

Standing in the living room of Grandma Connolly's house, Nina held onto a mug of steaming coffee and observed the house she knew so well as a child. Last year her mother had renovated, and everything except the shape, was different. She acknowledged that it was very beautiful, but this house was supposed to be her fixed point in the universe, the thing that didn't change. It caused a bitter sweet lump in her throat, made her want to cry in her mom's arms.

"Grandma," her eldest, Aubrey called out. "You need help in there?"

"Not at all dear!" Grandma called back cheerfully.

Aubrey shrugged and went back to her Gossip girl book, legs curled up under her on the new pale green couches. Nina's youngest, Sophie, was playing hide and seek with Grandma's cat. Nina sighed and sat on the Laz-e-boy in the corner, hands wrapped around the hot mug. Then she noticed the painting.

"Mom," she said when Grandma came back into the living room holding a platter of chocolates, which were swarmed by the two kids in an instant. After they backed off only the dark and toffee chocolates remained. "Mom," She said again.

"Mhmm?" Grandma turned her soft blue eyes on Nina.

"The painting. Why's that still there?" You renovated completely, got rid of everything! But you keep that, why?" Nina inclined her head towards the wall.

Nina, Aubrey and Grandma all quietly looked at it. It was a painting of a village street, people going about their business on the crowded road. There were chickens, cats, dogs and children bustling around underfoot. It was a rather pretty painting. It seemed to draw the light from the room, all eyes attracted to it.

"My painting..." Grandma mused. "I never told you the story?"

Nina shook her head. Aubrey put her book down, fixating upon Grandma.

"Oh my, oh my. Well, let me tell you this then." Grandma made a big show of getting comfortable, crossing her legs and smoothing out her skirt.

Aubrey grinned at Nina. She had always loved Grandma's tales.

"Well, when I was a young girl..."

Young Grandma, also known as Faye, peeked around the corner of the hall as Daddy brought in his new painting. He had bought it as a present for Mommy.

"Faye, help me?" He asked, trying to balance the painting and mount it on the wall. She zipped towards him, jumping on the stool and helping him lean it on the hook. It clattered a bit, but hung solidly on the wall.

"Picture perfect!" Daddy laughed, picking Faye up and swinging her around once before placing her on the floor. "Go get Mommy."

"Mommy! You painting's up!" Faye yelled into the kitchen. Mommy was doing dishes. She smiled crinkily eyed down on Faye and wiped her hands on a dishcloth, then followed Faye out into the kitchen.

"Oh gorgeous! It's such a lovely painting!" She cried, holding Daddy's hand and leaning on his shoulder. They stood looking at it for a moment. Faye stood on the chair and lent in to examine the painting. It was a cherry, bustling painting, everything fit like a puzzle, smooth and flowing. Except one little girl. She stood against a house wall looking out into the street. Her detail was amazing. She stood out from the paint like she was real. The surroundings seemed dim around her. Faye suddenly didn't like her, she felt malevolent.

"Faye, hunnie, can you please go get Mommy a glass of water?"

Faye nodded and sped from the room.

Later, she closely inspected the girl. Her dress was dark blue with a yellow belt, hands behind her on the wall. Her hair was pale gold, undone and around her shoulders. Faye wrinkled her nose and lent in close, nearly touching the paint. The face was turned away, looking down the street, sort of a profile. She had a vacant look on her angelic little face. Faye squinted at her.

"You don't fool me." She scowled.

Suddenly a little smirk came across the painting's face. Like she knew something.

Faye, with all her 6 years of wisdom, knew paintings didn't move. She gasped and fell backwards, narrowly missing the coffee table.

"Faye!" Mommy called. "What was that?"

Faye scrambled back up on the chair and went back to squinting. The painting had resumed her vacant looking down the street.

"Faye! What happened?" Mommy called again.

"Nothing! It was just my head!" Faye had long known that if you said you fell on the table, parents ran to check on their furniture, but if you just fell on the floor and are able to talk, they drop it.

The cat, named Cat, weaved it's way about the chair legs, meowing for food. "Coming..." Faye mumbled. She gave the girl one last warning look, then hopped down and went to find something for the cat.

At night, Cat always came up onto Faye's bed and warned her feet. Faye was so used to it that when it didn't happen that night she was shocked awake.

"Cat?" Faye asked of the darkness groggily. "Where are you?"

There was no noise in the house. "Cat?" Faye whispered. All she got was booming silence. She sleepily got up and bumped her way downstairs. "Ca-at. Where aare yyou?" She demanded under her breath.

"Meewwel." Cat squeaked from the kitchen.

"Cat." Faye opened the door to the dark kitchen. But it wasn't dark, there was a pearly light coming in from the living room. Cat was sitting, looking in at it. Something made Faye back up and observe, hidden by the half shut door.

The pearly light got brighter and brighter, and suddenly there was form to it. The form bent down to Cat and picked him up. The form gave a flick of her opalescent hair and turned on her heel back into the living room.

A sleep-fogged mind made Faye not quite realise what she was seeing. But that silhouette looked very familiar.

"Cat?" Faye asked, as she followed their path. The living room was now dark, devoid of the light. The last few glimmers of it were whispering their way back into the painting.

"Faye, have you seen Cat?" Mommy asked the next morning, holding an open can of cat food. "No, not sense yesterday." Faye glanced around the corner at the painting. Earlier today Faye had checked the painting. The girl was now on her knees, petting Cat. Her hair was now done up in a ponytail, and wearing a pink dress. Faye didn't tell. Mommy and Daddy wouldn't believe her.

That night, after Mommy and Daddy had gone to bed, Faye snuck down and hung a blanket over the painting, in hopes it would keep the girl in there. "Don't worry Cat, I'll get you out! Now stay there." Faye added, before lowering the blanket.

It didn't work though.

Various objects went missing during the next few days. A chair, the blanket, a pack of matches. Everyday Faye checked on the girl. Her dress would change, the chair was added next to the door, the blanket draped up in the window of the little house. Then, the painting started changing every few hours, like with every object she took she was able to move more. Faye also noticed that the girl's look became strange. She looked out of the painting with distaste, like she hated what was out there.

One night while the girl was stealing a mug from the shelf, Faye accidentally yawned, hidden by the door again. The pearly form snapped around, looking down at her. In a few quick strides, she was right above her. Faye was stuck with her mouth open in a stupid looking yawn.

Faye didn't have time to think before the figure was walking back to the living room. She stood below it and suddenly was gone, leaving only the wisps of light. Faye went back upstairs, somehow feeling marked.

"God damn it!" Daddy shouted the next morning, opening the shelf. "Where's my mug?"

"Where did that chair go?" Mommy wrung her hands, opening the door under the sink, like it was under there. "A mug, ok. Keys, ok, fine. The cat, yes... but a chair? How do you lose a chair?"

Faye just ate her cereal, contemplating the feeling she had gotten last night. It was a scared feeling, like the girl knew her. Like she was next on the missing list.

"Mommy?" Faye peeked into Mommy and Daddy's room before she went to bed that night.

"Whats wrong sweet?" Mommy asked. She was laying back on a pile of pillows reading while Daddy was already asleep. His arm was around her waist, and his mouth open in a silent snore.

"Just wanted a kiss." Faye danced over and pecked her Mommy's cheek.

"Alright. Goodnight sweetie. See you in the morning."

Faye went back to the living room. Below the painting she set a plate of cookies for the girl.

Maybe if she had something nice to take she wouldn't bother with Faye.

Faye woke to a strange light in her bedroom. The opalescent girl was leaning over her bed.

"Oh no." Faye said hoarsely.

The girl took her by the wrist and lead her downstairs. Faye's mind was complete detached.

Half of her was vaguely aware of being lead downstairs, while the other half was wondering what her parents would do when they found her bed empty.

They walked into the living room, and Faye tripped over the plate of cookies. She picked one up absentmindedly, knowing how Mommy hated things on the floor. They stood beneath the painting, and a strange feeling came over Faye, like she was dissolving. It wasn't unpleasant, sort of like warm water running over her, that prickling sensation. And suddenly she was inside the painting.

Everything was lines and thick strokes, even the air around her, which felt thick and lumpy in her throat Faye gasped, paint filling her paint lungs. Moving was like moving in oil. Slowly, Faye turned from the wall of the house she was staring at to look up the street. The street from the painting was laid out in front of her in 3D, full of the same energy, but completely still. Never before had Faye been in a more silent place. It felt heavier than the air. Her cat curled around her ankles.

"Cat!" Faye cried, but no sound came out. She scooped him up. His fur was rough and bumpy, like running your fingers over a dry painting. The painting seemed unfinished from this close.

The shadows weren't quite believable, the detail too smooth and unreal. Faye observed this with a fascination, then turned to where the girl usually stood in the painting.

She was in her original position, hands folded behind her back, face turned away from everything, looking down the painted road.

"Hello." Faye tried to say. No sound, but the girl turned her head. The girl's face wasn't done.

Only half of it, for the profile that you saw in the painting. Everything stopped short in the middle of her face, features flowing into smooth skin colour.

A loud buzzing noise filled her ears when the girl's half mouth opened, like insect noise.

"Who are you?" Faye thought, winding her fingers in Cat's fur. The violent sound blasted her again. She guessed it was the girl talking.

"What do you want?" It seemed a sensible thing to ask, in a six year old's mind.

The girl slowly pointed at Faye.

"Me?" Faye thought in surprise.

The girl shook her head, but continued to point.

"Cat?" That seemed highly unlikely. But maybe she was just lonely. That's why she stole stuff from Faye's world? She was just trying to fill up this lonely silent void. Then it occurred to her.

"My world? My life?" Now she recognised the girl's expression in the painting. Jealously. "You can't." Faye stated.

The buzzing washed over her again as the girl looked surprised at Faye. She guessed that the girl didn't expect any resistance.

"I'm sorry, but that's incredibly, enormously stupid." Faye tried not to laugh at the thought of this girl taking everything in her house and stuffing it in this painting. "It's out of the question." She thought in the voice Mommy used when she was being stern. "You're a painting."

The buzzing was silent.

"But whats stopping you from walking that way?" Faye pointed down the road that the girl was always looking down. "You could go that way. Try and find some more, uh, people like you."

The girl turned to face that way.

"You're looking that way in the painting, you must have been thinking of it."

Slowly, she nodded.

"So go on. Go, you really should."

The girl turned back to Faye and nodded again. Confirmation.

"And," Faye wagged a finger at her. "I expect my mug, chair, cat and house keys back."

Reluctantly, the girl got everything for her.

Faye had once heard her Mommy and a friend talking about kids. They were saying that if you acted like you knew everything and used a steady voice that gave no room for debate, you'll never get any arguments. Faye didn't quite agree that it worked for kids, but it seemed to work fine on creatures from paintings trying to steal your life. Even though she was shaking inside, she tried to stay calm as the girl got all the household objects for her.

"Alright, send us back now." Was this really working? Faye thought as she commanded the girl.

She nodded. Somehow sadly. There wasn't any buzzing.

"And, by the way, good luck." Faye added as the warm melting sensation started again.

Outside, in her living room, Faye felt a little bad. Maybe all she really wanted was company. But she couldn't steal, it was wrong. Faye watched as the painted girl walked down the road into oblivion before her very eyes.

"Goodbye." Faye waved. Cat meowed again and darted off. The chair, mug and various others lay scattered about the living room.

As she mounted the stairs to bed she remembered the cookie she had dropped while picking up Cat in the painting. She zipped back and checked, sure enough, there it was, sitting by the house.

"That's a really cute story Grandma." Aubrey told her.

"Thank you. I was always fond of it myself." Grandma grinned and took the platter of chocolates back to the kitchen. Aubrey shook her head and went back to book world.

Nine finished her coffee, but something was nagging her. A detail she remembered from her childhood here. She got up and examined the painting. Yes, there was a cookie, sitting by one of the last houses, very out of place.

Grandma was still smiling when she re-entered the living room.