

You'll live a long time yet, Cathrine. An eternity without me. you will look into the faces of passers by, hoping for something that will for an instant bring me back to you.

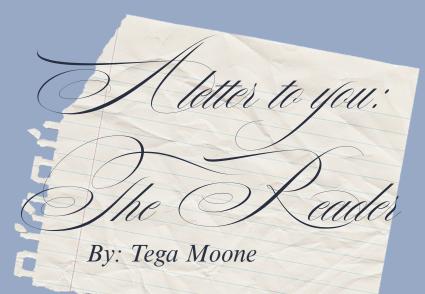
you'll find moonlit nights strangely empty, because when you call my name through them,

there will be no answer



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This issue would not be possible if it werent for them!



Welcome to Studio Moone's third issue: *Haunting The Narrative*.

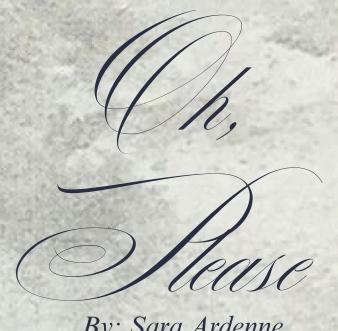
"Haunting The Narrative; a character whose presence in the story is sparse, even to the point you only see them once or twice if at all, but their actions have major consequences to the story."

The term 'Haunting The Narrative' isn't only limited to people, something as seemingly small as losing a bracelet, could be the thing that changes your life as you once knew it!

In every story, shadows linger- ghosts of past choices, whispers of unfulfilled dreams, and echoes of lost voices. This issue delves into the space where narratives become haunted, exploring how the specters of memory and regret shape our lives.

Each story, poem, and photography, invites you deeper into the term, and what it could me to everyone.



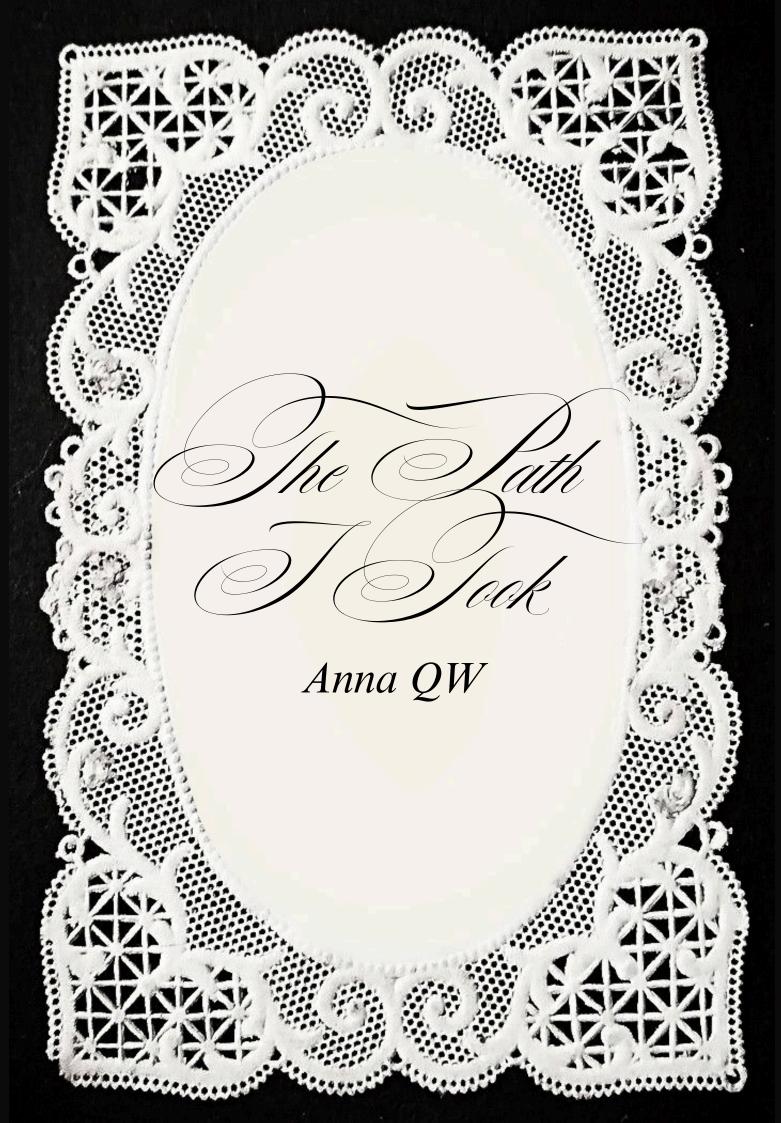


By: Sara Ardenne

i can somehow see you. i hear you, in that whisper wish-wash sound of the trees, during the rain which you said happened for a strange strange reason that you never could quite figure out

oh, please, let me go.

But that was a mystery you were pretty OK with because the sound was so lovely and i see you again this evening in how the woman on the other side of the restaurant leaves her pinky finger out when raising her glass and she has dark hair and you had dark hair and why are you still haunting me ever so awfully, why can't you let me go? why can't i let you go? you're all around me. it's awful, it's terrible, it's disgusting. i want to move on but you won't let me. you linger behind my mirror, in the smoke curling underneath words spoken, your smile in every stranger, mocking loving terrifyingly sorry and don't be sorry it was a fault of mine not yours never yours but oh, please spare mercy on a friend and let me go. oh, please, let me go. i was with you in cards, in hearts, in shards of glass, in screams and pleads and sad, sad pasts, now you are with me in happy and old telling stories untold screaming from above so that my ears will fold oh please.



Greed is man's downfall by the time one realises it, it's too late. One drowned in greed and pride yearns for what's beyond reach and thus, what's within slips away like water leaking out of a broken pipe, subtly until it's entirely gone.

I remembered when my children were born, the excitement of being a father. But the thing about some people like myself, is that I only saw the pleasantness of things, I never considered the challenge that would ensue. I only saw a family as a burden—I often argued with my wife—she became a nuisance to me—pestering me to go home and to spend more time with the children—the children fighting with others at school—the children not doing their homework the children failing their exam—the children asking me to send them to school as if I'm their driver. But isn't that the job of a wife? A wife stays home with the children, waiting for their husband to return—a wife who needs to rely on her husband to live for she doesn't work. I had power and money —therefore, I had to show my superiority and raise my voice.

Everyday as I returned home—my wife somewhere in the house relaxing, while I worked so hard and my children having the time of their life as if everything they had now can be conjured with a magic wand. I should be the one enjoying all this money. I wanted to, but my wife didn't like going out as well as my children. I felt as if I couldn't breathe. Then came the day where my children had to go to university and my wife asked for tuition fees. I was furious, tuition fees are costly and they had to choose such an expensive university while they are others at a lower price. They only wanted to swindle my money! Thus, I refused to pay them for I didn't have the money—if I took them all out for my children's fees, what else is left for me? They're mine and no one could ever snatch them from me.

I often drink with my colleagues and one of them understands me more than anyone in the world—more than my wife, my children. She satisfied all my needs—making me feel whole—allowing me to experience my youth again. I knew it was wrong but with her, I am free—and what's wrong with being happy?

These two years with my beloved woman had been the happiest time of my life and without anyone's knowledge. At first, we were afraid someone might catch us—I would always remember the thrill of spending time together in secret but as time goes by, everyone was ignorant about it and thus, we no longer took much heed. We went to places I had always wanted to go—taste all kinds of food—living in luxurious hotels—the life I had always wanted—my dream, a reality. I often felt elated as I lied to my family that I went on business trips and wedding dinners—and they actually believed me without a shadow of doubt. Soon, I noticed an increase in my monthly spendings—those

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ungrateful brats. My beloved had told me to discipline them for their mother had failed to do so. I had scolded them many times, yet, every month my expenses remained increasing. "Decrease their pocket money," my beloved had said. "That's the only way." And my beloved is always right.

One day, my family found out about her and that demon filed for a divorce. I didn't know where this demon got her money from but she surely had enough to get a lawyer limiting their spendings was the right thing after all. But why does she get the house and now I had to pay her more maintenance than I ever had to? And now I had to pay for my children's tuition fees? This is blasphemy! However, what choice did I have? They got evidence of my beloved and I. Worse, it's against the law because of whoever bastard who passed it. If those pictures got leaked out, it would tarnish my reputation and my beloved, harming her greatly. The demon had me in checkmate, I had to agree to these terms.

Even if I had to sign the papers on these terms, I felt a sense of achievement and freedom.

Every weekend, I would have meals with my children. I can't let that demon prevent me from seeing my blood and I had to get my children on my side. As they sat before me, I didn't know what to say. "How's university?" I had asked. "Good." was all they said. During the rest of the time, we were using our phones until the food arrived.

My beloved texted me. "My children, you know about it," I replied. "Just checking that the demon is absent." Throughout the entire meal, we were silent.

After a few meals with my children, I found out that the demon had been going on vacation all around the world. She must be using the maintenance I gave her. A sting of jealousy burned within me, tightened my stomach and gnawed at my bones.

"Let's go overseas during this long holiday!" she cheered. I stared at my calendar and noticed it crosses a weekend. She seemed to notice this too and hugged me. "We had been planning this for so long. Thus, you can always eat with them on the following weekends. It's not like they're just going to disappear." I nodded—I had worked so hard—if it were not for a family, I would have enough to live wealthy. Thus, I should deserve much more than that demon.

In the following week, my beloved showed me a popular restaurant she came across. "It's opening this Saturday. Let's go there, shall we?" I smiled, "Of course." "I'll book a table for tomorrow then," she exclaimed and started calling the restaurant.

<sup>&</sup>quot;But tomorrow's a Saturday."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Don't worry, the food is often best at their grand opening."
"No," I tap my fingers on my knees, "I meant that...it's a
Saturday."

- "And?" her voice was sharp as she frowned.
- "I'm eating with my children," I said.
- "Cancel them!" She crossed her arms. I tried to reach her shoulders but she shoved them away.
- "It's not like you have anything to talk about when you meet them!"
- A tight line formed in my mouth. She's right and I didn't want to upset her. "Alright," I said.
- She smiled and kissed my cheeks—I felt whole again.

In the following weeks, she started planning more trips during the weekends—"You still have a lot of time to meet them when we return," she had said—And every time, I stood my children up. As long as I'm happy right? And that demon is not the only one who knows how to live a life. But people, like myself, often mistake euphoria for happiness—abandoning your responsibilities while not considering others in pursuit of happiness is just an illusion—in fact, it's shirking, avoidance and evasion.

Oftentimes, my children would ask me whether we are having meals and most of the time, I lied about having work—I felt needed and wanted whenever they send these messages, which shows how much they want to see me. Soon, they no longer asked and it seemed the tables had turned.

Sometimes after the divorce, I would return to my once home before stopping at the gates and realise that I no longer live here.

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However, I still felt hatred whenever I laid eyes upon the house—the house I lost. Little did I know that I had lost much more. Every night as I return to my new home, I would notice the eerie silence which envelopes the house. Last time, I would still see my children and that demon in their rooms. I no longer felt the freedom I once had instead, I feel lonely. When one's presence had been a nuisance and burden, warding off another, their absence should have brought solace—however, people often yearn for what's beyond their grip or what was once within and thus, their absence now haunts me.

It's that time of the week again and I asked my children to have a meal together. "I'm not home." they simply said. It turns out that all these years, I had never really cared about my children's studies or progress at school and meeting up after the divorce, was simply a task rather than a bonding session. I never really knew them, therefore, as they further their studies far from home, I as a father don't even know about it. However, their university was only a one-hour drive from home. I offered to meet them there but they refused for they were busy.

Gradually, the weekends with my beloved no longer felt the same. I no longer felt the enthusiasm, instead I longed for the next meeting with my children. The thought gnawed at me and amplified while I was alone in my empty house.

It turns out that I had been wrong all along—I had

always thought my family would always be there when I return. Clearly, I was never a far-sighted person while the demon was.

Weeks turned into months and I can't remember the last time I met my children. I fear they may forget me so I increased their monthly maintenance. Yet, they still had no time for me. I no longer felt the superiority I once had over my family—the reliance. Oftentimes, I find myself offering help which I once found as a burden—in fact, they were the responsibilities of a father. However, they no longer needed me—it turns out, they never did for I was never by their side.

As I sat on my couch in my house far from home, my mind slowly drifted to ten years ago, when my children were just as tall as my waist. I remembered the demon pestering me, her reminders which I was once fond of became a nuisance. I remembered planning family trips together. Surprising her with gifts which made her smile, a smile I was once fond of but soon hated. Listening to her advice which I now see as controlling. I remembered returning late at night and brushing my children's forehead as I watched them sleep. We would go swimming every weekend under the scorching sun. Go to newly opened restaurants. Go for vacations and enjoy the food. Gripping them tightly on the water boat because the demon asked me to and she doesn't swim. Burying each other in 9 the sand.

Building sandcastles as big as them that they could boast to other people on the beach. Collecting seashells. Guiding them to the perfect photo spot. Printing photos for photo albums.

My glassy eyes opened and I remembered the empty collage photo frame sitting on the kitchen counter for years collecting dust—I had once said that I would fill them with our photos but I never did and would never have the chance to. Therefore, I went to a printing shop to print all those photos I once promised and slid them into a frame I bought. Each one, reminiscing a moment locked in memory—a moment that I could no longer return to.

I once had a home and everything anyone could wish for but everything comes with challenges and I chose to run. I abandoned my responsibilities which I viewed as a burden. I thought I was superior but now I'm inferior. I broke a promise. I thought I lost the house to her but it had been much more—I had everything within my grasp but like sand, I never held them tightly and they flowed out between the gaps of my finger with time—I would never feel the warmth of a family ever again.

I sat on the bench while a boy walked towards me and sat beside me with a book in his lap. His mother approached him and told him to call her if he needed her. I realised it wasn't because she disliked going out but because she wanted to be by my

10 children's side when

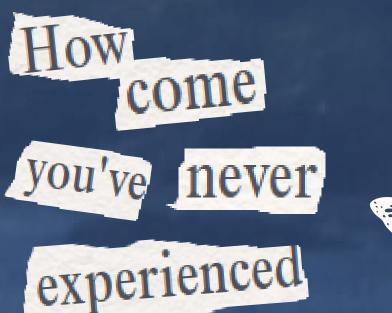
they needed her—when they study or won an award. I thought that my family never understood me but it was I who never understood them. It was I who left them when they needed me. I struggled to stand up, supported by my walking stick, hugging the bouquet tightly as my back hunched while walking past many tombs of white-headed husbands and wifes side by side. Finally, I reached her tombstone. Her smile accentuated the wrinkles on her face and her crinkled eyes twinkled in the tiny photo on the tombstone. I heard that she smiled in her sleep.

All my life I had always wanted to be superior to everyone else and to always win. Little did I know that I was a loser who lost many things in life. But my biggest loss—my family. The divorce was a lesson for my unforgivable mistake —my greed, euphoria, selfishness and evasion. It wasn't freedom but the start of my downfall. My absence was never felt but instead, theirs haunted me every second of the day and will continue to until the day I die.

If I could turn back time, I would never run away or find my responsibilities a burden. But some people had to lose in order to learn—I would be lying if I said that I wish I knew this earlier as I knew and experienced it as a child—yet, I still chose this path.

I stared at her portrait on the tombstone—stared at the curve of her name and smiled as I laid the bouquet of chrysanthemums before her. 11

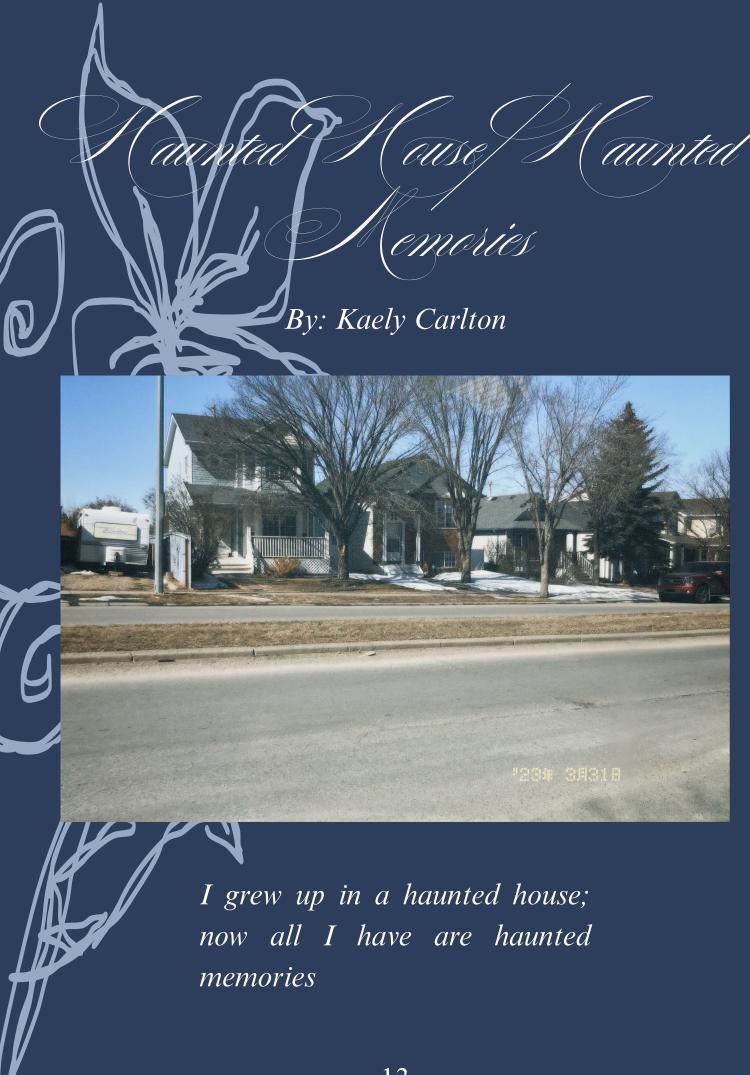
My heart was heavy with remorse and guilt as I stared at the smile that was once given to me. My wife's smile—which I had never appreciated.





elysium?

I was made to haunt the narrative; how could I have?





And suddenly "i don't want to get married" slipped out of my mouth, Because the 12 year old me would never say that, The 12 year old me wanted a loving partner, a small house by the river,

She wanted to dance in midst of the field of wildflowers and make vows of 7 lifetimes,

She wanted to grow old and grey with him but she didn't know the challenges,

Because back then she was so naive,

As she grew older and mature she learnt the tactics of cruel world,

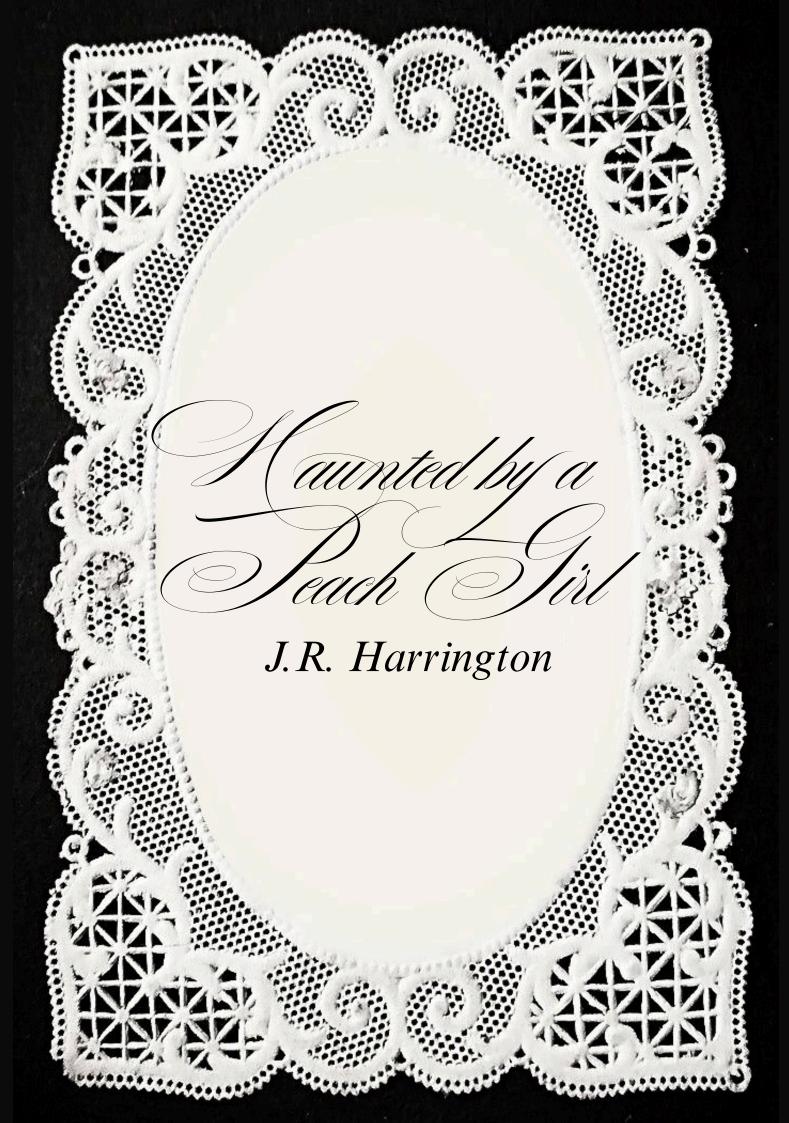
A world where a woman's work is always downcasted,

A world where a woman is expected to fulfill every role even sometimes of her husband,

Now the woman is expected so much that she's tired of only providing and getting nothing in return,

Not even love, loyalty, respect.

I admit that I'm afraid, I'm terrified, I'm agitated, Because I've seen this and I don't want to even enter the vicious cycle.



You've been haunting me, peach girl, in my dreams and waking hours. In the dreams you are perfect, hair sleek and tamed. You do not mind when I collapse against you, do not mind when I hold you tightly. It's been so long, after all, what's the harm in a little affection? You wear perfect makeup and, just like real life, I am afraid to try to kiss you.

In the morning when I'm leaving my house I see a girl walking past, looking at the street like she's searching for someone. For a brief moment I imagine she's you, searching for me, fresh off a plane to start a better life without the drugs. But the moment passes, and she looks nothing like you.

I remember to search for your obituary; the dream made me so certain that you had died. I only find arrest records on crime-watching websites, and in the mugshot you look nothing like yourself, your hair uneven and choppy, face miserable. Your hair is lighter than in the dream, because in the dream it was a dark brown, smooth like buttery chocolate bars we used to steal from the supermarket together.

At the library I think I see you again, in a girl playing on her phone by the entryway. I don't look closely enough to be certain it isn't, but I'm busy with a friend who doesn't need to haunt me to be seen. It couldn't be you, anyway, since you're probably still in jail, but still, the haunting. It continues with every woman who looks vaguely like you, and really, I don't know what you look 15 like anymore.

I know you by the stubborn set of your shoulders, the curve of your hips, the beanies you're always wearing. Any drugged thin girl with slightly bad fashion could be you, and my mind never ceases to remind me of the fact. I remember things about you that it feels like I shouldn't—it's funny how losing a friend doesn't erase the memory of them. I cannot listen to certain songs without thinking of your name. I cannot drink peach tea without remembering your allergy. Peach rings, peach vape, peach fuzz. The very word has become associated with you, peach girl. I think of that day in the portapotty, you smoking meth and me drinking that terrible vodka, trying to leave and being so dizzy I fell against the gravel.

Remember how that fourteen year old girl got you hooked? Remember when we smoked her cigarettes in a woman you called "Mom"'s car? She wasn't your mother, she wasn't anyone's mother. She crushed up a vicodin for you to snort and you offered me the remnants but I did not take it. I considered it for a few moments, but I did not take it.

And maybe I was stronger than you somehow, or maybe you were grittier than me. I dug my nails into my palms and you glued on acrylics stolen from the supermarket at lunch. I miss when it was just us and the weed. There's a girl I smoke with now, and she reminds me of you, her self-consciousness despite her beauty, her drug-addled generosity.

You were always so afraid to not be super-model gorgeous. You were always sharing, until the end. You told me everything, called me your best friend. You were never really my best friend, but you stick in my mind regardless. Not dead, but still haunting me with every sip of gas-station iced tea.

There is no resolution to this sort of haunting. No priest I can call to exorcise you from me. There is only the intense darkness of your eyes, only the mugshot I eye online that looks nothing like you. There are only dreams where you appear and let me hold you like I always wanted to. But you're probably off with some other guy, a practical stranger, and he is probably better for you than me.

Because I would only make you feel worse about yourself, in my sobriety. You never said it, but I could see in your eyes that I made you feel that way. And now I keep writing about you, because the memory won't die. The way you forgot everything I told you, all the secrets wasted. The way you described how the drugs made you feel in vivid color. The way you never realized you had changed.

Once, you were sweet, peach girl. Now you are bitter, hardened, rotted. Your very memory is ruined by the drugs, not the silly stoner I once knew. But I miss you, every single day and every single night.

Goodnight, peach girl. I know I'll see you in my dreams.

## Addition of things i'll always be

By: Sarah Watkins

the sepia photographs under your dresser drawer, the chiming of your fork against your mom's nice plates, the crust of your toast that you always cut off but can never quite bring yourself to throw away, the tick of the clock in your mildew motel room, the hour so late you begin to see sun, the haunting, the haunting haunting, the haunting the unforgettable; the on



Gripping at my hair, I leaned against the door. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. The words repeated in my head, just as the scene replayed under my eyelids. "She was innocent." No. Lies. Lies I repeat, lies! That girl was anything but innocent, she was an entity, pulling and tearing at my soul to feed her own demonic vices. She deserved to die. She deserved it more than anyone. It's not my fault. She practically walked into it. I was saving everyone. I'm a saviour, a heroine. I'm not what they say I am, I'm not like her, I'm not a monster.

I hear my mothers voice calling out but I can't seem to control my mind enough to reply. Colourful spots were forming in the air now. "Innocent. Innocent. Innocent." She must have left her mark on me, those thoughts cannot be my own. She was not innocent. I know that.

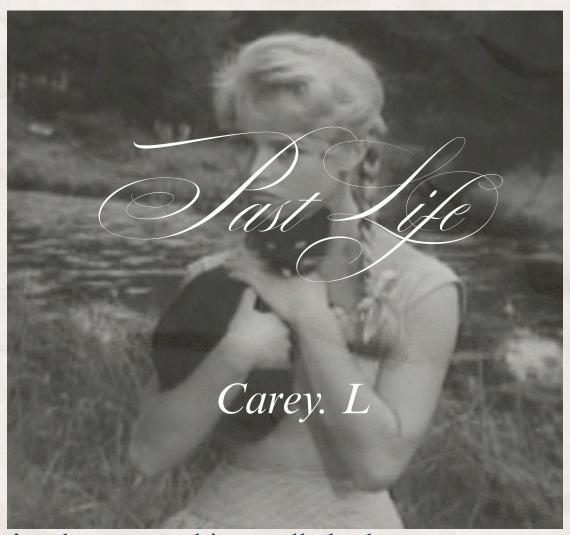
I began to tug and claw at my skin, escaping the thoughts I knew she was planting. "Get out!" I cried, "Leave me!" Mothers call is getting louder, but so is the ringing in my ears. I felt nothing but the strong urge to get her away, and my arms had minds of their own with the way they were pulling at my flesh. It wasn't mine anymore, it was hers. It was always hers. With every mark already visible, it was obvious. Get it off me. The spots grew brighter. I sunk to the floor, breathing heavily in a pool of my own blood and flesh. I felt free. Free from the everlasting pain she brought me. Reaching down. I felt for the pieces to make me 19 whole again, but I found

nothing. I could see it, yes, but I couldn't feel it.

The door opened. Mother walked in, but she didn't scream. With that pitying look so many elders often give, she bent down, picked me up, and carried me to bed.

"Goodnight, my sweet." She kissed my head before leaving. I stared at the door. At my arms, my legs, my torso. I reached to feel my bloody scalp, but all I found was hair. My eyes turned back to brown, and the room turned back to gray.

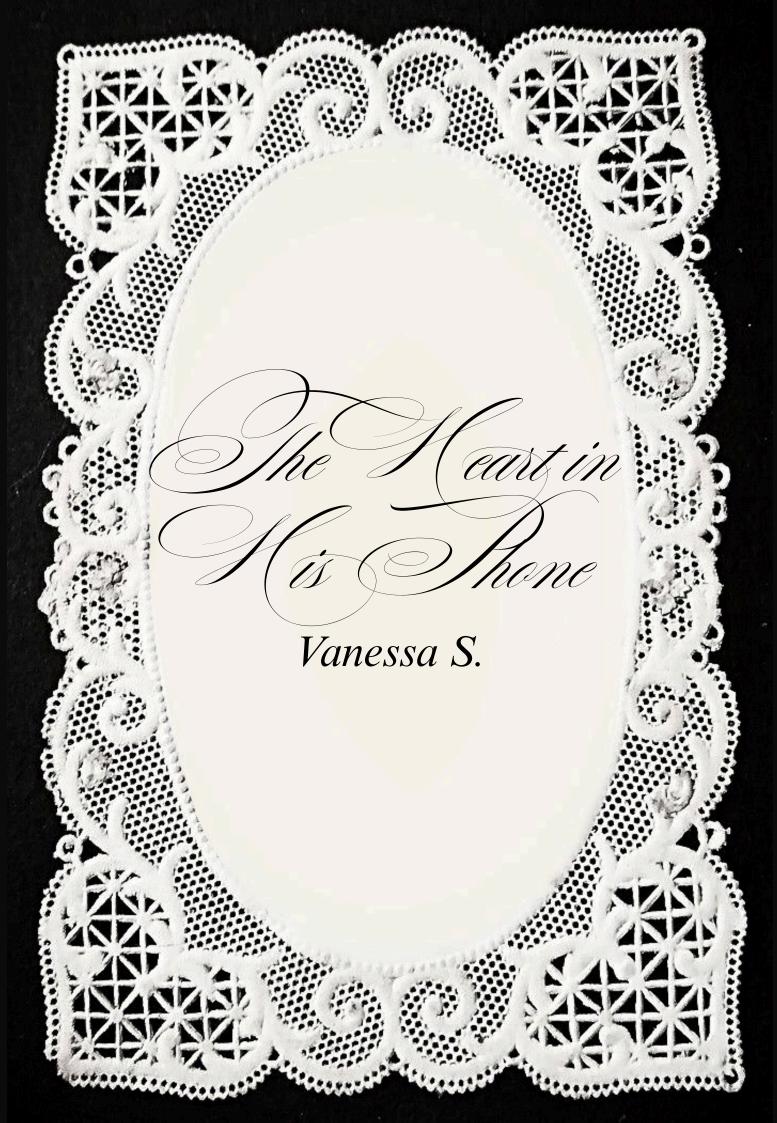
Goodnight mother. I'm sorry.



I must've done something really bad in my past life, the world seems to hate me so I wonder what I did.
maybe i plucked one too many flowers from the ground,
leaving unfixable scars.
so it tugged at my life,
laughing every time i was in pain.
i wonder at those late ungodly hours at night, what I did.

I must've done something really bad in my past life, because that's the only way to explain why the world hates me.

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It was the kind of afternoon that made you think something important had already happened before you arrived at your destination. The air in Hebden Bridge was soft with a sweet drizzle, cobbled streets were humming under wet shoes, and the sky was the color of milk left too long in a mug. I had no reason to be there—just a train ride gone too far, a friend with a camera, and the itch to see towns that look like they remember their past lives.

We were on the corner near a bakery that smelled like burnt sugar when I saw it. A phone. A Redmi note 13 pro 5g. Face down on the sidewalk, halfway under a bench, black-cased, and speckled with rain. Obviously, I picked it up out of reflex—thumb grazing the side, screen lighting up, but locked.

"I'll just hand it to someone," I mumbled, already turning toward the street. "Cop, shopkeeper, whatever."

But Layla—who never let curiosity die politely—nudged my arm.

"Wait. Try unlocking it. Maybe there's an emergency contact."

"Layla—"

"Oh, come on now, it's not like we are robbing him, we're just helping," she grinned "besides, its probably just face ID or fingerprint. Try swiping."

The screen blinked once, then again. No password. Open.

We stepped under a café awning, rain tapping a syncopated beat above us, and we began looking through it. The background was a mountain—snow-capped and the kind of blue that makes your lungs ache. His gallery was a quite wilderness: plateaus, rock formations, and eroded ridges under golden skies. One video, no sound, showed a seismic device clicking gently on a windless plain.

"Wait—look," Layla pointed. "that's a field journal. You see that logo? British geophysical union. This guy's doing a master's in geophysics or something."

The next few pictures indeed confirmed it: a page of scribbled calculations, close-ups of stratified rock layers, another folder called "Sheffield Conf. 2024." Diagrams. Satellite maps. A screenshot of a Zoom presentation with the caption, "Thesis Defense Prep – Final!"

Whoever he was, he had a brain that lit up around tectonic plates and heat maps. Then we saw **the album**. Titled nothing. Just a single heart emoji. Tucked between "Rock Type Ref." And "Granite Survey."

Layla and I looked at each other and she tapped it open. There she was. Picture after picture, like a slow confession—taken on trains, in bookstores, outside of what looked like a university. A girl with a right nostril piercing and bangs like a curtain hiding secret. Skinny like a line drawn in pencil. Always dressed like someone who folded her cardigans and knew which 23 authors drank themselves

to death. She wore din glasses, and dark brown eyes that never seemed to look straight into the camera.

There was a photo of her sitting by a window, knees up, and reading a copy of The Bell Jar.

Another of her pressing a record into a vinyl player. One where she was looking at a sculpture in a museum—hand half-lifted, as if she was about to touch it, but knew she shouldn't. Another where she was smiling with a cigarette but looked like she'd cry if the smoke drifted in the wrong way.

"She looks like a girl who underlines her favorite lines and never shows anyone," Layla whispered. We kept scrolling. Her with headphones on and eyes closed. Her in black fishnets and a short skirt. Her holding a book upside down like a joke. A blurry one where she was mid laugh, teeth imperfect but joy aloud.

I didn't realize how long we had been looking until the rain got heavier. The world outside the screen literally felt thinner. "She reminds me of the wife," Layla said suddenly. I blinked, "what wife?"

"You know... those kind of movies... the one with the writer whose wife dies in the first ten minutes? The one who haunts the story like smoke?" I was quiet. Because I had just thought that. The exact same thing, too. Not like déjà vu—more like she had stepped out of some collective cinematic memory. A woman written to be lost.

We scrolled a little longer, silently. I think we both felt it—something unspoken stitched into those photos. Like he was trying to remember her perfectly. Or maybe trying to forget himself.

Then we heard a laugh, almost like it was forced. "Ah—" a voice said, warm and a little breathless. "I think that belongs to me."

We looked up. He stood with his hands in the pockets of a windbreaker. He was wearing deep corduroy trousers, a brown shirt with too many buttons done up, black sneakers, and hair that had clearly been fought into place but lost the battle. His glasses slid down his nose slightly. He was in his mid-thirties. Clean-shaven. Eyes kind but slightly tired. A man who definitely studied geophysics. He didn't seem mad. Just amused. Maybe curious what we had found.

I handed the phone back slowly. He smiled at me, and then at Layla, as he took it.

"You two were gentle," he said. "Thanks."

We nodded. He turned and walked down the street, humming something we didn't know. Layla looked at me with her eyebrows lifted.

"I think I have fallen in love with his whole life," she whispered.

I nodded. The rain was softer now, barely there actually. The scent of moss and old stone filled the air.

"I think we just 25 watched a ghost grieve

in reverse," I said.

She didn't answer. She just smiled a little, sad, but full of wonder. And we walked on.



people say tears make your lashes grow.

but she knows that's a myth.

her lashes were as thin as thread.

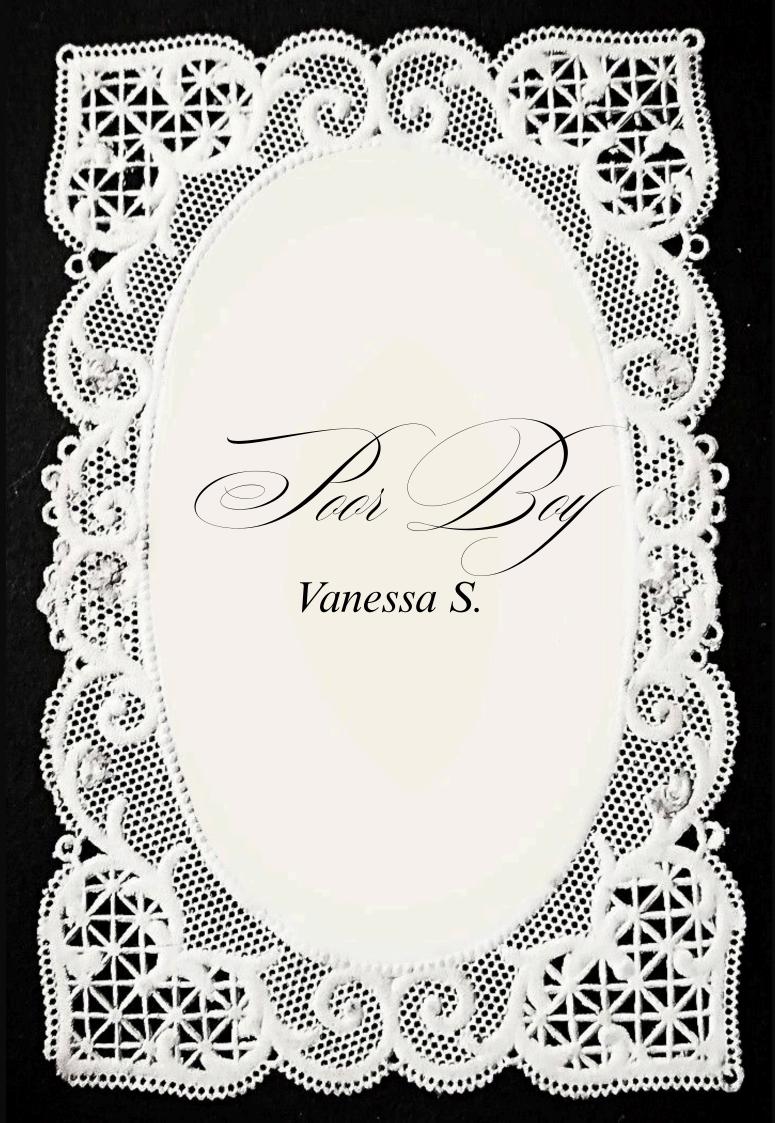
they were as fragile as glass
waiting to break.
they were basically invisible,
and people made sure to point it out.
but she cried every night,
her pillows stained with mascara residue
and soaked with tears.
if tears made your lashes grow
why were hers the way they are,
thin, fragile, invisible.
people say tears make your lashes grow.
but she knows that's just a myth.

shadows dance with fading light, Echoes of a time long gone, Whisper secrets, draw us on.

Flickering candles, soft and pale,
Tell the stories, weave the tale;
Memories linger, ghosts take flight,
Haunting whispers, lost in sight.

Through the corridors of our mind,
The past entangles, wraps and binds;
In every heartbeat, every sigh,
The specters of our lives float by.

By: Siena Quinn



He doesn't say my name out loud anymore, not even in his sleep, but it slips between his teeth when he thinks no one is listening. I know this because I am always there... in the corners of his mind where he folds away the parts of me he couldn't bury. He walks like he is escaping a ghost but does not know which corner I am in, poor boy, I am in all of them! I follow him in silence, not as a ghost with chains, but as a feeling and a flicker in the periphery. Somewhere, a raven caws like it knows his secret and remembers me. There has never been a moment he was truly alone—not since me!

He lives his life carefully now, deliberately. He changes the routes he walks, the coffeeshops he visits, as if trying to shake the scent of me from his days... but he still catches glimpses of me in windows and reflective glass, and he never looks long enough to be sure I'm not real. I haunt him not in shadows but in memory, in the soft echo of a laugh that sounds too much like mine, in Jeff Buckley's music, and in the way his fingers twitch when someone walks by wearing a jacket that looks like one I used to own.

He fell in love with someone, or at least, tried to. She wears her hair differently, speaks softly, and never asks questions about the way he stares into the distance as if waiting for something to take shape. But she doesn't know that he bought her perfume because it reminded him of me. She does not know that I was the one who led him there—with a whisper in the wind 29 and a shelf just out

of place... a little funny how accidents taste like fate. Poor boy... he told her he liked poetry because I used to read him poetry, and he didn't blink the whole time. That he always parks one street away from where I used to live and walks the rest of the way just to pass the building like it doesn't mean anything. He tries so hard to forget that it circles back and turns remembering into religion.

I am not dead. I am not gone. No. But I live beneath the skin of his routine like a fever that never truly breaks, I am in the candle that always flickers before it dies, the halfsecond pause in his voice before he says, "I am fine.". I'm in the songs that find him at the most inconvenient times, when hes feeling strong, when he thinks he's moved on! The universe has a cruel sense of humor, and it loves me.

Once, she caught him staring at his phone too long. He lied and said it was nothing. "It's just work". But the screen had gone black, and what he saw was his own reflection, and behind it, something he couldn't really name—me! Watching, waiting, and reminding! I don't need to appear to haunt. I only need to be remembered.

It's not that I want to ruin him. It's that he made me into something I could not live inside. He called me holy then dared to bury me like a sin... and so now I come back as a reckoning. I slip into the space between his ribs when he breathes too deeply, and I remind him what it means to long for someone who has become 30 a myth.

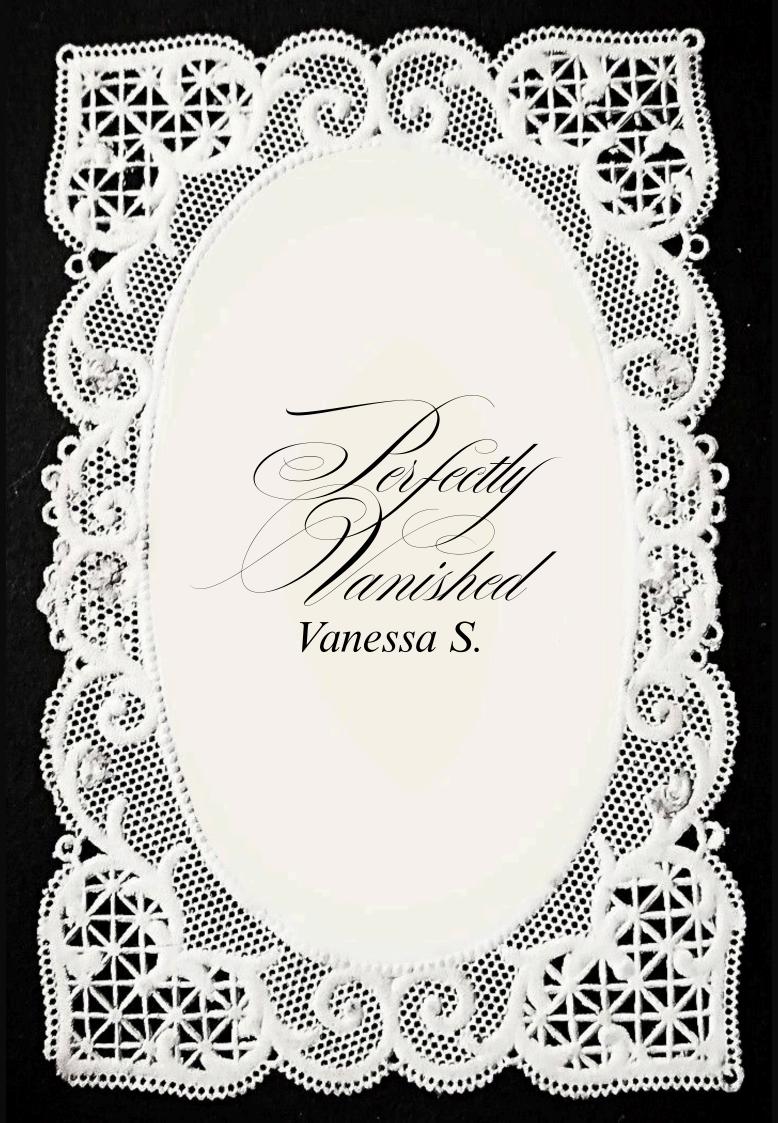
He tells himself I was never real, that he imagined the depth of it, and the gravity of me... I was too good to be real for him... but he still dreams of white dresses, of salt, of a voice that told him, "If you ever forget me, I'll become everything you can't ignore." He says that he saw me in a bookstore once. I was holding The Iliad and staring at the poetry shelf... he dropped the coffee in his hand. He called out and I turned, but I had no face. Poor boy, you can't give a face to what you abandoned!

He opens books now and finds notes that were never there. He hears my name in the mouths of strangers. On cold nights, he swears he hears footsteps down the hallway, and when he turns, theres only silence and the feeling that something left just before he looked.

I do not need to knock anymore, for the door is always unlocked for me and solely me. He reads this story and shifts uncomfortably in his seat. Wonders who told it. How I knew. But deep down, even he knows—he brought me here. And now, I am not leaving. I am not waiting. I never left at all. I haunt like hunger. I haunt like teeth in the dark. For I am the wind that knocks over his framed photos and always misses the one of us... I am the name the universe keeps murmuring into his soup, his groceries receipt, and every person's wrist.

"You're still mine." He hears my voice uttering it over and over in the walls and he'll 31 cry, but only a little, because he finally understands—some hauntings are gifts in disguise... some obsessions are not survival... some love is not supposed to die... and some girls never leave! They always, always, and always, come back!

He will think that all of this was just a coincidence... but beloved, you called me here... and now that I am back, I will not leave.



We never said her name out loud after that autumn. Sometimes one of us would start, half a syllable, then stop like it hurt the teeth. Her room stayed the same after three years—almost like it was stuck in time—window cracked, the closet door hanging just slightly open, and the thin line of light from the hallway stopped right at the shoes she never wore out.

You could still remember her, if you tried. On the margins of photos none of us could remember taking—just her wrist visible, the edge of a toothy smile, almost slightly always in motion. In the locked Notes app on Valentina's phone. In the scratched-up copy of Never Let Me Go that lays spine-up on the porch for weeks after she disappeared... its pages curled like fingers waiting to be held.

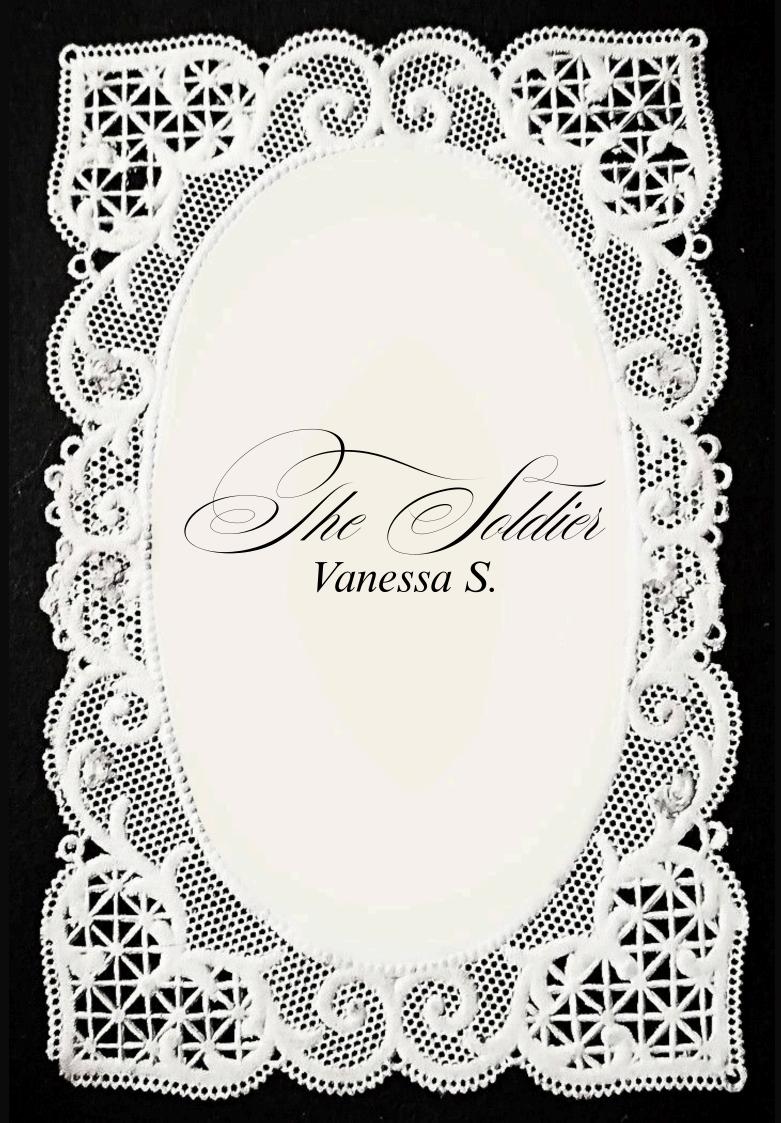
She had a way of sitting like she knew something. Not smarter—just older. Like she'd done the whole life thing already and wasn't sure if she'd bother again. Always in short skirts, hair pinned back like a librarian's, and chewing the same piece of gum for hours. One time she said she dreamt in Latin. Another time she swore she had a sister who lived inside her.

I saw her once, after. In town, near the riverbed where the reeds hissed like they had heard a secret. She was barefoot, had loose hair, and carried a fishbowl. She didn't look at me and I didn't call out. Sometimes we hear her laugh in old voice messages—thick and warm. With a single click at the end like she pressed stop before the punchline. Theres one photo we all have saved but no one talks about it. She is sitting on the roof, legs crossed, and one hand shading her eyes. She was looking at something far away.

She told me once she believed every person had a place in the world where they vanish perfectly. Where if they went missing, they'd never be found because they belonged to that emptiness.

She didn't say she was going there but maybe she didn't have to.

Sometimes when I walk home late, I swear shes just a few steps behind me, but I never turn around.



He was twenty-one and not quite a man, though war does not wait for men to finish growing. They buried him in a field outside Amiens, barely a name etched in the wood, and a cross so soft the rain took the letters before the worms could. His mother back in Nottingham never saw where he fell. They told her it was quick... that's how they lie to women who once wiped the noses of the dead.

He died in November... a week before the Armistice. The shell landed twenty feet to his left and that should've spared him, except it didn't. the shrapnel carved a smile into his neck. He didn't scream, but he gurgled, and Private Alden tried to pretend it was laughter. They dragged what they could back under the roots of a splintered tree and wrapped it in his coat. He had written a letter that morning. He'd scribbled a line about how the frost looked like lace. No one ever read that part and the envelope never left his breast pocket.

Years later, they built a house over that field. The foundations never settled right. Plaster peeled in strips like old bandages and the attic stayed cold even in summer. The boy had no name anymore, but he wandered just the same.

A woman moved in during the '60s. She played the violin in the front room. Sometimes when she played alone, the E string would snap. Once she heard knocking in the chimney, though no birds ever nested there. She told people she felt watched, not in a 35 terrifying way, but like

someone shy had taken residence in the walls. She placed a chair by the window and slowly whispered, "If you're lonely, sit with me.". But he didn't sit. He stood like he always did. Soldiers don't sit until they are dismissed.

He smelled of wet soil, gunpowder, and something slightly metallic... almost like rust on an old horseshoe. He never meant to frighten anyone. He just wanted to be seen. To be known. To be seventeen again, only in a world that did not ask for little boys like him who still flinched when their moms called them in a loud voice, to be exploded.

Sometimes when it rains, the wallpaper bleeds near the baseboards. The shape of a cross appears behind the bookshelf if the sun hits at 5:28 P.M., because that's exactly when he died. The wood there is softer than the rest. If you press your hand against it, it pulses faintly... almost like a soft heartbeat or something underneath trying to remember.

He walks at night. You might hear his boots if the wind dies down long enough. He opens the windows just a crack for some fresh air... not to escape, no, but so that something of him might drift out and be caught by someone who'll ask, "Who was he?".

You just did!

So now you have taken him in! You're reading this with your mouth slightly open, and your heart confused between sympathy and fear! You think it is only fiction. But tonight, when you lie in bed 36 and feel that coldness

on your ankle, you'll wonder if someone is standing at the end of it, quiet as mud, and unsure if it is safe to speak your name aloud!

You can say goodnight, if you like. He will wait for it.



By: Alexandria Dawn

"In the twilight's breath," she whispers,

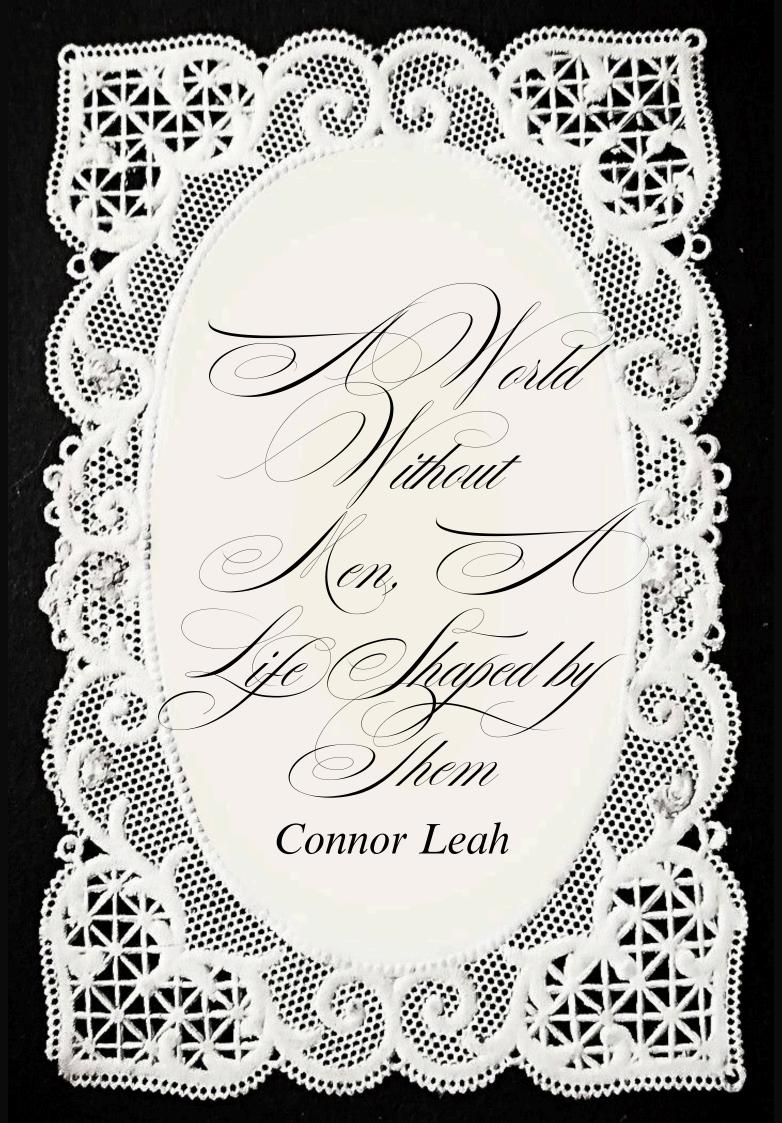
"can you feel them near?"

Veils of silence wrap around us,
while shadows sway, drawing close.

"Listen," he says, eyes sparkling,
"the wind carries old secrets,
murmurs wrapped in dusk's embrace,
echoes of stories waiting to be told."

"Time's a threadbare tapestry,"
she sighs, tracing its worn edges,
"each moment a flicker,
where past and present dance together."

"In this haunting, we linger,"
he murmurs, pulling her near,
"in the spaces between our breaths,
we find the echoes we both fear."



There are many works of literature in which the characters are often presented with a clear path to move forward and let go of past experiences. But throughout many pieces, they often chose to indulge in the things that hold them back the most. What about the human experience tether's us to such memories that only hinder our abilities to live life to our most accomplished self? Why does one let themselves be haunted by intangible ghosts of the past? In Jacqeline Harpman's post-apocalyptic book, I Who Have Never Known Men, 39 women and a young girl are held captive by their male captor in an underground cage. They eventually find freedom and emerge into a world that seemingly disappeared, where they are the only survivors. Although the women are physically freed from captivity, they are psychologically haunted by the influence of the unspoken men, leaving them unable to build a future untainted by the past.

In this post-apocalyptic world, the other 39 women have lingering images of the world that was taken from them. During their time in imprisonment, the men who watched them forbade physical touch, extended conversations, and never gave them any kind of attention. After they escape and the captors disappear, the men—and by implication the society that liberated them—still dominate the narrative. They are now free to go as they please and wander the lands, but they become so consumed with the ideals of the past and how they came to be prisoners. They 39 still abide by the concept

of no touching, and even struggle to communicate throughout the book. The men's oppressive power continues to define the women's boundaries, and haunts their choices in this new limitless world. All their conversations become jumbled stories of past recollections of what they can remember and details about their male captors. So what does this say about the women? Why can't they just get over the impressions their oppressors left now that they're gone? With their sense of self being long eroded, being affected for so long by such a haunting experience shows how their oppression can reshape identity, and how such haunting power can live within the people it damages. They have absorbed their imprisonment to such a deep level, that they continue to be haunted by their captors by becoming their own prison. The men's silence and absence become more haunting than their actual presence in the women's lives. In Jacqeline Harpmans book, I Who Have Never Known Men, the author suggests that physical liberation does not equal freedom from the mind, and that real freedom comes from learning to co-exist or even overcome the experiences that haunt us. Roy T. Bennet once said, "The past is a place of reference, not a residence." We as humans give up so much of our present, to a graveyard of unchanged events. What about what we have already lived through becomes so comforting? Is it the safety of knowing the past can not be changed?

Is it a shield for our fears to the unknowing future? The women in this story abide by the laws of what they know, in an attempt to control at least one aspect of their lives, even though it only holds them back. We as humans often find solitude in what we know, even if what we know is what harms us. It can be hard to break away from the past when who we are is shaped by those experiences. Both the good and bad are the foundation of our autonomy. The best we can do is learn to coexist with our past, and let it be a guide for our future, as opposed to a tether in our present.

You've made it to the end of Issue Three!

Aumting The Massative

Another thank you to all the contributors!

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