

## Haunted

I love my house, but it's haunted. Not by the dead but by the echoes of a life we once lived here, together, for a long time. It seems no amount of sageing or rearranging can exorcise them completely; they live in the shadows of what is now my home.

I think I have cleared all the energy. Photos and love letters, too painful to see, are safely tucked away for another day, far from today. I'm sure I have cleansed every possible space of reminders. I move chairs, thinking it will erase the words you said while I sat on them, the ones that cut through me. And then I feel pleased with myself, steady. Ok, I can do this, but then no. Words cling to the fabric as ubiquitously as our pets' fur. The beautiful ones, too, the ones I long to hear you say one more time.

A Gatorade bottle that I don't drink comes out from under the bed from when you had a side, even though I have vacuumed a dozen times since then. Change of season, and I find guitar picks in a zippered part of a purse I hadn't opened for a while. I always kept extras, and at gigs, more often than not, you would ask me for one. That always made me happy. Not anymore, but I still can't bring myself to throw them out. They stay in a drawer I don't need to open. The junk drawer I do need to open turns up a note from you with a heart, that you love me, and will attend to whatever the errand was after work. Now I do all the errands, and there are no more notes to find, or to leave for you. It's not just things; there's the sound of your voice in my head as something happens, and we say the same thing at the same time in the same way. Once, we shared a brain.

I did throw things out. I burned some, safely stored others, made rituals, did everything I could think of in an attempt to banish the ghosts of memory once and for all. But to no avail. I can't get rid of them, so now I have befriended some, avoid others, and even raise my voice to the most persistent among them. I sleep in the middle of the bed, so there are no more sides. Some hauntings are hidden in plain sight. Like the heart you drew with our initials on the bathroom mirror, which only revealed itself, like invisible writing, after the shower steamed the image into view.

The apparitions first appeared when I opened the door to your room. Empty. Your absence knocked the air out of me; it was impossible to breathe. I quickly closed the door, but not before they had dispersed into the rest of the house. Lurking, dormant, until they make their presence known.

When you first left, I told you living here without you was like death by a thousand cuts. My attempt to reclaim the situation and get me out of the crippling state of cognitive dissonance was to defiantly repurpose rooms. I started with yours. I filled it with my drums, the ones you bought me, music posters, and acoustic foam panels. Finally, there was a proper music studio. But without you to play in it. This didn't help me feel better. I went through the rest of the house, intentionally removing obvious reminders of everything we shared, in every room, which was everything, so not an easy feat. Impossible, in fact. I did my best, telling myself I couldn't make this awful thing easy, but I could try to make it less hard. I told myself a room is just a room. A meal is just a meal. Sunday is just a Sunday, no longer Happy Sunday as we used to say. The one day that can still bring me to my knees.

My home has always felt like a big hug to me. I remind myself that the beauty and arrangement of things comforts me, even if they are all reflections of experiences we shared together, a lifetime, now ago. More and

more often, I can live with some measure of happiness here, by myself. I can sit on the sofa again and not be reminded of your head and hair in my hands. I have gotten better at keeping the most gruesome ghouls at bay when I am awake. But the middle of the night is when the visitations occur. A warning from our cat announces their presence, the one who sleeps nightly where your head used to lie. Traces appear like trails of the cigarette smoke that accompanied you. That still does. But I don't.