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Ghosts

John Wesley Horton

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GHOSTS

Someday I'll be like a prehistoric painter with a crooked finger who left handprints on a rock face; remembered for making a handicap into symbolism, threatened by oblivion every time someone exhales. This is why I'd rather leave you breathless than engage in conversation. This is how a spirit rattles chains. Old gods challenged the imagination, visiting Earth like swans, or else arriving like crepuscular rays, knowing dusk and dawn to be the truest times of day. Lucretius believed all things mattered, that even the least significant ideas were made up of atoms. Great Caesar's Ghost was just a film he sloughed off like dry skin. All your recollections belong to someone else. We know cicadas molt before they get their wings, leaving flightless memories clinging to the trees. Lobsters must feel the urge to come out of their shells. Maybe this is like our need to be re-born. Maybe this is why we say we're new every seven years. But what is it with our interest in scars? What about the impulse to apologize for what we can't erase? Captain Cook spied the sun through a state-of-the-art glass and never discovered the secrets of Venus. But then, his sailors returned from Polynesia with tattoos. Is it love, or the lack, that makes us mark each other? Aeneas bore his father's weight in front of every conquering Greek. A microscope confirms the wolf in every Border collie's DNA. There's a Trojan Horse for you. There's a little chimp in every Borderline personality. Sometimes we channel our ancestors in the dining room and wind up like F. Scott Fitzgerald in the garden eating dirt. An Aborigine touching up ancient art will tell you spirits move his hand. Like once I spoke to a man who said he was my dad on a Ouija board. Once I read Paul's letter to the Ephesians under the influence of psilocybin. Some ghosts are better left unread. Other ghosts are shadows of the most horrific things, like the girl who survived My Lai pretending to be a corpse. We can imagine so many angry ghosts. Maybe that's why

Epicurus wanted us to believe death was the end of our days. Maybe that's why Yeats used his wife like a rotary phone when he spoke with the dead. He imagined himself in death as a mechanical bird. His readers would be voices speaking his disembodied words. At dawn, I can't tell the difference between horizon and the sea. Lucretius understood the ocean rose to fill clouds with rain. It always rains in Gothic novels. English ghosts pass through the wainscoting. All the ghosts are haunting future ghosts. Farm hands who listened to voices telling them they'd be better off if they bought the farm are buried in the cemetery with the rest. If you drive at night you might catch a glimpse. There's a difference between windrows and the woods. There's a vine wrapping the wrought iron fence. If you appreciate someone's work, Lucretius said, it really is a part of them that's gone to your head.