

Haunted

Last night
I dreamed my apartment was haunted.
I'm not very religious
and remembered this in my dream
but still I was praying,
my prayers like incantations
or refusals.
Me feeling like
I should call on a higher power
in case my "get away from me"
didn't matter.

Many times I have felt like
I wasn't loud enough
or maybe it was someone else
who didn't listen.

"Get away from me"
is always a prayer.
Words flung into the air
and you hope that it enacts
something tangible.
In your spirit
you ask the words themselves
to carry more than the weight of syllables
to have more force than what's suggested
by the volume of your voice
or the hands that press
but don't move
that fall feebly
when ignored.

It was as if
I wasn't there at all
yet there too much
my presence taken as invitation
wordless, believe me
I am so afraid you won't.

How could I have asked for it
when he was behind me
when we hadn't said two words
and no bit of not said
could ever be yes

And yet
my body was supple.
Would you believe that "supple"
is still the word
so many male poets use
to describe women they don't know?
and hardly represent
except in part or parts
I guess the Petrarchan blazon
never went out of style
I guess the patriarchal style
never went out.

Maybe that is why
I am the one who's haunted
though I am blameless.
You occupied the space
like you owned it
like I was cursed on entrance
you made it something I couldn't inhabit.
And I swear
it did get colder
like they say it does
your breath a threat on my neck
your hands wanting to possess me.

I don't even think
you know what you are
or what's happened
because ghosts rarely do.
I wanted to scream
but I swallowed my "get away"
and made it my own conviction
to outrun you.
I told no one
because how would I describe you?
Just another vague male presence
not exceptionally insidious
and what was I doing there
what did I expect
in the first place?

Maybe you are only ghost
to me
and besides that you are
living, breathing, human
only human
humans make mistakes

but I'm the one
who didn't get to be a person
I am the one dehumanized
I bet you don't even remember
or ever realized.

The thing about a haunting is
you never escape it.
Every horror movie has taught me
you might run
or think you've conquered
but in the end
there is a promise of a sequel
the emergence of an old, familiar phantom
the same spirit in another place or body
in infinite iterations.

The difference is
I am not re-living you,
not really.
It's not as if I wake up,
invaded all over again.
Though the memory is painful
that is all it is--
remembered.
The experience not repeated
but recalled.
So why do I
keep calling you up?
I wish I could
hang up

but none of us can.
So I will be phantom
I will be
bringing it up again and again
until they are all more tired of the event
than of me calling it
what I call it
what it is
the retrospective is
the answer to a prayer
me seeing myself and knowing
he should have, too.
I was there all along
and he's the one
who should have sensed it
he's the one without sense.

And if anyone should be haunted
it's him.