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FAMILIAR HAUNTS

Tait Vigesaa

The house goes for under market value because the previous owner thinks it's haunted. She's right. I grow up there playing Super Nintendo in an attic that for some reason locks from the outside. We adopt a Chow named Zakita that my dad calls Cujo. I never see anything too weird. Just a ball that rolls uphill against the slant of the house. Or shadows caught out of the corner of my eye. Or my younger brother walking through the kitchen outside of our bedroom and the silverware flying open and hitting him in the side. We both run upstairs yelling. We say it's the ghosts. Dad says it's the air-conditioning.

My parents drop me and my brothers off at our grandmother's house on some weekends. We get ice cream at Softies and then she takes us to Barnes & Noble or the library. I find a bargain book with a black cover that's just a door with a wispy hand peeking around to open it. It's a book about urban legends and ghost stories. She won't buy it for me. I beg and plead and promise that I'm old enough to read it. A rite of passage building to the point I'll be able to look down the dark hallway to the room filled with antiques.

I'm sharing a bed with my younger brother but I can't sleep. Spring-heeled Jack is waiting outside the cracked open door, peeking in with the light. The Mothman is probably peering in from the window. I want to turn on the light but I keep picturing the illustration of the Jersey Devil waiting in the dark by the light switch. In the morning my grandmother takes the book away.

The drummer in my band has spirits. His family has done their homework (fucked around with a Ouija board). They find out there's three of them. There's the two good spirits who are little girls and they want to protect Colton's dad, Dale. Then there's one evil spirit. They call him The Tall Man. He's older and has a smell. He wants to hurt Dale. Some of the other guys laugh and are skeptical. I tell him I believe him. That I've felt cold things in the basement.

My first home away from my parents is one I'm renting with several friends. I lied about an aunt so I didn't have to stay in the dorms. Among my possessions is a human skull my great-grandfather found in a field. Robby asks to keep it in his room one night. He brings it to me at the kitchen table in the middle of the night. He's shaking his head and looking at it with wide eyes. I can't quite tell if he's awake or not.

Zach's girlfriend cheats on him so she's out and off the lease. Jeff

sleeps with my girlfriend so he gets kicked out too. Rooms move around, Zach takes the larger room and we look for someone to take Jeff's room. Sean moves in and he trashes the house over Christmas break. He goes home from college and Chris moves in. After two years the walls are caked with bad psychic energy, or at least that's what Meredith says.

I'm home for a little bit, staying with my parents. My mom's worse off after back surgery and dealing with her medication load for schizoaffective disorder. We're sitting on the back porch smoking cigarettes. The backyard is a mess of snow and unraked leaves, dirty wet piles of interseasonal procrastination. My mom turns to me and asks, "What did he say to you?" and I ask her who and she responds and says, "The man whispering in your ear." The little girl playing under the bed and the man who whispers used to scare me. Now they just make me worry.

There're some phone calls where you just know somehow about the whirlwind of fuck on the other end before you even answer. The earth-quivering moments where you lose the ability to stand for a minute. Your knees buckle. And you don't feel the sharp rocks in the gravel driveway cut holes in your jeans to slice at your legs. Everything will sound tiny and far away on the phone call. The sound of your father's voice will sound like someone else with a pitch and tone like you've never heard your entire life. Someone will drive you somewhere and you won't really remember where you were going. But you'll remember the pine trees in the valley north of your home and the way they looked blurring together through tears and motion while you leave yourself because you know it's the first time but won't be the last.