

DEAR FUTURE ME: THE *THIS OLD HOUSE* VERSION

This April house. Still the weeping cherry
holus-bolus with robins and blossoms, still
the leaded-glass window cracked neatly
from corner to corner. Lead paint layered
over with new oil-based eggshell, asbestos
tiles clothed with carpet. No posts and boulders
under this house, now a smooth foundation,
concrete and radiant floors heated and even
beneath our feet. The mingy hedges newly
planted. You'll wonder where the boulders went,
if they lie somewhere in the too-bright sun
longing for the damp dark of their home
for over a century, the chiromancy of worms
and moss, the opossum's sinewy company
and stink, children's voices falling through
the floorboard cracks along with dust
and doghair from the jumbled footsteps,
the dancing and chasing, the splinters
and Legos and rainbow hairbands, but
it doesn't matter anyway, the opossum
is long gone and so are the children.

WITCH HUNTS AND ORTHODONTIA

"In my desperation to be a good mother I talked myself into believing that all I was doing was giving my daughter a fair shot." -Felicity Huffman

Bridget Bishop was the first of nineteen people executed for witchcraft during the Salem witch trials in 1692.

I left my coffee at home so I make myself a cup
at the orthodontist's office with the Keurig machine,
plasticky magic they say would wrap twice around
the moon. Plastic-coated tongue, plastic swallows.
My daughter checks in for her appointment
with the automated touch screen and the technician
takes her away to tighten her braces while I wait next
to the magazine-splashed table, modern gossipy almanacs.

Bridget Bishop wafts in, no broom but a cloud of hay and beeswax,
teenage daughter in tow. Ignores the touch screen,
insists on talking to the receptionist. She has few teeth
left but was beautiful once. Men dreamt of her in their beds
and then blamed her for not leaving when her hair turned ashen
and her trim waist pooled beneath her corset. They hated
the way they couldn't stop thinking about her double-jointed
fingers. Her crime of aging and still throwing her head back
when she laughed.

Bridget picks up an old copy of *People*. Felicity Huffman
on the cover, headed for jail. What she did for her
children, what we all do. This morning when I asked
my daughter to empty the dishwasher she said
You're ruining my life. Right now all I see is her bottom half.
The technician tightening her braces hides her from view
but my daughter's sneakers twitch with each twist of the pliers.

Bridget's daughter climbs onto the chair next to hers
and they talk about what color rubber bands they'll choose
for their teeth. Green and black, yellow and orange.
Rainbow. White. Bridget Bishop was accused of witchcraft
because of her sin of color, the looped rainbow laces
of her bodice. Red and gold in a time of black. She traces
Felicity's white lace turtleneck with her finger,

touches her own grimy collar, pulls a horsehair strand from the ropeburn wound encircling her neck. Bruises burgeoning beneath her eyes. She and Felicity whisper to each other, slender capillary prayers weaving a web of commonality between them. Mother, wife, martyr, witch. Felicity closes her eyes and goes back to sleep. Bridget looks at her watch. She doesn't touch her seat, floats just above it. Only half an inch. Nothing furious or showy. Nothing anyone would notice if they weren't paying attention.

THE GHOSTS WERE CHILDREN ONCE

The ghosts grew up in a cheap house sliding
down the hill. Their ghost parents propped
it up with maple trees and cedar stumps.
Blessed gravel with ectoplasm and buried
it at the four corners. Twined it with blackberry
vines and morning glory.

Still the house slid.

When the ghosts went down the hill to the creek
they could forget about the slipping house.
They let tadpoles swim through their fingers
and watched legs unfurl behind them
like leaves on twigs. Watched red squirrels
turn grey, grey squirrels turn black. Snakes
fell through the tunnels of their own crisp skin.

When winter came, the creek scabbed over
with ice and everything slept- frogs, squirrels,
vines and snakes. Everything but the ghosts
and the house, creeping, creeping
toward the creek.

THE GHOSTS ARE FINDING THEMSELVES

Even if they've only done something once
the ghosts call it tradition. They light
the leftover cigarette butts our guests left in the jar
on the front steps and blow smoke at each other
until they're more smoke than ghost.

They wonder what they really are.
How can they be smoke and still themselves.

They watch our bodies change, cells
sloughing every seven years
into new selves that are still just us.

The ghosts break apart and roll under the bed
with the dust bunnies. The cat comes out
with ghosts in her whiskers and a puffed-up
tail. When I sweep underneath, all I find
are the overdue library books they hid
because they wanted to finish reading them.

They like my daughter's YA novels the best.
The Fault in Our Stars, The Age of Miracles.

The ghosts reassemble in the corners
behind doors and bookcases. Look at
each other's non-forms, dryer-lint grey and
curdled like cream, and talk about what
their bodies would look like if they had them.

THE GHOSTS ARE DIVORCING MY SISTER

As if the rope was never knotted by her hands,
no bowline or cleat or round-turn and two half-
hitches, as if they hadn't sailed up the coast
through fields of bioluminescence, cycled
through turns of sleep and wake at the dark
bow watching for rocks in the water.

As if the ghosts hadn't brought all their work
friends over for her prohibition-era cocktails just
like the ones the ghosts remembered, the
genuine article, bathtub gin, as if she hadn't
souring her wrist perfecting the lemon twist,
spent her savings filling the cabinet with
antique Libbey glasses, their perfect snappable stems.

As if she hadn't made excuses to their friends
for the ghosts' behavior, their jokey meanness
and the way they passed out on the lawn after
drinking and stayed there for all the neighbors
to see on the way to work in the morning,
ghosts like white fungus lumps
sprouting snores on the grass.

The ghosts took the fireplace brick by brick,
patted passing girls' asses with mortar-powdered
hands, buried old baby shoes in the ashes
for her to find later. The ghosts painted mustaches
on her dead mother's baby photos and said
What's the big deal, we're dead and we don't mind.

They scratched the table she varnished, slashed
the chairs she reupholstered, cut the brakes
on the car she fixed, tore down the curtains
she'd sewn, smashed the jars of tomatoes
she'd grown and canned.

The ghosts are divorcing my sister.
As if they could ever be more than mist and drift,
as if once, long ago, they believed they could stop

moving, be solid. As if she hadn't known from the first. Back on the ocean, when the water's push against the boat's bow sounded just exactly like someone off in the distance screaming.

BISON, REINTRODUCED

Black stones on green grass.
The bison herd below spreads
from the trucks that hauled them,

flow like water, shining alluvial gravel.
It could be a game board,
and the bison are polished mancala

stones, the fleet of white trucks
blank dominoes without any pips.
Truck husks, no life left in them—

even the drivers have left,
stepped out to watch
bison spread across grasses

they haven't bruised in 150 years.
Impossible to see from here how
people so small could even play the game,

let alone win. The important thing
is the big mammals are in it again.
A woolly faculty greening the badlands,

teaching us about restoration
through grazing, through dross.
Teaching us about heritage, about

mistakes and owning
up to them. Already, the drivers
can feel the ground growing

beneath them. A fertile resurgence
under hooves and teeth, under
their wheels as they leave.

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