

THE SKYSTONE

A STORY BY

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Origins

I was walking along a stony beach and found a large flat stone with a magazine picture stuck on it. The picture was of a blue sky with small white clouds. Thus was born the Skystone, but what manner of people made it I couldn't say.

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The Young Man walked along the beach, watching the waves go up and down, kicking stones, breathing the warm salt air. His crops were ripening in the sun, his trees were heavy with fruit, the new well his father wanted was finished and providing sweet water. All was good with the world. Life would be even better when he'd found a wife and they settled down to the serious business of raising a family. For now, he was happy to walk along the beach, looking at seagulls fly out for the day's fishing, and watching the clouds roll by.

One day he was walking along the beach kicking stones, when he almost tripped over. He'd meant to kick the stone but its unusual colour stopped him. He stooped to examine it. It was oddly translucent, as if someone had solidified a bright sunny sky, with tiny white patches inside that looked like clouds. For a moment he

thought it was one of those strange new polished things his rich Uncle had brought back from a journey. It was the wonder of the town.

Everyone came to see the mirror that had come from a far off land. The world must be full of such wonders, the Young Man thought, and one day he'd journey with his Uncle to see more of them. In the meantime, the sea had washed one onto this very beach.

The Young Man prodded the stone with his foot, and turned it over carefully to make sure no crab lay hidden under it. He picked it up. It was larger than the other stones, flat and round like a discus, and about the size of a small plate. He looked deep into the stone and saw clouds pass across its miniature sky. He looked at the sky behind him but it was cloudless. This was no mirror, what kind of wonder reflected clouds that weren't there? His Uncle would know, his Uncle

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had seen many wonders on his journeys. He carried the stone carefully back to the town and his Uncle's villa.

"Uncle," the Young Man called. "Look at this stone I found on the beach."

His Uncle and Aunt lived in a large villa overlooking the bay and they were the richest people in the town. Those were the times when the rich were rich enough, and the poor could afford the essentials of every day life. Everyone had enough happiness to last from day to day, year to year. I think those times must have really existed, otherwise we would have nothing to yearn for in this violent world of ours. However, our story is not of these times, but of those when a Young Man found a wonder on a beach.

"Look, it reflects the sky even when we are indoors, and reflects clouds but there are none in the sky outside. And there, a bird just flew across it."

The Young Man was very proud of his stone, and his Uncle was quick to marvel too. He had never seen such a stone on all his journeys in the world.

"What kind of stone is this?" whispered his Aunt.

"It must be a sky stone," said the Young Man, "though I have never heard of such a thing."

And so the skystone was named. His Uncle showed it to the household and soon they called in their friends and neighbours. The villa, big though it was, soon became crowded and the Uncle could no longer think about his business affairs for the crush and babble of sightseers.

"I will set aside a room, and set the skystone on a table," suggested the Uncle. "People can come and see the skystone for a small charge, but not larger than the poorest people in the town can afford to pay. Everyone should have a chance to see this new wonder. You, Nephew, can have the money and soon you will have enough to pay for the foundations of a new house for yourself."

And so it was arranged. The Young Man and his skystone became famous throughout the town. Visitors from outside were brought along to see the town's marvel for themselves.

The skystone never failed to show the sky, but

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where that sky was reflected from was a mystery. It kept its own time, with sunrise and sunset a long time after sunrise and sunset in the town. Some days it showed a grey and stormy sky, regardless of the actual weather outside, and showed a starry night sky when the town was under thick clouds. It always showed the same view no matter which way you looked at it, and despite its apparent translucence, you could never see your hand behind it. It was a true marvel.

The beach became a frequent visiting place for the Young Man, searching for more wonders among the stones. One day, he found another on the same beach. He was walking along as usual, kicking the stones, looking up and down, when he was astonished to see an enormous fish walking along on its tail. The fish had a bubble in its mouth, and he was even more astonished to see a man's head in the bubble. The Young Man realised immediately that the man must have been walking along the beach like himself, when the fish had leapt out of the water and swallowed the man right there on the spot. He drew his knife, and without any fear

chased the fish down the beach, jumped on it, and ripped its belly open, releasing the man. As you can imagine, the man was terrified and tried to run away. His experience had shocked him terribly. He stumbled and fell, shrieking, and screaming, then passed out.

The Young Man went over to the fallen man, lifted him up, and carried him back to the Uncle and Aunt's villa. They tended to the man and brought him back from his faint, but his experience had been so bad, all he could do was babble and point to his mouth in terror.

A brave servant volunteered to bring the dead fish back to the villa. It was truly a new marvel, and the fish skin was laid beside the skystone for everyone to see.

The man became ever more agitated as the day progressed, and began sobbing, nothing seemed to calm him. The Uncle decided that a sight of the marvellous skystone would distract him from his terrible ordeal, and he was carried into the room. It was a mistake, because the man started raving and shouting at the skystone, and tried to get close to it. They carried him out

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of the room, raving and screaming and choking. The Aunt shouted at the servants to make some calming tea for the man to drink.

While they were fussing around the man, trying to calm him, a visitor in the skystone room shouted for the Young Man. He rushed into the room and found the visitor pointing at the skystone. Instead of reflecting a far away sky, it showed a reflection of a man just like the stranger he had rescued, and this man too was inside a fish, and was babbling away just as the first man had.

“What’s this?” said the Young Man. “Has the world become a place of never-ending marvels? Don’t worry,” he called to the man in the skystone, “Tell us where you are and we’ll rescue you.”

“Perhaps these men don’t speak our language,” said the Aunt. She commanded the servants to bring the first man back to translate.

The man was brought in and people tried to get him to understand so they could rescue the man in the skystone. The first man went berserk, screaming at the skystone in a language none

could understand. After a while, the man in the skystone disappeared and the sky returned. The first man broke down sobbing and had to be carried away. The cook brought some calming tea for him, though it took three men to hold him down so they could give it to him.

The Uncle ordered the fish skin to be taken to an old sailor down by the bay who was famed for his knowledge of the sea and the wonders it contained. Perhaps he could identify the fish and tell the town how to avoid being swallowed by one.

The household settled down for the evening meal. This one took much longer to eat because everyone was busy discussing the new marvels. When they finished, most of the household went down to their friends and relatives in town to tell them of the day’s incredible events.

The Young Man went for a late evening walk along the beach, half hoping for even more wonders. That’s the trouble with wonders and marvels - if you have too many of them, you spend half your time looking for even more and nothing gets done. Better to have one marvel to

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look at than many.

It was dark by the time the Young Man returned, the house was still almost empty. Nobody had as yet returned from spreading the news. He was thinking about going to bed when the gardener came to him in an agitated state. He kept talking about a strange noise in the sky, like a swarm of locusts. The gardener was famed for his hearing. It was said he could locate a mole in the ground just by listening for it. They went outside and looked around at the clear night sky. After a little while they could all hear the sound. It was indeed like a swarm of locusts, but it was the wrong season and there hadn't been the breeding weather for years. The ground rises at the back of the gardens so everyone went there for a better view. Imagine their surprise when not a swarm of locusts, but a gigantic dragonfly came into view and landed at the front of the villa. The gardener was furious because it broke his bushes and flowers down. Before anyone could stop him, he rushed across the garden to shoo the Monster away. He only got halfway across the garden when the dragonfly spat at him and

he dropped to the ground with a hole burning in his chest. People on the rise panicked and fled for cover. The Young Man dropped low and crept around the edge of the garden for a better view of the Monster.

The Young Man was getting used to wonders by now. He was only moderately astonished when the belly of the dragonfly opened and three fishes, each with a man inside, got out and ran for the house. Despite their fear, people from the town were coming up the hill in the darkness to see this Monster that had dropped from the sky. They all saw the fishes with men inside running out of the house with the man who had been rescued that very morning. He had stolen the skystone and was taking it with him. The Uncle came running out of a side door toward the dragonfly shouting about kidnappers and thieves. One of the fishes with a man inside turned round and spat at him, and the Uncle fell dead. The three intruders climbed back inside the dragonfly with the man and the skystone. The dragonfly flew away, spitting at the people below, killing some of them. It flew away into the

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night sky and was not seen again, nor the man, nor the skystone.

The clamour and panic died down and the town went about seeing to those wounded by the spit of the dragonfly, and counting the dead. Such a thing had never happened before in the entire history of the town. The mayor passed a law that all new wonders were to be left in a guarded house outside the town for three full weeks, in case they attracted giant dragonflies, walking fishes or other Monstrous Creatures. The Aunt allowed the people who had been killed by the dragonfly to be buried in a corner of the garden, with a new gardener to tend the bushes and flowers on their graves.

News of the events spread across the land and people came from far away to hear the stories. Of those events, nothing remained but the strange fish skin that the Uncle had sent to the old sailor. For many years after it was displayed at the mayor's house down by the docks, until it rotted and fell apart.

The Young Man became a famous merchant who travelled to distant lands and brought back

many wonders and marvels from his travels. In all his life he never found another skystone, nor anything like it. He never had the time to walk along the beach as he did in his youth.

It's possible there are other skystones lying around, waiting to be picked up. If you find one, marvel at it, then throw it into the sea. They seem to bring a lot of trouble with them.