

Abattoir

I can still hear my mother's screaming,
buried in the walls.

I am at my grandmother's house and
I don't know why.

I am planted small in my grandfather's big,
red armchair, under four of his guns
which hang on the wall.

Collectibles, he called them.

He's dead now.

I only met him once or twice,
but each time I walk to the kitchen I feel
my weight creak the same floorboards
he dragged my mother's body across.

I hurt in my bones when I see
my mother's breaking, more easily each time,
the pieces of a human carcass mangled
by his construction worker hands.

I run my fingertips along the calloused paint.

The walls are spotless.

There is blood everywhere.

This house is a time machine.

Sound drifts around corners dented
by a child's skull, through doors
she sat against, on the other side,
so the monsters couldn't catch her
— monster.

And somewhere in the incessant droning of
my grandmother's TV, the screaming:

"Help me, God help me."

My mother lost religion when she was fifteen.

I don't like it here.

In certain spots it is very cold,
like passing through a ghost.

I see a lot of things I don't think I'm supposed to,
terrible, terrible things.

Like the stairwell at the end of the hallway,
and a girl my age tumbling down.

I won't say who stood at the top,

his hands — again, his hands — still outstretched.

Beside the front door, at the bottom of these
god forsaken stairs, there is a caricature drawing
of my mother, tinted a lemon yellow,
quite nauseating against the raspberry walls,
paper like skin spotted from years of sun,
frame hung slightly slanted.
My grandmother never straightens it.
She wears glasses, but she isn't blind.

I see my face in my mother's.
We have the same profile, same sea foam green eyes.
I slept in her bed once,
ironed flat from emptiness,
but made up as it once was, teddy bear and all.
Across the room is the closet where she'd
shrink herself to become her shadow,
melt into the walls where the war couldn't find her.
With the door cracked open,
I swore I could see a face,
a face too much like my own.
Probably, it was just a dream.

Alzheimers:
a fancy word the doctors use when
someone pretends to forget so as to not
be blamed. Truth is so conveniently erased
when it's only sketched, lightly, as a drawing is.
But I know, oh I
know well what went on here.
That before his own death,
the day slipped my grandfather's mind when he
polished off one too many bottles,
held a gun to his baby's temple,
shoved metal against human,
almost pulled the trigger.

“People change,” my grandmother says,
but she can't look me in the eye when she says it.
“He did some things he shouldn't have done,
but he's not who he used to be.”

But I'm not stupid.
The need to hurt,
to leave a bruise that soils the skin forty
years later, it doesn't just evaporate.
Maybe he was broken too.
Broken people break people.
I should know that by now.
Why don't I know that?

My grandmother avoids knowledge at all costs.
Knowledge is truth; her's is unforgivable.
This she knows,
and her guilt bleeds dark and heavy like
her daughter's boxed ears onto a carpet
scrubbed tirelessly to hide the stain. Removal.
She calls herself a woman of God,
studies me when she prays;
I must remind her of someone,
someone she tried to remove,
but she refuses to remember whom.

I understand now.
This is an act of warped repentance,
though confess she does not.
Yes, I understand.
Since I can remember,
Grandmother loves to play games.
Grandmother loves to play games,
and I look too much like my mother.
Games become reality,
I become daughter,
a second chance to roll the dice.

But Granny,
dear Granny,
this isn't Candyland.

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