

The Desert

by Kari Kwinn

Chapter One: The House

“My neighbor Amy tells me that in dreams, your house represents your life. Last night I dreamed my house burned down. I'm writing to tell you about what is left.”

Jung proposed, and his followers agree, that in dreaming, one's house represents one's life. Even if it is not 'our house' or if it physically doesn't resemble our home but we know (in dreaming) that it is our house. It makes some sense to me. In Steering by Starlight, Martha Beck expands on this metaphor and suggests that one way to start changing your life is to remove physical, tangible items that no longer suit you from your home and begin replacing those items with those that suit the life that is more authentic. Objects in, objects out. I think both of these suggestions are incredibly valuable. Theoretically, I would love to remove my old, sorry carpeting from my home and replace it with brand new Santa Fe tile, complete with subfloor heating and a self-cleaning function.

After three years of living with thirty-year-old blue carpeting, I'm starting to wonder how this happens. Also wondering what blue carpet represents in my life? I've tried all sorts of free associations (The ocean? Cookie Monster?) but found none that resonate with me. There may be areas of your life that are equivalent to my blue carpet. Irritations with no specific childhood baggage (I was never mauled by a muppet), or objects that occupy space that you'd like to get around.

I'm not a therapist, and I won't pretend that I can offer you solace from your youthful woes. Maybe some of them will rise up as we navigate the next six months together, and maybe they won't. My goal here is to help you shed The Things, whether they be objects, habits, or other notions that clutter your life and keep you from living joyfully. If something massive does come up for you, like trauma, I'm happy to point it out for you (wow, Kari, your dining room furniture is remarkable, the plates perfectly coordinated and the food delicious.... but have you somehow overlooked the ratty, old, blue stained carpet beneath all of this?).

Yes.

I'm using the term “house” to refer to the dwelling space over which you have some control or ownership. Perhaps for you this is an apartment or mobile home or sailboat. Perhaps for you this is your summer home, winter home, private plane, and fleet of Audis. In order to walk into the desert we must first understand and see our life as it currently exists.

Spend some time now writing down a description of your house and get a little nutty with the adjectives. Let your mind wander and write without thinking. PLEASE do it before reading on.



Mine starts like this:

“I share my house with my husband and our two overly-needy birds. My decorating style is ship-wrecked, meaning that it is a compilation of what other people have cast off. I have a really detailed scrapbook of exactly what I want it to look like, and I'm unwilling to compromise and buy the half-right stuff, so it is full of functional pieces I'm not that attached to. I'm working slowly to fill it with the exactly right pieces.”

So relating back, “I share my life with my husband and two overly-needy birds. It is a compilation of what other people have cast off. I have a really detailed idea of exactly what I want it to look like, and I'm unwilling to compromise. Right now it is full of functional pieces that I'm not attached to and I'm working slowly to fill it with exactly right stuff.”

Wow.

Regardless of how The Things come into our lives, whether they are appointments, obligations, items, weight, whatever, they are all taking up space that we wish they wouldn't. A lot of these are the 'not quite right' things that occupy the space that the 'exactly right things' should use. When something amazing comes into our lives, we don't always make the space that is necessary.

So we start with boundaries. Drawing a line in the sand. Find your calendar and look for space. An hour long appointment. How far away is that time? Perhaps it is later today, or maybe next week, or even the week afterwards. Block it off (with ink, if you're a paper gal) or with BIG BOLD ALL CAPS that just says Desert: Chapter 1 homework.

HOMEWORK:

Sit (or lie down). Have nothing near you except water and your journal, open to the last page. Write "PARKING LOT" on the top of that page (if you're like me and you always like to right on the right side, just turn the journal upside down). If you need to have a piece of scratch paper with you, you can write anything that is totally unrelated that comes up, like "buy toenail polish" or "Gruyere is the name of that damned cheese: email mom" or "feed cat." Hopefully after awhile you won't need this extra paper, but I don't want these things in your parking lot. That's not what it is for.

Set a timer (alarm, phone, whatever) for fifty minutes and set it somewhere behind you. Not next to you. Not where you can see it. Turn it away if you can see the face of how much time is left.

There is no time in the desert.

If you were lost in the desert, you would have walked for awhile. Then you would sit down to take a rest and gather your thoughts. Then you would think about where you wished you were. Just sit around and imagine what you would miss if you were ship-wrecked on a deserted island. What are the things you would miss? Who would you like to spend more time with? What are those projects you would love to start now that you're all by your lonesome? Would you travel? Write that how-to book about 101 uses for discarded lint? Think. Daydream. Get lost. Write down anything you think of in your parking lot. Mine looks like this:

PARKING LOT

Decorate guest room

Visit Greece and eat all of the olives

Learn how to make yogurt

Write memoir

Design the perfect travel purse

Take parents to Alaska on a cruise

Assemble scrap book out of boxes of photos

Scratch Paper:

Drop off boots to get resoled

Buy tissues

Do you see how the Parking Lot is different from the To Do list? The Parking Lot is where your dreams are waiting for you. Things YOU NEED to do and ideas and dreams. The scratch paper is stuff that needs to be done.

When the timer goes off, finish up your parking lot exercise. If you have fallen asleep, you must have needed it. Write down "take naps" or "get more sleep." I'm not kidding.

BONUS WORK:

Extra desert time (not extra *dessert* time):

If you can sneak 15 minute appointments in between now and then, great. I'm not talking about when you're brushing your teeth or on your commute (although the bathroom and the car are excellent places

to squeeze in some Desert time), I'm talking about time when you arrive early. Time that you commit to taking a bath or zoning out. No reading, no podcasts, no music.

Unsubscribe:

Focus on what is coming into your life electronically and from the mail.

Mail: Find a shoebox or something similar and start to stash all of those unwanted catalogs, offers, and other junk that takes time and space in your life. When you have a moment (we'll get to it later if you don't) call/email/mail these folks and asked to be permanently removed from their mailing lists.

Email: unsubscribe to the sales items that you open and look at but never buy. If you can't bear the thought, create an email folder where all of this crap goes (unopened) and make an appointment with yourself to only open it once a week. Don't just delete it, unsubscribe. Each time you read the subject line of "Cute new cumberbunds for fall" you've just spent five seconds of your life you're not getting back. You will always be able to find what you need on the interwebs. I'm pretty sure they're not going anywhere.

"I always knew my house would be a mansion, and that it would never be enough."