

Mistake Me For Nothing

Poem By Elizabeth Albrecht

I am a friendly ghost. The floorboards squeak as I enter the house. The hinges whine as the door closes with a faint shudder. It's just loud enough to wake them, but not loud enough to keep them awake for long. They're not afraid of my footsteps. They're not afraid of the way I drag my mop and twirl my duster. There's only a tinge of annoyance when I displace the furniture to sweep under the couch. As long as everything returns to its place, a place I don't remember choosing, I'll continue to be a friendly ghost. To dwell in this house and not haunt it. I am a friendly ghost. I'll wave for your attention, but I won't shout. I won't utter a word about it if you don't want me to. It's just who I am; there's no point bringing it up, really. If you ask me about my day, I might tell you, but I worry you just won't understand. It's hard to explain the realm I'm in, this peculiar plane of existence. It's a world you've dipped your toes in, but have never stepped inside. Sometimes I imagine the rooms in this house covered in a thick layer of dust. I imagine dragging my feet through it like sand and kicking it up into the air before it falls to the floor like snow. I'd lay in it and let it fill my lungs like smoke. I'd lay in it so long I'd let it build over me like a warm woollen blanket. The dust will no longer be my failure, the thing that nags me on; it will be my undertaker who finally lets me rest. My back curls over as if I'm winding my way through a snail shell. I inch my body forward. I travel deeper and deeper until I'm squished against its center. This is where I start to clean. I scrub the walls of this shell until the light from the outside world becomes visible and there's room to work myself deeper. If I angle the sponge just right, I can get further into the corner. Am I stuck? It doesn't matter right now; there's too much space to spiral. Further, further, further along. Around and around I go. I am neither resting nor working in this trance I find myself in. I'm simply engulfed by the objects that cry, the objects that demand. I'm not folding to their needs but tending to them. I'm simply working to upkeep, uphold and repair. Beyond the bounds of this spiral is my dust fantasy, my darkest desire. I only dream about it when I'm walking through the house, restless and discreet. My dust palace is all I dream of as I sleepwalk, both day and night. I found a tooth below the bathroom sink this morning. I found a sock wedged between cushions. I came across a love letter in the trash can. I uncovered a dead mouse behind the fridge. There was a toothpick between the floorboards. There's a leak under the sink. I found a crack in your favourite mug. Your scarf has been missing

for five months, and you haven't even noticed. The carpet has been bleached by the sun. The doormat is fraying. You stained the dining room chair. I know the colour of your blood, sweat and tears. I've seen it on the bed linens. I built a fortress as a child. I destroyed it. It was mine. I demolished it with a wrecking ball before the dust had time to settle. As I bathe, I smell the chemicals, the spray, the liquid, fluid, build-up-disintegrating juice. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Chlorine. Optimal. Optimize. Optical. Streak-free. Build me up. Tear me down. Scub me dry. Rid me of my human. Make me good as new. Make me transparent. Mistake me for nothing. Look past me. Crash into me or just walk through. Pain. Pane. Permanent stain. I dealt with it. Don't worry. Did you ever find out where that goes? I go here, but you go there. I see things that you'll never see, and you know it. "That's not where that goes," I say. But you'll never figure it out. I go for you. It goes away. Do you know where that is? Away? You can stay asleep in your armchair. In my dreams that night, I return to my dust palace. I wipe it clean and watch the dust return to its surface like a scab growing over an open wound or mould. I don't demolish it. It's not really mine. Recipe book, graham cracker, seed oil, mildew, residue, remnants, remains, upon my shoulders, in my back and knees, growing on my head. They're not afraid, so I won't be either.