not miss anything, and these images began to form a story.

A peaceful town stands quietly, surrounded by trees and with the noonday sun beating down overhead. Suddenly, the peaceful calm is obliterated by the cry of a carrion in a nearby tree, as the door to what must be the inn slams open. A tall, cloaked individual, wreathed in shadow and surrounded by a tangible aura of malice steps out of the building, with a weapon of some sort clenched within its left hand. This individual steps into the sunlight, and the light seems to bend away from it, causing darkness to obscure any view of it. It begins to walk, but with each slow, monotonous, dreadful step

it takes, smoke flares up around its ankles and the grass is left scorched by boot prints. Past the individual, the interior of the building is ablaze. Flames lick at the walls and tables, but a perfect circle in the center of the room remains untouched by the fire. Within this circle is a tower of bodies, each and every one of them burned alive, with screams of terror etched within their taut flesh. After about five steps, the individual stops, and without looking back it slams its weapon into the side of the building, which ignites and explodes in a crown of flame. From beneath the flame the ground then ruptures, with large twisting bars of metal escaping the confines of the earth before plunging back in, like a great serpent might move through the waves. The metal twists and wraps around the other buildings in town, pulling them toward the raging conflagration in the center. The buildings disappear one by one, until none remain. As the fire then dies down, the bars of metal return once more. But instead of returning with the intent of dragging more into a blazing fire, they bring with them a new building. A stone building, multistoried with turrets and balconies fit for a duke emerges from the ashes of this town.

I stood shocked, hardly breathing as the last droplet of water landed upon the ground and the images faded. Slowly, I collapsed to my knees, tears leaking out of my eyes at the thought of the amount of life I had just seen lost. Eventually I struggled to my feet and returned to the boat, refusing to inform the fisherman of what I had seen.

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It took but a series of moments for a town to be reduced to nothing. But if those moments could be avoided, then it was my job to at least try. I had little fighting experience, but I was wealthy, and the journey north to the town I had seen was long. Perhaps there would be others along the way, that I could meet and convince to join me, if nothing else than for coin. It would take but a moment to understand if they would be able to help, and that counted. After all, all the world has was a series of moments.