

The Ghost in My Shower

I never believed in ghosts until I started showering with one. Sometimes she would wait for me in the shower or jump in once the water was warm. It became a habit of ours, one that I welcomed at first because it gave me a way to feel less alone. I'd smile back at the ghost when she'd wipe water from her eyes and laugh. But after a few weeks of showering with this ghost, I found myself lying in bed after the alarm and dreading getting inside of that shower and seeing her again. What was a comforting experience slowly transformed into a haunting. The ghost started going beyond the shower. We'd get dressed together and I'd sit down at the breakfast table, and she would be sitting next to me with a bowl of oatmeal, cross-legged and humming.

As I'm writing this, I realize that she sounds like a friendly ghost. Children might consider her to be more of an imaginary friend, but it wasn't the ghost that made me uneasy and kept me up at night as she slept next to me, it was my relationship with the ghost. She resembled my ex-girlfriend that I had lived with. Our daily routines were shared and my brain replaced her in my present life with the accumulation of memories. Ghostbusters would never come to visit my apartment with their magnetic field reading kits, but "ghost" is the only way I can describe the active existence of the woman who sits next to me on my sofa and laughs at the television.

When I stopped showering to avoid the ghost, she started waking up with me. I'd open my eyes, and she would face me with a smile that showed off her mouth guard. The appearance of the ghost was not the only experience of being haunted that was followed by our breakup. I had inherited her night-time jaw clenching that has put me in the dentist's office with cracked fillings. When my dentist asked me if I had been undergoing any additional stress than normal, I couldn't

tell him that I had a ghost who seemed incessant on spending more time with me every day. Then he asked me where my partner was. She used to accompany me to our dentist appointments. I could bring myself to tell him that she was right there, in the corner, reading a magazine.

She was controlling my life. I cried in the shower twice in a row and couldn't finish washing myself before the hot water ran out. I continued to shop for clothes that she would approve. Then there seemed to be a more direct control, a control that made me listen to music I hated and watch television shows I normally avoided, and even make dinners that were flavored towards her tastes (cheese and fat). These behaviors were carried over from the relationship as a way to compromise, although in the remaining months of our relationship, I found that her wants and needs trumped mine more often.

So I decided that I needed an exorcism. There was no priest, but there was fire. Photos, postcards, notes and letters; all set ablaze in a gasoline soaked box. Getting rid of the items that I had used to summon her ghost were difficult to compile with their end in mind, but I had the drive one night when I couldn't sleep, again, and needed some way to gain control. After I torched the box, the ghost slept with her back towards me. Then I grew my beard out (something she always disapproved of), found new cooking *vegetation* recipes, started backpacking and watching my kind of movies. I showered at night, I slept backwards, and I never ate a meal at the table. When I moved into a new apartment across town, I was nearly ghost-free.

At the end of a horror movie, there is sometimes a cliff-hanger meant to make way for either a sequel or to keep the audience a bit frightened when they leave the theater. My sequel with the ghost has been the haunting I still get from places that we loved together. Should I decide to return to Newport, Oregon or Honolulu, I'm sure to see her just as I had in Seattle dancing around the musical fountain outside of the Space Needle. I'm afraid of going to certain coffee shops and bars because I might bump into the real her. When I

finally bumped into her, we talked, and I realized that my ghost was no longer based on a person who exists now, but on a person who only exists in my memory. This realization doesn't stop the ghost from appearing to occasionally lather and shave her legs in my shower.

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If Only

If only we could
 be as kind as
 we are dangerous
 if only we could
 confront our doubts
 as persistently as we cling to blind belief
 If only our gods
 weren't as petty
 as we are
 If only someone would run for president
 that didn't want to be president
 If only you and I had one more day
 we could learn
 the same songs
 we could harmonize
 if only
 we could throw back our heads
 we could dance
 till the moon went down