

All The Kings Are Gone

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The person that dreamed up this space didn't like the idea of a predictable layout, so instead of a separate living room, dining room and library, he decided it would be better to combine them into one large all-purpose area. Created from the original one-room cabin with its massive stone walls, this space is conceived in the grand terms of a long gallery as one might find in an English country house. Separate functions of space are determined by the arrangement of four enormous bookcases dramatically set against a background of red-on-red wallpaper and handsome chintz curtains. A number of comfortable armchairs and sofas set back to back against identical sofas are upholstered in the same rose patterned stuff. These elements are anchored by a vast woven carpet in a pattern of russet, green and gold leaves. A remarkable group of huge still-life paintings by seventeenth-century masters bridge the patterns of books and curtains with displays of fruit and flowers and trophies of fur, feather and fin, further evoking the atmosphere of some English gentleman's house. However, this room is primarily a library, a real one in which to read and not simply watch television or play cards. The books are not for show but for serious perusal, including 18th and 19th-century history, old masters drawings, astronomy, and much more. The complete *Bibliothèque de la Pleiades* rubs shoulders with Freidlander and Watterson, Kundera and Naipal, Bradbury and Shaw. Leather-bound books with multi-colored bookmarks have been removed from the shelves and stacked so high as to nearly cover a table in front of a low dividing

The Best Show In Town

bookcase, two English mahogany stools and a Georgian pedestal desk, all but hiding a heterogeneous collection of bric-a-brac including several French Empire and Oriental theater masks, a Chinese glass jar, a magnificent ceramic shell, and even the papier-mâché lamp bases, leaving only their lighted green shades visible through the tangle.

A small silver table of simple proportions is unassaulted by this overgrowth. On the table is a glass case containing a sweat-stained hat with two feathers in its band. Also on the table, or more accurately in its mirrored surface, are the same Newton-ringed reflections seen in the mirror on Apricot Hill.

Teddy escorts Sarah and Tillie from the dining area into the seating area.

“Tillie, I want to thank you for your help with dinner tonight. It was delicious. Lamb with garlic was one of Father’s favorites. Mine, too.”

“You mean garlic with lamb, don’t you?” Teddy chuckles, adjusting the recipe.

“If God is in any food, it’s garlic,” Tillie declares as she shuffles along.

A small fire in the fireplace, fresh-cut flowers, and chocolates in cut-glass dishes make the room inviting. Sarah’s siblings and other relations are already seated.

Eve brings her girls in last. Claire runs over to the desk with the ceramic shell on it and starts searching for something.

Sarah complains openly, “Eve, not the children! Claire-honey, what are you doing?”

“i wanna show you my shell!”

“with or without the snail?” Julia asks matter-of-factly.

“without. i made a ring for a queen! it’s for you grandma! ’cept i can’t find it *any-more*.” Now she runs over to the antique globe and stares wide-eyed at it. “juya, can you see our house?”

“hey claire, look at this picture.”

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Claire runs over. “they don’t draw so good,” she says, frowning at the delicate still-life painting on the wall.

“but gampy said they’re *real artists*.”

“n’yuh-uh. they leave too much white spaces.” Claire’s eyes now fall on the nearby chocolate dish. “*wow choclats!*” she splutters.

Julia’s eyes go wide too. In her haste to share in the treasure she knocks over a silver-framed photo.

Sarah anxiously stands it back up.

“Julia, put that down!”

“but mom, claire ate one!”

Claire with her mouth full, “*n’yuh-uh!*”

“did too!”

Caught chocolate-handed, Claire still manages to radiate an expression of pure innocence. Holding out her hands as if testing for rain, “but it was a *accident!*” Clever and devious. And so young.

Julia re-strategizes. “maybe she *deserves* deserve—”

“*E-e-eve!*” Sarah whinnies and shoots her daughter a look that says “This is not the time or place to fight this battle!”

Julia intercepts the silent communiqué. “but gampy *wants* us here! he told me *today!*”

“Shush, child!” Tillie scolds. “You don’t know what you’re sayin’!”

“but it’s *true!*” Julia insists.

“juya, i think i’m gonna ’splode!”

“cross your legs, claire!”

“i think i hafta hop—”

“Alright, you guys, that’s enough. It’s your bedtime,” Eve declares, now in step with orders.

“but *mom—*”

“No buts, young lady. This is for grownups. I’ll tell you about it in the morning.”

Julia is disappointed. “*o-kay.*”

Sarah’s eyes are swimming. “Eve, put them in the nursery.”