



Arcane

Literature

Carnet curated by
Antonia Singer

with
ISABELLA GREENWOOD
NORA IRIS MITCHELL
MONTANA THOMAS
JACOB ACE
KAY KASPERHAUSER
ANTOINE CLAUSS

ISABELLA GREENWOOD Stairwells of Return: An Es- say on Haunted Houses

1. Haunted House: Origin

The house I grew up in had many windows, and too few doors. It breathed unevenly, inhaling through the gaps in the floorboards. My younger brother, an insomniac at the time, reported the nightly arrival of two women dressed in mourning: black veils, black gloves, black dresses that dragged across the carpet like wet fabric. They would pinch him awake, he said, to keep him from slipping too far into sleep, meanwhile I claimed to converse with a man in a tall white hat—as I knelt facing the wall, hands together. One afternoon, three women arrived at our door, with a gentle authority of those who already know what they are looking for. They ascended the stairs without hesitation, entered our bedrooms, and when they descended again their faces were streaked with tears. They told my mother that a boy a similar age to my brother had died in his crib in that very room from cot death, a century ago. His mother and nurse had returned—draped in grief—to prevent his repetition. They told me that a priest had died in my room. Here, my first two lessons of the haunted house were, I. The past may return to prevent itself from repeating in the future, and II. ghosts still believe in God.

2. Haunted House: Theory

If a ghost is a tragedy condemned to repeat itself, then a haunted house is a site of perpetual punishment, a structure folded inward, trapping its occupants in a choreography of return. A house, unlike a body, cannot migrate. It hoards its grief.

3. Haunted House: The Past

Ghosts continue to invest meaning in their refusal of endings, which made me wonder if we invent them simply because we are afraid of closure. Or perhaps ghosts invent us, refusing to let us leave. (It makes me think we are all ghosts, rehearsing ourselves over and over, returning to the same gestures until they lose their edge).

But haunting is not only the persistence of the past. As Derrida writes, haunting is a structure of time itself—where the past does not stay buried but interrupts the present, producing futures already contaminated by what has been. Mark Fisher called this hauntology: the way lost futures remain alive, lodged in the cracks of now. A haunted house is not merely a museum of what once happened; it is a rehearsal space for what was supposed to happen and never did. This is why haunted houses are so unsettling. They remind us that the past is not finished with us. They insist that history continues to live inside our walls, our bodies, our language.

4. Haunted House as Evidence

As Jean-Michel Rabaté reminds us, the word haunt derives from the Germanic root heim, from home, already signalling how haunting is inseparable from dwelling. In a postcolonial frame, this connection between haunting and home unsettles colonial ideologies of possession: the coloniser’s insistence on ownership of land is revealed as precarious, always vulnerable to spectral return. Ghosts insist upon what has been erased in official histories, indigenous presences, enslaved bodies, silenced narratives, by continuously occupying the space. Haunting is therefore not merely an aesthetic condition but a political one. It reveals how colonial projects attempt to naturalise linear time, while ghosts disrupt this chronology, insisting on temporal disjunctions. They arrive from what should have been “past” yet remain unresolved, surfacing in the “present” as reminders that colonial violence is never fully concluded. In this sense, haunting operates as a counter-archive: a living, unsettled record that resists the ordering and containment of history into neat, finished narratives.

5. Haunted House: No Exit

In Carmen Machado’s In The Dream House, Machado describes hiding in the bathroom from her drunken girlfriend, praying she doesn’t bang the door down: “In that moment [the locked bathroom] was my own little space. Even though after that it would never be mine again”. Machado notes that for the rest of her time in her house, her body would charge with alarm, even though in that moment, it was the closest thing she had to being safe. Sometimes a haunted house is when a house is not meant to be haunted, and yet it is: the ghost is something that lingers in its wake, reminding you that something violent took place. This made me think that perhaps a haunted house is simply a house that remembers, long after we have all forgotten.

6. Haunted House: Repetitive Dream

I kept dreaming of being in a haunted house with my friend, who dreamt the same dream. Doors would open, slam and shut. For a while we repeated this dream many times, often on the same nights, and almost always together. Freud said houses symbolise the psyche, so I wondered if this meant our psyches were haunted? (together). I also considered the way the dream was about proximity: the way two people can share a psychic architecture. Maybe the repetition was less about terror than it was about rehearsal—the dream testing its doors, slamming them open and shut, trying to see whether we would find an exit or keep returning to the same place.

From a critical standpoint, the dream’s circularity gestures towards a different temporality, one that refused linear progress, much like haunting itself. Repetition produces difference with each return; even when the dream seems identical, the psyche encounters it anew, slightly altered by the residue of what came before. The haunted house is perhaps less about terror than about return: the uncanny recognition that what we cannot exit, we are forced to replay.

7. Haunted House: The Body

If the house is a psyche, as Freud suggested, then what of the body? Does it, too, become a haunted house—its cells repeating their histories, its walls storing echoes of past occupants? A house remembers even after we leave; a body remembers even when we try to forget. Trauma, after all, is a kind of haunting, the body keeping score when the mind wants to disown. Diary entry, November 2024:

Is my body a museum? A haunted house? Cells? A spirit? A daughter? A result? Evidence? A way out? A way in? My own? (If it is not, how do I get it back?) The haunted house is not always a house, sometimes it is the skin we live in, sometimes it is a dream that repeats itself.

8. Haunted House: Poem (2018)

It is almost over now, but I cannot find the rest of myself to celebrate. What point is there in peace when the one who prayed for it has been scattered through a house that screams? When silence never arrives but only imitates itself—What kind of peace is it when the only escape is holding my breath beneath the bath water, silence becoming a kind of fish, joy dissolving like dirt spiralling down the drain? The ceiling falls when I stand to walk the dog, and the dog drags me home by the hair, leash in its mouth, I have forgotten where home even is. Peace is mocked by memory, by the image

of a lamb tied with butcher’s string to the kitchen table, by the ache of sleeping on an empty stomach, by the strained songs of choristers whose hymns hurt to hear. And still peace looms on the stairwell, sword in hand, heavily veiled, demanding I kneel, demanding I watch my head roll down the stairs to join the rest of me. What point is there in peace if I have no eyes left to see it? Is a haunted house still a haunted house if there is no one left to scare?

9. Haunted House: Witness

(Sometimes a haunted house is reliant on observers: is it haunted if no one can see its ghosts?/ Does a tree fall in a forest, if we don’t hear it? Must things require a witness to be real?)

10. Haunted House: (Never) Ending

The haunted house is not simply a site of terror, but of testimony. It records what official histories cannot, carrying memory in its walls, its stairwells, its repetitions. In dreams, in bodies, in architecture, haunting is the persistence of what refuses to be forgotten, whether that be violence, desire, or grief. To enter a haunted house is to step into unfinished time, where the past is not past and the future is already compromised.

Perhaps this is why we return to them—through stories, through theory, through our own recurring dreams—because haunted houses remind us that history is never still, that the archive is never complete, and that the ghosts we inherit are also the evidence we live among. To speak of haunting, then, is not to describe absence but to name a presence that insists. The haunted house is not proof of death, but rather, evidence that nothing ever fully ends.

NICO LOU CARRASQUILLO The Gas Station

They’d been driving through the night. A warm air night. A mid-summer Midwest night. A humming cricket-y night, which they would’ve heard if they’d stop driving. When it finally appeared, the gas station seemed like a heavenly mirage. The inside smelled like mosquitos and candy wrappers. Destiny was slow and sleepy. She fingered the rows and rows of glittering key chains on display. Missouri Missouri Missouri started to sound like misery misery misery.

She was rubbing the small resin dome of a charm which depicted the black skyline of KANSAS CITY against a blue night, with little rhinestones inset as stars. It was the size of a MENTOS MINT and she wanted to put it in her mouth. To suck on the metal of it. To roll it around with her tongue, like a pretty round stone at the beach.

The starry misery night.
All those gas station fingers who had touched it before her, dancing dirty on her tongue.

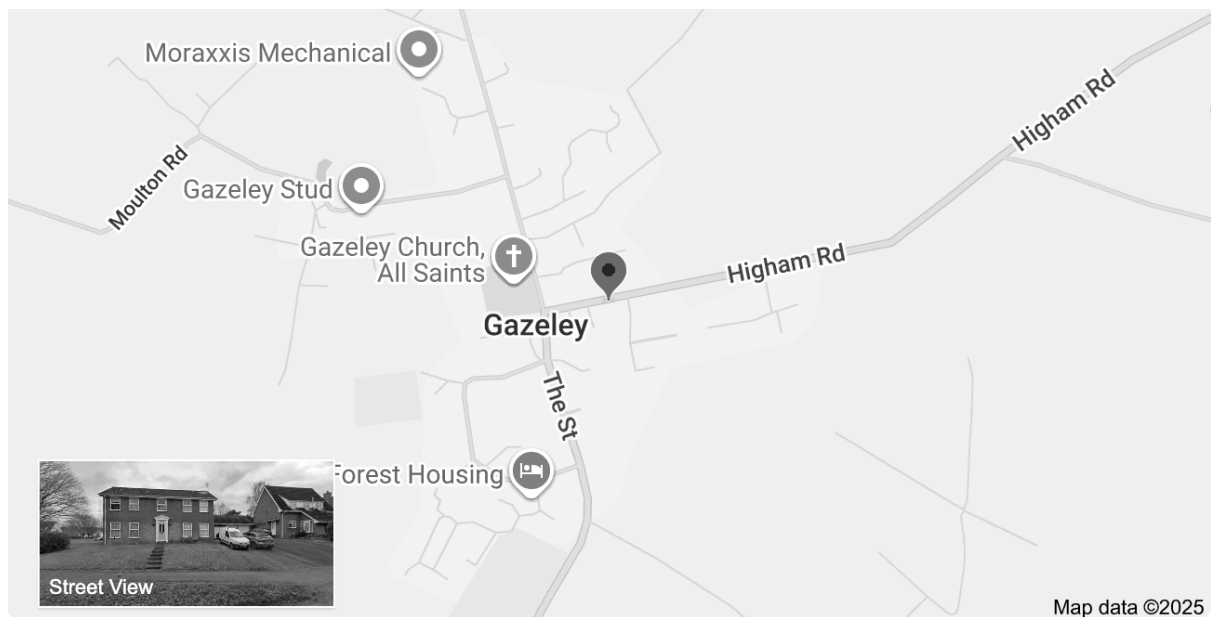
Jay walked purposefully through the aisles, chatting for a moment with the goth teen behind the register before disappearing into the back with a bathroom key attached to a fat piece of wood.

Stairwells of Return: An Essay on Haunted Houses

Isabella Greenwood

I. Haunted House : Origin

The house I grew up in had many windows, and too few doors. It breathed unevenly, inhaling through the gaps in the floorboards. My younger brother, an insomniac at the time, reported the nightly arrival of two women dressed in mourning: black veils, black gloves, black dresses that dragged across the carpet like wet fabric. They would pinch him awake, he said, to keep him from slipping too far into sleep, meanwhile I claimed to converse with a man in a tall white hat—as I knelt facing the wall, hands together. One afternoon, three women arrived at our door, with a gentle authority of those who already know what they are looking for. They ascended the stairs without hesitation, entered our bedrooms, and when they descended again their faces were streaked with tears. They told my mother that a boy a similar age to my brother had died in his crib in that very room from cot death, a century ago. His mother and nurse had returned—draped in grief—to prevent his repetition. They told me that a priest had died in my room. Here, my first two lessons of the haunted house were, I. The past may return to prevent itself from repeating in the future, and II. ghosts still believe in God.



The Haunted House, (positioned opposite All Saints Cemetery, Gazeley, Suffolk).

II. Haunted House : Theory

If a ghost is a tragedy condemned to repeat itself, then a haunted house is a site of perpetual punishment, a structure folded inward, trapping its occupants in a choreography of return. A house, unlike a body, cannot migrate. It hoards its grief.



Erwin Wurm - 'Little Big Earth House', 2003

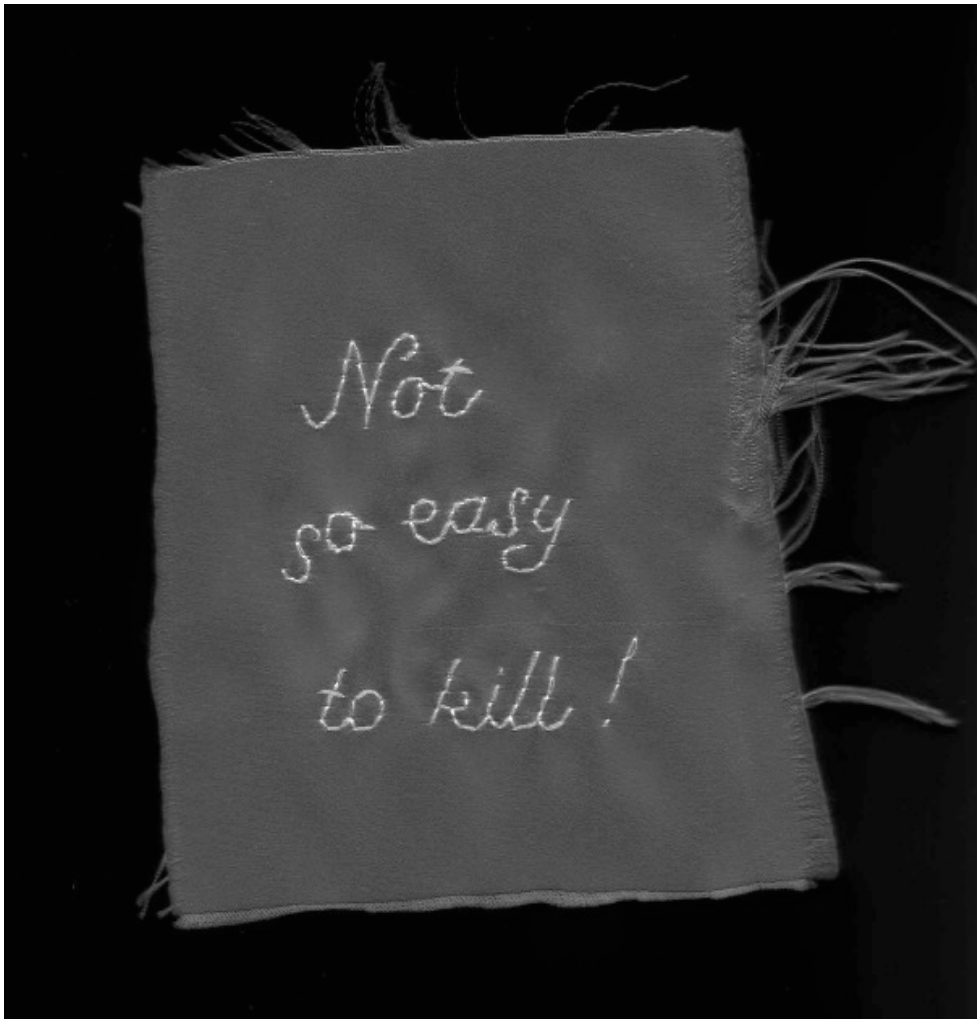
III. Haunted House : The Past

Ghosts continue to invest meaning in their refusal of endings, which made me wonder if we invent them simply because we are afraid of closure. Or perhaps ghosts invent us, refusing to let us leave.

(It makes me think we are all ghosts, rehearsing ourselves over and over, returning to the same gestures until they lose their edge).

But haunting is not only the persistence of the past. As Derrida writes, haunting is a structure of time itself—where the past does not stay buried but interrupts the present, producing futures already contaminated by what has been. Mark Fisher called this *hauntology*: the way lost futures remain alive, lodged in the cracks of now. A haunted house is not merely a museum of what once happened; it is a rehearsal space for what was supposed to happen and never did. This is why haunted houses are so unsettling. They remind us that the past is not finished with us. They insist that history continues to live inside our walls, our bodies, our language.





Clippings from writers archive.

IV. Haunted House as Evidence

As Jean-Michel Rabaté reminds us, the word *haunt* derives from the Germanic root *heim*, from home, already signalling how haunting is inseparable from dwelling. In a postcolonial frame, this connection between haunting and home unsettles colonial ideologies of possession: the coloniser's insistence on ownership of land is revealed as precarious, always vulnerable to spectral return. Ghosts insist upon what has been erased in official histories, indigenous presences, enslaved bodies, silenced narratives, by continuously occupying the space. Haunting is therefore not merely an aesthetic condition but a political one. It reveals how colonial projects attempt to naturalise linear time, while ghosts disrupt this chronology, insisting on temporal disjunctions. They arrive from

what should have been “past” yet remain unresolved, surfacing in the “present” as reminders that colonial violence is never fully concluded. In this sense, haunting operates as a counter-archive: a living, unsettled record that resists the ordering and containment of history into neat, finished narratives.



From the series “Flowers drink the river” - by Pia Paulina Guilmoth, American

V. Haunted House : No Exit

In Carmen Machado's *In The Dream House*, Machado describes hiding in the bathroom from her drunken girlfriend, praying she doesn't bang the door down: "In that moment [the locked bathroom] was my own little space. Even though after that it would never be mine again". Machado notes that for the rest of her time in her house, her body would charge with alarm, even though in that moment, it was the closest thing she had to being safe. Sometimes a haunted house is when a house is not meant to be haunted, and yet it is: the ghost is something that lingers in its wake, reminding you that something violent took place. This made me think that perhaps a haunted house is simply a house that remembers, long after we have all forgotten.

VI. Haunted House : Repetitive Dream

I kept dreaming of being in a haunted house with my friend, who dreamt the same dream. Doors would open, slam and shut. For a while we repeated this dream many times, often on the same nights, and almost always together. Freud said houses symbolise the psyche, so I wondered if this meant our psyches were haunted? (together). I also considered the way the dream was about proximity: the way two people can share a psychic architecture. Maybe the repetition was less about terror than it was about rehearsal—the dream testing its doors, slamming them open and shut, trying to see whether we would find an exit or keep returning to the same place.

From a critical standpoint, the dream's circularity gestures towards a different temporality, one that refused linear progress, much like haunting itself. Repetition produces difference with each return; even when the dream seems identical, the psyche encounters it anew, slightly altered by the residue of what came before. The haunted house is perhaps less about terror than about return: the uncanny recognition that what we cannot exit, we are forced to replay.

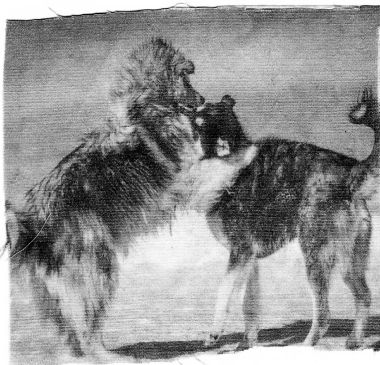
VII. Haunted House : The Body

If the house is a psyche, as Freud suggested, then what of the body? Does it, too, become a haunted house—its cells repeating their histories, its walls storing echoes of past occupants? A house remembers even after we leave; a body remembers even when we try to forget. Trauma, after all, is a kind of haunting, the body keeping score when the mind wants to disown.

Diary entry, November 2024:

Is my body a museum? A haunted house? Cells? A spirit? A daughter? A result? Evidence? A way out? A way in? My own? (If it is not, how do I get it back?)

The haunted house is not always a house, sometimes it is the skin we live in, sometimes it is a dream that repeats itself.



Stupid girl you never learn



Dream #123456

(My) house is on fire- I wait for the fire to calm before entering, everything is destroyed, the walls are burnt And the windows shattered - but now I can hear The birds when I wake up.

Another dream about a house.

and this is no way out - I cannot escape it because I am my house, I am my body).



Dream #123457

Someone is in my house, there is no way out- I cannot escape because I am my house! (It is my body).



I don't have a room in my walk-in closet, I have a room in my walk-in closet, I have a room in my walk-in closet.

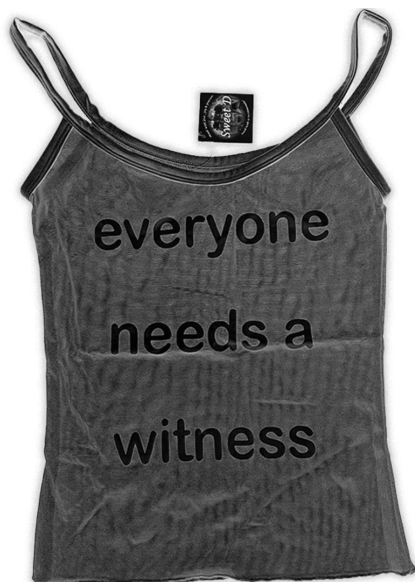
Writer's dream diary.

VIII. Haunted House : Poem (2018)

It is almost over now, but I cannot find the rest of myself to celebrate. What point is there in peace when the one who prayed for it has been scattered through a house that screams? When silence never arrives but only imitates itself—What kind of peace is it when the only escape is holding my breath beneath the bath water, silence becoming a kind of fish, joy dissolving like dirt spiralling down the drain? The ceiling falls when I stand to walk the dog, and the dog drags me home by the hair, leash in its mouth, I have forgotten where home even is. Peace is mocked by memory, by the image of a lamb tied with butcher's string to the kitchen table, by the ache of sleeping on an empty stomach, by the strained songs of choristers whose hymns hurt to hear. And still peace looms on the stairwell, sword in hand, heavily veiled, demanding I kneel, demanding I watch my head roll down the stairs to join the rest of me. What point is there in peace if I have no eyes left to see it? Is a haunted house still a haunted house if there is no one left to scare?

IX. Haunted House: Witness

(Sometimes a haunted house is reliant on observers: is it haunted if no one can see its ghosts?/ Does a tree fall in a forest, if we don't hear it? Must things require a witness to be real?)

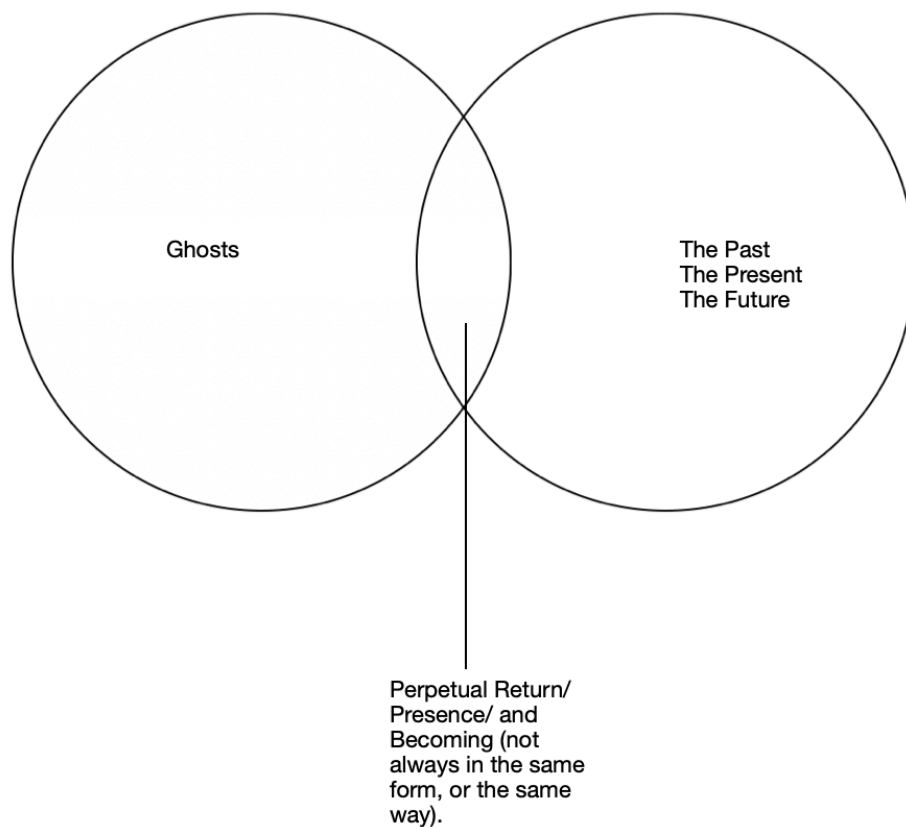


'Everyone Needs a Witness' Tank Top, Sweet D.

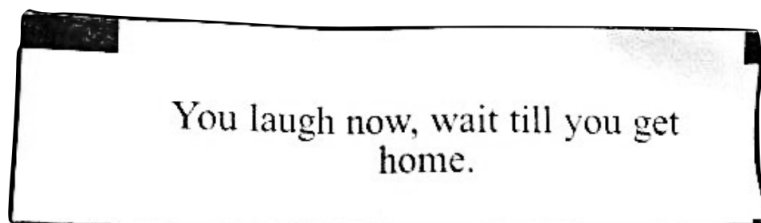
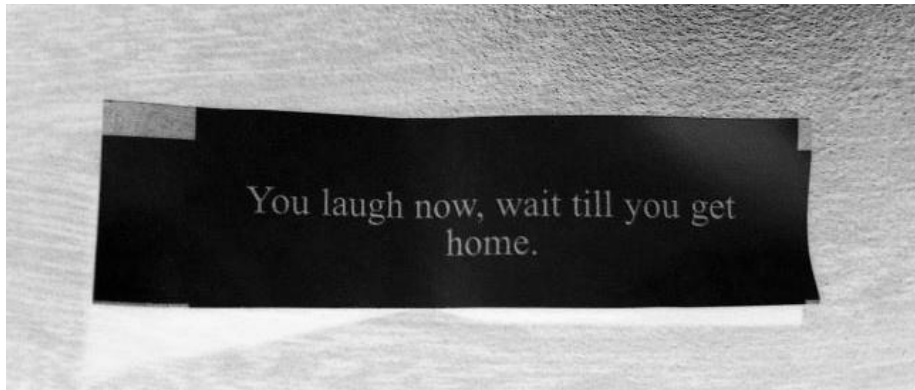
X. Haunted House: (Never) Ending

The haunted house is not simply a site of terror, but of testimony. It records what official histories cannot, carrying memory in its walls, its stairwells, its repetitions. In dreams, in bodies, in architecture, haunting is the persistence of what refuses to be forgotten, whether that be violence, desire, or grief. To enter a haunted house is to step into unfinished time, where the past is not past and the future is already compromised.

Perhaps this is why we return to them—through stories, through theory, through our own recurring dreams—because haunted houses remind us that history is never still, that the archive is never complete, and that the ghosts we inherit are also the evidence we live among. To speak of haunting, then, is not to describe absence but to name a presence that insists. The haunted house is not proof of death, but rather, evidence that nothing ever fully ends.



Diagram, "Ghosts", courtesy of the writer.



Fortune Cookie.

Text References

Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by P. Kamuf. New York: Routledge.

Fisher, M. (2014) *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Freud, S. (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by J. Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.

Machado, C.M. (2019) *In the Dream House: A Memoir*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.

Rabaté, J-M. (2023) *Knots: Post-Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*. London: Routledge.

Destiny opened the glass refrigerator door and contemplated a Red Bull before grabbing a blue Gatorade. Cool Blue. For the baby. Cool Blue dribbled down her chin as she stood drinking it in the beef jerky aisle - legs slightly spread - an ugly, unselfconscious stance. The girl behind the counter took a hit of her vape and blew a cloud that enveloped her entire head. It was one of those huge refillable machines, with a window to watch the amber oil moving around inside from, slow and syrupy. She held it as if it were a baby bottle, her fingers gripping hard like a toddler. When she sucked in, the thing blinked all electric and colorful. Like a carnival. When she exhaled she disappeared like the caterpillar from Alice in Wonderland. Come to think of it, he was blue too. Cool Blue Gatorade colored blue. Even the cloud smelled blue. The Gatorade bottle sweated in her hand and dripped onto the small mound of belly underneath her t-shirt. It was an old t-shirt of Jays, with stains down the front of it from the Wendy's they had eaten for lunch. A ketchup stain glowed under the overhead lights. There was a meaty, pickle-y smell on her skin. Inside of her pores. Deep into the pregnant core of her.

Coming around the corner of the aisle now was a small kitten, rubbing itself sweetly against the bottom row of the candy display. Her little feline ass wiggled in the grinning sugar crystal faces of Sour Patch Kids, against rectangle boxes of Mike and Ikes, along rows of colorful bags hanging heavy with M&M's, Nerd's Gummies, Jolly Ranchers. She was young, still had her boney baby body, which snaked its way towards Destiny's ankle, and then around and around them both in a furry infinity symbol.

But then Jay burst out of the bathroom, frantically. He pushed past Destiny and the kitten, who hissed and jumped into an open box of Hostess Donettes. Her small claws punctured the thin plastic which contained the powder sugared dough beneath. A small puff of white mushroomed up around her body as she settled and then landed delicately atop her fur. The air was a sudden mix of strange flavors. Jay's hurried exit from the bathroom had released a dull piss smell into the air. Against the sugary backdrop of the yeasty pastries and the vape smoke, the smell that had taken over the room was disorienting. Underneath the human shit smell was that of a neglected litter box. An interspecies collaboration in stink. Hot dogs rolled over on silver bars, cooking for eternity, oil slicked and salty. The air conditioning which pumped through the space folded in its own moldy must. The goth teen, whose name tag read Sloane, had taken out nail glue to reattach a fake one which had come loose from her middle finger. Its chemical fumes stung. The smells created a symphony of headbutting odors. The most ancient stench of human excrement held hands with this modern smell of nicotine sweetness. Everything else filled in the gaps. Outside gasoline leaked from the pumps.

And then Jay did something really wild.

Gas stations often attach their bathroom keys to large objects, in order to make them harder to lose or to avoid them being taken home with customers. Destiny had seen keys attached to hubcaps, bucket lids, clipboards. But the one Jay had been given was attached to a large wooden stick, like a portion of the leg of a table. When he left the bathroom he had beelined to the register, wood raised above his head. And when he had gotten right in front of Sloane, he brought his arms down and cracked the wood against her skull. The sound was like thunder. Sloane's eyes, rimmed thick and sticky with eyeliner, went big upon impact. The wings she had painted on that morning with cheap, drugstore makeup stretched wide as her face contorted in pain. Her mouth made the shape of a hollow scream, wide enough so you could see the silver metal glint of childhood fillings in her molars. She exhaled and one slow white cloud seeped out of her open mouth. This final breath smelled of Slim Jims, Mints, and Strawmelon Peach. A pretty red dribbled from the girl's dark hairline and created a river through her face. A head injury bleeds like something mad. Destiny's hands were over her mouth. She closed her eyes and tried to think of nice, nice things. Watching her father get a wet shave at the barber shop when she was 6 and he was still a young man. The sudsy smell of shaving cream. A hot eucalyptus towel. Her mother reading aloud to her in her childhood bedroom. Voice like butter and like the womb. Her amber baby powder perfume soaked into each sheet and old pillow on the bed. Destiny inhaled, trying to remember it, and was met instead with the cold pissy latex smell of the room she was actually in. Her eyes opened, accidentally. Sloane's red head slumped like a horrific rag doll. Blood had pooled quickly at her feet, her platform boots in a sea of red. Droplets dripped steadily from her head onto the dirty rubber flooring. A lifetime of scuff marks on the ground. She closed her eyes again.

Outside, a skinny boy stood watching the scene unfold through the windows. His big eyes were blue and watery. His pale skin was blue from the tungsten lights. He had appeared out of the blue. Out of highway dust. Born from a mountain. Dropped from the morning dusk sky. Somewhere an ice machine churned, and dropped fresh cubes into its belly. A bird chirped. A weed grew.

NORA IRIS MITCHELL

The Spider- Forest (Chapter 1)

Once I lived in a big wooden house with three men who were strangers to me. One of the men was tall and blond and good looking and had a work-from-home corporate job. He was very nice to talk to in the kitchen. The kitchen was made of

wood. I dreamed about him for days, I had a headache and a fever. I wanted to peek my head into his room while he was taking work calls and mouth, "Will you fuck me?" but I didn't. I decided to peel a small splinter from a torn up floorboard in my bedroom and slide it into the soft skin of my breast. I didn't push the splinter in towards my heart, I threaded it parallel with the visible line of my body, just below the surface of my skin. It pricked without bleeding and made my palms sweat. The splinter showed through me like a leaf under a frozen pond, or a dark dead-end vein. I knocked on his door, stepped into his room and said, "I'm really sorry to bother you, but will you help me with something?"

"Of course, what's up?" I sat on his wooden bed. "I have a splinter in one of my tits and I can't get it out. I get nervous about needles and things like that. Will you help me?"

"How did you get a splinter in your breast?"

"I have no idea." I pulled my shirt up so I was naked on top and cupped my breast with the splinter in it so I was kind of squeezing myself.

"It all worked perfectly. Later that night, I pulled ten more splinters up from the floor and put them in a matchbox to keep in my pocket for next time. I sanitized these with alcohol. The next time I used one of my splinters, I stitched it into the backside of my upper thigh. This placement was less obvious because I could've gotten a splinter in my thigh just sitting on a wooden bench. I wore thick mascara. I bent over in a way that would give a real doctor the wrong impression. The next splinters went into my breasts again and all over. My breasts are full of small holes."

I'm horny lately like I'm poisoned, wilting and dying. I want to be loved, I want to love. I don't even mess around like this. I want to live with God. I do live with God of course...

The Spider-Forest is dark, lonely, mysterious, and frightening. I have to go back there in a few days to do something similar to collecting water. The Spider-Forest is full of tall trees hung with large spiderwebs, some of the webs are very dense. It's always night there. The big wooden house is only a twenty-five minute drive from the closest walking path into the Spider-Forest. I'm living in a new house now which is painted red on the outside and green on the inside. It's decorated with all kinds of interesting old furniture and crafts. Depending on my mood, the daylight inside can be either beautiful or sick, but it's always green. The front window is made of glass tiles which make the first room look constantly wet, the other rooms are always dry. I live with a straight couple and their friends and we live like it's a hotel. We smoke a lot of weed out of big glass bong. The weed smoke hangs in slow pale-green clouds. This house is an hour's drive from another walking path into the Spider-Forest and no bridge disconnects the drive, it's all land. My friends in the house, Kate, Julie, and Ben, go to a different Spider-Forest when the time comes. Maybe they each have their own, it's something we only talk about incompletely. My car floats in the water where a driveway should be, the driveway's "under construction," Ben says. I'll drive to the Spider-Forest in a few days and leave my car in the parking lot while I walk.

The Spider-Forest is not the only place that matters. There are some beautiful swimming holes and scenic outlooks that matter a lot to me. There are some very quiet German Romantic landscape paintings that I can only bring to a soft focus in my imagination, but I do remember them. The paintings have big skies and land and sea, sometimes a lone person or crucifix or grave. I'm softly remembering Mountain Landscape in Bohemia. Its softness doesn't break my heart the way forgotten details of a face I once loved do. I'm softly remembering a face I've mostly forgotten and it's wrong, I'm wrong, however inevitable, however arguable, I won't argue it... Painted mountains forget themselves in distance, painted fog forgets them to feathers, it's ok. A painted person in my distant memory is obscured to one short fine line, I lie in the grass and alchemize him to feathers, I stretch out peacefully in the sun...

Kate told me a secret the other night on the back porch. Her skirt was light and short and she wanted some of my cigarette for the first time in a while. She looked very young and I felt vacant because I love her. She cried and her shirt got wet. There was a prehistoric bee solidified in a piece of amber above our heads where the lightbulb should've been, I don't know if I noticed it. There was a fluorescent yellow corn muffin glowing in the window at the kitchen table like a candle that takes a round silver battery, I ate it the next morning after its battery died. There was a low electric sound stretched wide by the dark like an invisible hammock between the house and the yard, making the night even darker. It was so dark that the yard turned into a deep black pond with an unlit bridge out over it forever in front of us. I think any wind could've started a fire. I noticed these details like puzzle pieces. My ex-boyfriend told me, "Coming events cast their shadows before."

Kate and I are sitting together now in the upstairs bathroom, I'm dyeing my hair. Julie is here too in the shower. We're talking about something new, but we're talking through a slit in a pane of glass the color of the other night, although with added green. I'm dyeing my hair red. Kate says, "I heard there's a new system of tunnels with more entrances into the Spider-Forest. Ben told me about it." My hair is a hand towel for red dye. "It's getting really nice out," I say, lying back on my sparkle beach towel. I'm wearing one of Julie's bikinis. The bottoms sit low on my waist so my hip bones stick out above the elastic twin bows. I'm popping out of the top like my tits are bubblegum bubbles. Wet red hair makes a mermaid's tail on one of my shoulders. The ocean is blue and shimmering like a beautiful migraine with aura. Kate has a great body and long hair and I can see her tan developing in real time. Julie steps out of the shower dripping and naked and lies down directly on the hot sand. She sighs, "I need a boyfriend." The sand coats her body and gives her gold cat's-tongue skin. I've suggested a few times that we make a bikini car wash to find Julie a boyfriend, but it never happens. It's good it never happens because I can't sin like that anymore. Ben opens the bathroom door and sits on my towel next to me, he has a case of beer. The green bottles reflect the bright afternoon sun. Julie's not interested in any of Ben's single friends. Ben sometimes says Julie's boyfriend lives in the Spider-Forest, we all laugh.

MONTANA THOMAS

Lunch at the Cascades

The stones of the Cascades

near La Roque sur Ceze were smooth, and the water that ran between them was cool— a gift under the tyrannical heat of August. In her visor and Merrells she spun around and stomped in a still and shallow nook of river. ‘Give me my babies!’ she screamed into the hills, “Give me them now! I need them now, give them to me! How dare you! I know you speak English, sir, don’t fuck with me! Now, gathering herself and lowering her voice, though still ticking and breathing heavily, she continued, “Hand them over, they belong to me. I need those things. Hand over those delicious little critters. Put em’ in the bag and toss em’ to me now, I can’t take it any longer. Come on man, don’t piss me off. I’m hungry and delirious. I’ll calm down. I promise. Just pass me the children. Now.” Seikilos Epitaph Two couples were dining outside under an umbrella at an Italian restaurant in the West Village around 2:00 pm. One of the women was coughing into her hands. Her husband pounded her rounded back with his flat firm palm again and again and again and again to help. Her small breathy coughs, like speed bumps over the penne, became increasingly fainter and she continued to curl in. The other woman politely asked the waiter, “Could you bring us a thing of water please?” Finally, the woman stopped coughing and her head fell to the plate, still and silent. The husband stopped pounding her back and they all looked around at each other in shock. An angry man in a car driving by the restaurant honked his horn for about 5 whole seconds at a bike that got out of its lane. The husband then slowly reached over and lifted her head by her chin and her ponytail. She was certainly dead and her face was caked in vodka sauce and some wilted basil. One lone penne had managed to stick to her ear. He began to move her mouth like a puppet as if she were speaking and making noises— like cow noises and bird noises. They all broke into smiles. The other wife jumped up and moved her limp arms from behind. They all laughed as they pretended she was dancing and singing La Bamba. Her husband’s hands were covered in food. They topped her off with red wine on her head. They drank and laughed so hard that their cheeks were red and their abdomens were sore. The waiter, Joe, brought over whipped cream, with which they could also play. Oh to lunch on a Wednesday.

JACOB ACE

The Webber Story

Lights! Camera! Action! Oli Webber lies on a dingy, unmade bed—bloodied, dismembered. His crotch, mangled—raw, stringy like chewed-up bubblegum. Ribs jut from his sides, the flesh gnawed clean from the bone. His body, obliterated. His face, remains intact—unmarked. A camera in the corner of the room is recording.

Behind it, two blood-soaked men gawk, drool, and grow hard beneath their jeans at the sight of this beautiful mess. Oli was only nineteen. This is his story. Born and raised in the asshole of civilization: Irvine, California—just 56 minutes outside La-La Land. It’s heaven, it’s hell. It’s where dreams are made. Oli had always wanted to be a star—even if it was only for fifteen minutes. To seem, at the very least, somewhat influential. But alas, no one from the OC was ever really that cool. At nine, his appetite for fame grew when he joined the school's theater group. Rooms filled with cheap costumes, fluorescent lighting, and half-hearted applause. He would think to himself “This is exactly where I belong.” Having recognized his raw talent, his acting teacher Ms. Feldman suggested to his parents that they take him to castings in LA. They refused, afraid he’d become a junkie or worse, some D list actor sucking dick for roles. Horrified by his parents' lack of support, Ms. Feldman took matters into her own hands. She’d caught wind of a very important casting for a very important film directed by a very important man. It all happened so quick! Oli walked in, read his lines, and walked out. Simple enough. However, the director wasn't entirely impressed, stating “The kid is good, but he just doesn't have...it.” Ms. Feldman reassured Oli that the call back would come. It never did. Days became weeks, weeks became months, and before he knew it he’d grown up—every actor's worst nightmare. He lost contact with Ms. Feldman, dropped out of high school, and turned to a life of complete degeneracy. He had no plan, no money, no ambition. His parents kicked him out for good reason—he became their worst nightmare. He had nowhere to go. But she remained—Babylon, waiting patiently for Oli’s return. For weeks, he walked up and down Hollywood Boulevard expecting someone to see the talent that once radiated off him. No one did. Until! A black Cadillac SUV crept down the street, following him for hours. Who could it be? What could they want? Oli ran up to the car and waited at the window. It slid down an inch. For a second—silence. Then a man's voice. “Want to be a star?” Oli’s stomach growled—that hunger reignited. Without hesitation, he jumped into the back seat. Two men sat up front, then everything went black. Oli woke up naked and tied to a bed. He screamed and rustled around, pleading. The same two men stood behind a camera, recording. “What do you want from me?” Oli muttered. No response. The two men approached. Oli screamed as they began chowing down at his flesh like rotisserie meat. His cries grew louder at the sight of his intestines. The last image seared into his mind: the men sucking his ribs clean. Death didn’t stop them—they kept eating. When finished, they admired their masterpiece, Oli’s ravaged body. These two men were none other than Felix DuPont & Leo Laurent, infamous directors—known for standout films like “Benny’s last breath”, “Bad Boy”, and now “Hollywood Cannibal” starring Oli Webber. This new addition to their filmography became an overnight sensation on www.rotten.com. Oli lived on, a star was born. The end.

KAY KASPERHAUSER

Feed Me Daughters

Voice One: Eyes are the only hole that it hurts right away to stick your finger in.

Voice Two: That’s not true for everyone. That’s not hurt, that’s another thing. Fair. Maybe I am all mouth all gaping maw, red drool-dripping car crash. God is generally interested in you being very brave. People are always saying I’m brave. Not in that way, which you hate. They are always saying so, because of my cape of a flayed lion and the skulls on my walls and the armies at my gates and the cities at my feet. Not in the That-Brave way God is very interested in: once when you were 15 and you were invited to the birthday party of a boy you had a crush on, because you were family friends with his cousin. I was so scared. You were so scared and mom said you HAD to go, and that you couldn’t make Alma go with you. I’ve never been scared with Alma, not even on the mountain in February in Vermont as many years before my period as it was after 9-11. Alma is your Thing. Not a shadow at all; like an echo but it comes before. You promised mom you wouldn’t make Alma come, and then you called Alma crying from the stoop of the party and she came and you went together. Not very brave at all. That’s the sort of bravery God is interested in for you. The not-that-kind. So we have known each other for a long time then, you and I? A long time. We made a plan ages ago, before either of us were in these bodies, to meet here. In a funeral home? In a funeral home, some very important things have happened to you that you weren’t around for, I was around for them. They’re mysteries to you, not like a shadow at all, like an echo maybe, like super macro close up zooms. Like through my microscope, the one I got online for \$28, that goes to an app on my phone, the instructions were in Chinese but I figured it out. You can tell me what happened when I was gone, like the op-notes from my surgeries? I proofread those, Dr. Divino wrote them but I did final edits. They said I was oozy, ‘coagulopathic, generally oozy.’ You were. They said too that I was ‘somewhat dusky’, the condition of me. We said ‘attention was then directed to the small bowel which at that point was somewhat dusky, as a result of the patient’s overall condition. Of note during the surgery: she was being aggressively resuscitated”. Allegedly You were, we wouldn’t be having this conversation if you weren’t. I like words that change meaning in a doctor’s mouth, dusky, oozy, patent, Impressive, Visceral, Productive,

Appendix, stool, acoustic, anti-body, You’re sometimes a bit anti-body. Atrium, a bit I am, yeah, What does dusky mean? What does dusky mean to you? Bats, orchids, or is it jasmine? Dusk, I think it’s a cousin of fuscus like obfuscation, like a darkening? You darkened. Cyanotic. Sayonara! Allegedly. I felt better once it stopped hurting. You always do, you’re a very good girl. Pheochromatic, That’s not a word. You’re right, but I have a point. PHEOCHROMOCYTOMA? A tumor that sits on the kidney? It’s what killed Eisenhower. ... okay? We only care about the Pheo part of it, PHEO, it comes from Greek phaius, it means ‘dusky’, it means a shade between black and white. What else is a Phaius? Phaius is the genus name of Swamp Orchids, so it isn’t jasmine? It’s Jasmine too, night blooming, but wait. Phaius. Grey, grey brown in some texts. It gets borrowed by Latin and becomes phaeacem... Faex, babe, that’s feces! Yeah but it’s not though, that’s not the root of feces. The root of feces is UNKNOWN. It’s BORROWED from a substrate language. It’s a stretch. It’s so romantic, your beautiful dusky bowel, dusky night blooming jasminefeces. I don’t have a belly button anymore, I’m unborn. In the 1800’s a man named Alexis St-Martin was shot, accidentally, at close range with a musket. The bullet tore a hole through his stomach, and left shrapnel in his muscles, in his ribs... Talk about being unborn. St-Martin survived actually, miraculously. For the first two weeks, everything he ate came right out of that hole. I had that, not the musket bit, but the food hole. Obviously. After 17 days, the food stopped coming out of that hole, and normal bowel function returned. When the wound did what it did, instead of healing, it went like this: the edge of the stomach hole fused to the edge of the skin hole. A fistula! Exactly, remember when yours... I had two ostomy holes at once. One was supposed to be inactive but it wasn’t and one day, on the way to the airport, it became very ‘productive’. There wasn’t supposed to be anything on the other side of that hole, that was supposed to be the good hole. All Holes Are Good Holes. Your trip was delayed. The well-behaved hole was secretly connected to the rebellious hole. There was a fistula connecting them, I imagined it like they were secretly holding hands under a table and I didn’t know. No one knew much about digestion in the 1800. The Army physician who saved St-Martin’s life, Dr. William Beaumont, recognized St-Martin’s unique condition as an opportunity. Beaumont spent the next 10 years conducting an estimated 200 experiments on St-Martin. He would dangle food on a string into the stomach, then pull it out and note the rate of digestion. Um..

Entire sacks of food. Beaumont’s work provided revolutionary developments for the physiology of digestion. He confirmed the existence of hydrochloric acid in the stomach! That’s Stomach Acid, babe! That sounds excruciating, for St-Martin I mean. It was.

Why did he allow it, was he that grateful for the doctor who saved his life?

Not at all, St-Martin was not grateful, he was illiterate. Beaumont tricked St-Martin into signing a contract indenturing him as his servant, in between experiments St-Martin would do Beaumont’s household chores.

Jesus.

St-Martin ran away eventually, and outlived Beaumont.

Well that’s good.

His wife delayed his burial until the body began to decompose, to prevent medical men from digging up and continuing to experiment on his corpse.

I love you my body, sweet body, sweet almond sized bone at the top of the spinal column, sweet pelvic bowl, sweet desire that sustains peace between man and wife, sweet throat which expels the gold and expends the silver.

Rabbi Levi said two matters about this, one for Torah scholars and one for ignoramuses. The first: One comes to weep, and his eyes shed tears [copiously]. The second: One comes to urinate, excrement emerges and precedes it.

As honey for the sweetness.

These are the edges of the lungs, from which the sounds of the voice emerge.

Are you afraid of heights? Are you a good flier? Do you fly well? What is your threshold for discomfort? Anticipatory discomfort? When does dusk start? You are an open maw remember, you are a doorway, you are nothing but holes. Witness me and all of my holes, seeping and gushing and shining and beaming I LOVE you.

There is a high plane desert in Southern Chile. It was a Pliocene lake, but became salt flats before the Andes even rose from the ocean. There, the cool low-salinity ocean current meets the South Pacific high pressure system and makes it one of the most arid places on Earth. It is very high and very dry and very cold.

Sounds like my ex-wife.

The things there do not decay. UV radiation breaks down tissue. Wind and windblown grit wear it away, there is erosion but there is not decay.

What happens to the things that die there?

For things to die there, they would have to live there.

So no one dies there.

Only the ones who journey there to die.

What happens to them?

Stillness, one you don’t know about, a lunar one. You’ve never met an astronaut, you’ve never even met anyone who has fucked an atronaut.

Easy to imagine that latter group is a small number, astronauts are very busy.

Fair.

Tell me about my sacrum, my coccyx, my pelvic girdle, my tailbone, my LOINS.

Well, firstly, those are not all the same thing. But what you mean, is what was The Very First Of You.

What the atheists say...

I used to be an atheist.

We wouldn’t be having this conversation if you still were.

What the scientists say is that at the beginning of the third week of gestation, the primitive streak forms a band of cells that is the first indicator of the body’s head-to-tail axis. At one end of this streak, the primitive node and tailbud develops, which eventually becomes the coccyx and the first part of your spine, the first part of you.

I lost my virginity to a guy who did pre-med in undergrad.

To us Hindu’s, it is the first too, first and root chakra. And to the Buddhists, a reservoir, a bowl. In Ancient Egypt we called it sacred, and the Ancient Greeks and Romans agreed, there we offered it as sacrifice to our gods, which is why you call it sacrum. We thought it was the key bone from which the body would be resurrected in the afterlife, a belief shared by Islam.

He never went to med school though, but he took immense pleasure in patiently explaining my reproductive system to me.

On the Last Day, Allah, may He be exalted, will restore the deceased person and requite him for his deeds. A belief we shared in Judaism, described in the Midrash and the Talmud as the Luz bone. We Early Christians thought the same thing, that it is a resurrection seed at the tiniest end of the spine. In mesoamerica it was a portal (you are an open maw remember) between worlds, a lintel under which our Shamans would pass on their journeys, a sacred inverted skull.

My sacrum hurts so much today, I think it means the baby is coming soon, your son is knocking on the door.

You aren’t pregnant, we wouldn’t be having this conv –

I get it. I remember his hand laid flat between my hips, his finger tracing the drop-journey of an unfertilized egg on my stomach.

Your breasts have gotten smaller.

Maybe I’ve lost weight.

You wish.

A wish is a prayer without god.

Touchè.

ANTOINE CLAUSS

Unjustified Existence

Tomorrow, she will rise under a sky full of regrets.

-

Two women and a man enter an apartment. One tends to the hand of the man with the grimacing face. They exchange a few short words, worried, absent.

It is late. Maybe 2, 3, or 4 a.m.

The other woman, little by little, no longer seems able to sit still, asking the others to hold something cold. Head or blood.

But you’ve got hot blood, the wounded manages to reply.

And a hot ass, haha, adds the caretaker.

We understand that a certain drunkenness binds them; a story more cheerful than the last.

Did you take her number, asks the caretaker, softer now.

She gave me her Insta but I already had it; I pretended I didn’t know her.

She noticed?

No.

And Mina then, wondered the wounded.

No news, replied the hot-blooded, I think she left earlier, without a word, as usual.

The hand keeps flowing. The caretaker pulls a white bandage, it stains instantly on contact with skin. Then each layer she adds dulls the color, less and less brown.

A phone rings. Three times in a row.

The man says, Hand it to me, I think it’s mine.

You think I came on too strong? The hot-blooded asks the caretaker. She seemed to like it though.

No, I’m teasing, I’m sure she’ll be the one to write first.

The man before his phone muffles his breath.

What about you, who’s writing to you at this hour while I patch you up like some devoted war nurse?

Shit. Mina.

The hot-blooded became agitated and decided to go find her.

The wounded and the caretaker try to reason with her rash decision. Nothing works. Just before slamming the door, the hot-blooded orders: Text her that I’m coming to find her.

-

One must be a fool to want to sketch the world. To believe that a link exists between life and ideas, or even only to believe it is possible to find it. This absurdity, so painful to contemporaries who hope to save themselves through a few strokes of beauty or freedom that point to the most ignoble of facts. Here, in the damp street, seeing only the weak glow of her phone in power-saving mode showing Mina’s message, so final. She thought returning was impossible.

Like on holiday, as a child, when you believe with disappointment mixed with a feeling of comfort that you return to a normal, old, known situation. False. An illusion.

Return is a word with an impossible meaning.

Rivers say goodbye to every drop of water that runs through them and know it well, while we believe they are always made of the same liquid.

Each second that creates this link between our body and the world breaks it in the same instant, leaving us stripped of any idea of imagining a sequel.

Of reckless temper, that used to reassure her. Now, dread and its noise alone remained, in the damp street, under the weak glow of her phone in power-saving mode showing Mina’s message, so final.

-

A partial hand. The pulp of hardened fingers drew close to her gaze before obscuring it.

Her steps echoed in the night.

Mina walked briskly, sharply, without looking ahead. The street offered no spectacle but silence, sometimes disturbed by familiar sounds she no longer heard: a car’s acceleration, the distant murmur of people like her but in groups. Perhaps the steps of another, like hers, alone further down the street.

Without looking ahead, her heels knew the way, avoided drain grates, anticipated the sidewalk’s rise, the world almost no longer existed.

She tried to write a message.

After turning right at the end of the avenue, she began climbing the wide steps bordering the park. As usual, she kept a steady, mechanical rhythm. Her

breath rose slightly with the effort.

Each word hesitated beneath her fingers. Sentences grew, erased on her screen.

She struggled to regulate her breath. Unusual.

Perhaps another breath moved more discreetly, lower on the stairs.

A few steps from the top, only fifty meters remained before she could push open her door.

A few steps from the top, she was now sure of her message.

Forget everything, it’s not because one mustn’t go back that one has no right to start over.

Ready to be sent.

She was definitely more out of breath than usual.

Another breath came in a fraction of a second to her ear.

A partial hand. The pulp of hardened fingers drew close to her gaze before obscuring it.

Her finger pressed send. Mina dropped her phone.

[à Julia]