

## The Tempest on the Ceiling

While she was looking, a dark storm encroached on the ceiling above Lennon, though the darkness was subtle at first. Up above the posts of the bed, the ceiling used to seem endless and vast, tan ceilings just barely visible in the dim lighting of Lennon's bedroom. When she was a young girl, she used to stretch her hand out, fingering the pattern of stars in the air. It was then she realized her room to possess a magic of sorts when those same stars she traced glinted in her room up above to give off the illusion she was napping under the night sky.

Now a much older young lady and no longer emaciated with thoughts of painting magic onto her ceiling, Lennon's eyes were aghast the first night she saw that twirling darkness above her. Though it was far out of reach, it somehow managed to sit heavy up above, like the world was weighing it down, bowing towards her. This made her nights fitful, tossing and turning in sheets till she was sure she never got sleep. Day by day she slept a bit later because night by night her eyes were too laden with the fear of that unnamed darkness above. She wondered if it was close to her already, too close, and was seeping in her ears, whispering dark things. On the darkest of nights when the moon outside sat hidden behind the clouds, Lennon could swear she saw tendrils of that darkness clawing their way down the wall to her. That fear gripped her, it slithered into her throat, closing itself with a vice grip on her breath, her stomach, until she felt like convulsing just to rid herself of those virulent fingers.

On this particular night, that tempest swirled closer than she had seen before. She knew this because she launched from her bed, eyes scanning over the lines she'd carved into the wall, tracking the progress of the darkness down from her ceiling. In mere weeks, she realized it really had been weighed down, that impenetrable cloud soaking up the light coming from the moon through the window. It had sunk so low it almost completely obscured her window now. Soon

enough, she worried it would overtake her escapes completely, leaving her to sleep buried in that darkness until the sun yawned and stretched to free her. *Could it obscure the sun?* She wondered, a shiver shaking its way down her spine. She would not let it confine her to her bed, heavier and heavier until it suffocated her. She would rid her room of it tonight.

With a renewed fury, she leaped upon her bed, the posts groaning from the sudden movement as she flopped on her back. Her hand shot into the air, furiously tracing the lines of stars in an attempt to add that light she held in her fingertips when she was much younger. Yet, the more she drew, the closer that blackness swirled toward her. It found its voice now, that wooshing of the storm whispering to her once again, though it was louder, the sharpness of it pained her ears. *Do you even know what you love to do?* It asked, its black hands reaching towards her. *How will you marry when you can only sleep, waking only to fail your duties as a daughter?* Lennon's fingers dug into her palm, the nails biting at her skin near enough to draw blood. *You cannot escape me, you cannot even rise early in the morning anymore.* Her head spun as it threw itself back into the dark wooden headboard, trying to bash the sounds of the whispers out of her brain. The tempest was right, she was letting it get to her, forget who she was. *You think you fear me, yet you crawl into bed earlier each night to find the comfort of my company.*

"No!" she voiced, she would not let that be true. Could not let it be true. She leapt from her bed, the darkness fast approaching her now. The only light came from the sliver in the window that was no longer obscured by that devil of a storm. She wrenched it open, cool night air hitting her face. Its hands were on her now, choking her, suffocating her again. She needed light, she needed air, the window was the only savior she could find in those last moments. She didn't care what lay below as long as it was out into the moonlight, so she leapt.

## Gothic Elements

A great deal of my short story was inspired by the way Gilman and Poe write about mental health issues in their respective eras. The Gothic really loves to heighten the ideas of all reality, bringing them to a head as a hidden threat. This works really well with mental health issues because they weren't taken very seriously in the time when the Gothic was popular and were usually explained away by madness or possession. In the same way that Catherine Morland finds something in nothing in *Northanger Abbey*, and in the way Frankenstein's monster is misunderstood, I really wanted to create a heroine that is consumed by her own thoughts of depression and failure and over exaggerates her reality to the point that it becomes her end. I also took a few points from *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* to create the protagonists' early childhood ideas of magic and the supernatural, something that is extremely prevalent in the Female Gothic genre. Another trait I tried to employ is letting the heroine fail at the end, which is something that is seen sometimes in Gothic fiction, but it is a trope that to me makes the story much more haunting and adds to that Gothic allure that leaves the reader feeling extremely unsettled. Lastly, I made sure to proofread this piece time and time again in order to get that wordy Gothic vocabulary. I made sure to describe everything in detail, personifying the inanimate, and exalting the verbs to the next level in order to give the effect of reading a Gothic novel.