

A House in a Clearing

You stand on an empty road. The sky is blue, not a cloud nor a person around for miles, except for you. In front of you is a grassy clearing, and within the clearing, there is a little house.

Perhaps “shack” is a better descriptor, as the structure looks old and worn down. It might’ve once been a wooden house, but now the wood is rotted and infested as it stands. With what, you are unsure. A rocking chair sits on the porch, swaying slightly due to the breeze. You notice a dark stain on the building’s entryway, wrapping around the door beam. You can’t tell exactly what caused it.

Your eyes shift from the house itself to the dark entryway, the decayed door swinging slightly. You squint and you think you can see—

You don’t see anything. You *insist* you don’t see anything. You don’t want to look back at the interior of the cabin. You wish to leave, and yet you can’t, something is preventing you. And so, reluctantly yet irresistibly, you take a closer look at the scene before you.

The clearing really is beautiful. The grass is greener than you’ve ever seen, and despite the area’s apparent abandonment, the glade does not seem overgrown. You spot flowers that you aren’t sure were there before, inhaling their entrancing scent. Yes, the colors seem brighter to you at this moment than they ever have before. It is quiet. It is peaceful.

You turn your attention back to the shack within the clearing, but in retrospect, perhaps calling it a shack is a bit harsh. Yes, it might look a little worn down, but you can’t spot anything glaringly awful about its structural integrity. If you put in a little bit of elbow grease, you’re sure you can replace that rotted wood and drive out whatever is unmaking the boards. After closer

inspection it seems like what you mistook for a dark stain was just the wood patterning, perhaps emphasized due to age and rot.

Should you leave, abscond those old back roads until you reach the highway? Should you go back to your residence in the city, gray pavement and gray buildings and gray sky? Despite the color you've scattered throughout the apartment, you know everything will seem gray in comparison to the brilliant colors of the scene before you.

Then should you stay? The glade is so peaceful, so empty, you could bring life back to it. You can almost imagine raising a family here.

After having that last thought you feel a pang of guilt. Bringing more people here feels like an infringement of territory, interfering with something not meant for them. You diligently ignore your own feelings of intrusion.

It is a place of solitude. Or, not solitude; the word "solitude" implies some sort of presence, and as stated before, there isn't anything inside the cabin.

However. It isn't empty either.

Calling it a presence would be too much, too forward, perhaps. It is rather, an absence of emptiness rather than the existence of something else. An Un-Emptiness if you will.

You feel the beginnings of fear. You don't know why.

Despite the strange atmosphere radiating from the non-entity inside the cabin, you make your decision, overwhelmed by the blinding colors. You are greedy. You are hungry. You are human and you are a fool.

You take a step forward. Then another. And another. You walk off the road entirely and into the clearing.

As you cross the expanse you ponder your perception. The glade looks much more overgrown up close, and you can't see any of those flowers you swore you had spotted earlier. Perhaps you're due for a checkup with your optometrist.

The walk across the expanse feels both like an eternity and a millisecond, and you are finally — or perhaps suddenly — stepping onto the wooden porch. As with the clearing, you find yourself questioning how you could've missed so many details.

Your first assumption was right, and the discolored wood is due to some sort of stain. The vague thought that it looks like blood occurs to you, and you ignore it. The rocking chair remains animated even though the earlier breeze has long stopped. Whatever's writhing within the wood isn't termites.

You step inside and the fear chokes you, drowning you, holding your head under the water until the icy current shoves its way down your throat. You gag, then freeze.

The Un-Emptiness faces you. You have made a terrible mistake.

In front of the clearing, there is an empty road. The sky is blue, not a cloud nor a person around for miles.