

Hanna Kang
Creative Writing

Words, unbidden

ghost story

He had moved into the cottage on a whim.

It was far away from what he'd known, in some secluded corner of a town that he knew nothing about. He wondered if he should've moved somewhere else, somewhere he'd be more inclined to meet others like himself, wanderers in straight lines searching for the end. But maybe some part of him was just searching for a change.

There was something strange in the way that the floors here sighed at night, in the way that the windows whispered vague words to him, in the way that the shadows reached for his empty hands.

But he would wake up in the morning, and the sun would be casting its weak light into the cottage, and the strange occurrences would have no more substance than the scattered dust in the air. *It's only the new place*, he told himself. *It won't take too long to get used to it, and then I'll be fine.*

Well. He was lonely here, however he thought about it.

As the month passed, the cottage began to surround him with the unfamiliar memories of his yearnings, making the floor sigh even longer, and the windows whisper even louder with distorted affection, the shadows now finding his hand in the dark and holding it closely. Sleep was not as easy with such darkness at his palms, tracing ice into his veins.

The ghost showed himself to him when he'd been going through a box of scrapbooks that had yet to be unpacked. It was a welcome distraction from the monotony of the afternoon, this almost desperate wish for the past to return, and he had noticed a slight shift in the air of the cottage and finally looked up.

It was not the ghost's presence that surprised him at first, but rather the appearance of such a textbook Halloween costume standing in his kitchen past midnight, rain boots dusted with droplets from some long lost storm of the past. He didn't think he was scared. Could anyone really be scared of a child's bed sheet ghost?

"Are you real?" he asked, staring into the circular holes that he supposed were their eyes, and seeing nothing beneath.

"yes. can't you see me?"

"I meant—are you a real ghost?"

"oh." The ghost looked down at their boots, raising an indistinct arm from beneath the blanket and waving it around. "i guess i am."

Maybe he hadn't gotten enough sleep the past month and he was conversing with himself. Or maybe this *was* a dream, and he was in bed right now, blankets settled around his body and not in the shape of this childhood reflection.

"So am I supposed to help you now?"

"with what?"

"Aren't you stuck here, and you want to free yourself from this world or something? Move on to the afterlife?"

"but this is where i live," they responded matter-of-factly, "why would i want to leave?"

To be honest, he had not thought about that. This ghost was unlike the haunting apparitions in movies he was familiar with, vowing revenge on people from their lives and howling with helplessness at the ones they'd encounter.

"do you *want* me to leave?" the ghost continued, drooping like a pouting child.

"No. It's okay." He smiled, and the end of the blanket perked up again.

"good."

It would certainly not be fair of him to send the ghost out of their own home, when *he* was technically the one who had imposed on their already claimed property. And from the looks of the phantom raindrops on their boots, the frayed ends of the sheet, they had been here for much longer than he could fathom. He looked at the ghost, who was now sitting on the counter with an ease that reminded him of his younger cousins, bouncing their legs with all the imagination and innocence of children who had not yet lost themselves to the world.

This could work out. He was lonely, after all. And this was their home.

"Do you have a name?"

"i'm just me." They paused, getting down from the counter, and he watched their scuffed boots meet the ground, just as solidly as his own shoes did. "do *you* have a name?"

Yeah.

But he was not sure that it mattered anymore, and surely not to the soul in front of him.

"I guess I'm just me as well."

"okay."

The ghost was in front of him now, the darkness beneath the cut out holes more noticeable than before. He looked into them, and there was still nothing, but there was also a familiarity that tethered itself into his dreams and dragged out the strangeness of nights before, with shadows that reached for his emptiness. The darkness inside the ghost was a scrawling of the soft embraces and longing sighs of the cottage, whispering their speckled affection as the stars hung low and sang of the moon.

"Were you the one who-"

They shrugged and sat next to him on the floor, legs splayed out in front of them.

"i don't know. i'm just here."

He nodded.

"why do you look sad?" they ask suddenly, and the words tug his thoughts away from their shared empty lives.

"I'm not sad."

"i think you are."

He doesn't want to be sad right now, not when he is sitting alone with a ghost and the ghost is only a child's blanket draped over a cloudy scribble of shadows and the ghost has boots that softly sparkle with lost rain and the ghost has been here since the beginning and the ghost is right next to him and they are together in this night that is lasting longer than any other night he can remember.

"don't be sad."

"I'm not sad."

He is sad and he is alone and the ghost is with him so he is not alone anymore, at least according to semantics, but they are both alone all the same.

"don't be sad," the ghost repeats, and they shift closer to him, blanket touching his side.

The blanket is cold. It is also soft.

"don't be sad," the ghost says again, and this time *he* is the one who shifts closer, until the smaller corporeal figure leans comfortably into his arm and now they are sitting together for real, shadows meshing into each other until they are not alone anymore.

He feels like he is home.

"I'm not sad." This is the truth. He closes his eyes and the ghost does not move.

"okay."

the kind end

The beach at night is silent as death. The kind of death that had screamed out names and held out shaking arms before falling with an all-too-abrupt sense of finality. *Enough!* the beach seems to say, and Quin silently agrees. They like to think that even if the dark waves churn angrier than before, fury laid bare at all of the passive eyes, that the world perhaps still has a fleeting chance of survival. But right now, the sand is cold glass under their bare feet, and the moon is shattered and the stars are just broken fragments that are kicked carelessly to the side, and the wishes that were pinned upon them lie forgotten and unwanted, and no one watches them fall with wonder anymore, no one rushes to them and tries to fix the remnants, and Quin remembers this simple fact: no one gives a shit.

The figure next to them turns. "Are you okay?"

And despite the coming end of the earth, the cold deaths of everyone they have loved, Quin nods.

Because even as the world is ending, they can stand here in this simple moment with fingers intertwined in the sort of gentle remembrance that whispers to them unbidden, the memories of the empty wishes that surround them.

We'll be okay.

The sky is bloody. The moon is slowly running out of stars to cry. The streets glint with broken glass. The air grows colder and colder, and amidst the dread Quin finds it in them to think that it'll be okay. In another life, in a past memory, they might have continued to stop caring. But here, there is love in their thoughts and there is love in their intertwined fingers, and there is love in their heart and in their eyes and in their hopes.

Here, they can hold hands and stare into the abyss that greets them. They can think about the people they have lost, and they can think about the people they will meet too soon. They can stand at the edge of the world and scream words that they didn't get to say, and hear the ghosts echo them back. They can do all they want, they can fight and sing and light fires and cry themselves ragged and run, keep running, and do whatever it was that they couldn't before, because it didn't matter anymore and the consequences had been damned so long ago that they might as well have never existed. Quin had been dreaming of this, this instant and this coldness and this love, for as long as they can remember. They saw the stars lying abandoned at

their feet. They saw the moon, bloodied in one last attempt to be listened to, shattered and stagnant in the crimson sky.

They had dreamed of cold death, but sometimes they forgot that they had dreamed of warm hands too. Warmth that started from somewhere inside, gentle, ever gentle, and the warmth said *it's okay* and it said *nothing will change* and it said *breathe*.

No one gives a shit. It is a simple fact. No one gives a shit, and the world is ending and people were desperate to save it, but no one gave a shit before, and now it's too late to start, and no one gives a shit anymore. And yet-

There had been moments that mattered, and there had been love in the way that some had started a growing pile of lost children's toys, and there had been love in the way that glowsticks looped around the rungs of ladders, and there had been love in the way that stickers now disrupt the broken landscape.

It's entirely possible that Quin might be a little bit drunk. It's possible that the warmth they feel right now isn't from the love of others, but rather from alcohol. They feel somewhat blurred around the edges, and does it really matter anymore? The warmth is as real as the dark waves and the star remnants and the hand they hold. When they had dreamed of the end, they thought it might be burning. Fiery and hot and hell on earth and people angry with themselves and each other and blood on the ground and blood in wounded hearts. Perhaps, in a way, that would have been better than this. At least it would have been over quicker.

The cold death that awaits everyone is longer, and it brings bitterness in a dragged out sort of depression, in a winter that grows colder and doesn't seem to stop. And no one gives a shit, but there are times when someone will turn to another and offer them a glowstick. A passing stranger will leave behind stickers to brighten up the destruction. Quin will find the ragged remains of a dusty stuffed bear and add it to the pile in the middle of the city.

The world is ending, and they are cold. They want to lie down and let snow cover them until they can't feel their nose. They want to hold hands like this for a long time. They want to keep finding stuffed bears and adding them to the pile, they want to leave behind glowsticks on ladder rungs and stickers on steel beams. They want to live the rest of their short life in slow-moving warmth, in hugs around a fading fire, in the safe arms of people they love.

The world is ending. and Quin stands on the beach slightly warm all over and they think that if they were to live again, they would choose to stand here every time.

don't forget

silent. watching. swathed in shadows and swirling snow, and the faintest of a blue mist.

they came when winter arrived with darkness clinging tightly to the seams of frost and wind, and stayed until the sun decided to remain once more.
then, as silent as they came, they left yet again.

“who are they?”

“they have been watching over us in the winter for as long as we could remember, my child, and we have become grateful for the protections they bring.”

“okay.”

the silent guardian would come on the darkest day, and the people would sense that something had appeared out of the gloom, and they would step outside and notice the vaguely translucent figure, stoic though the biting chill was coursing through them. with a sigh, the people would go back into the inviting warmth of their homes, relaxed and with a renewed optimism that someone would be there again to watch over the village when the shadows grew ever longer.

snow would billow around them, and the figure would have the smallest of smiles before nodding slowly and closing their eyes. and the snow would swirl around again, but this time, not as frantic, and more controlled, for the still and calming silence of the guardian would allow the cold to settle and be at peace.

and the pale blue mist would become more pronounced, until they were surrounded by a cloud of glimmering ice, and the village was calmer and safer from this crystalline beauty.

a child would ever so often wander towards the waiting figure, struggling to get through the snowy mist, curious to see who the guardian was, only to wake up at the door to their homes with a murky memory of shadowed and amused eyes, and the glow of an icy flame.

“but won't they get cold? why don't they ask if they can come stay with us? can't they talk?”

“that is a part of their magic, and it works in mystical and strange ways. i do not believe that they have ever spoken a word, but whether that is by choice or not, it makes no difference to us.”

“oh. alright.”

cold. yes, they were always cold, but they had come to an understanding with the snow that would loop around them, and was not at all bothered.

and silent, yes they were silent, and they felt no need to speak when they would be content as they were. they did not remember if they had spoken in a previous life, in a previous time, in a previous memory, but that was the past, and the world is made up of dreams and hopes, and no longer of echoes.

when the sun had made up its mind to come back again, the people would once more notice a shift in the winds and in their hearts, and would walk outside, barely witnessing the cloaked and mysterious guardian fade away, with only a slight blue cloud and a swirl of snow left behind. and the guardian would feel at ease with the knowledge that they had fulfilled their promise for yet another year, and would continue to do so for however long they had left.

Untitled

You are standing at an edge.

Maybe it's the edge of a cliff.

You stand there, and you can see the vast expanse of churning waves below and all around you forever and extending into an unknown mist that your vision cannot breach. You shift forwards a little, seeing the loosened rocks tumble down into the shifting ocean, and as you watch them fall, you can feel your own body pulled towards the depths, called by voices that perhaps only exist in your head. But as you peer closer, you think that maybe there *is* someone down there who wants you. A glimpse of seaweed, or is it hair? Your body wants to join the turmoil and you think about how easy it would be to close your eyes and let yourself fall into the ocean and melt into such a comforting mess. The waves make you feel as insignificant as the rocks; you know that they could easily cast you aside without any regret whatsoever. You would be softer, after that. The waves would smooth out the ridges and you think that you would feel lighter. Such carelessness almost makes you laugh.

Maybe it's just the edge of a roof.

You climbed up there a while ago, and now it is past midnight. You wonder why you came up here in the first place. You wonder if you had wanted to breathe in the winter air, the kind that sends ice into every bone and awakens your senses to something beyond your control. From your perch you can see who is still awake at this hour, faint light shining from behind closed curtains, people who have homework to complete or video games to play or books to finish. You could be one of them, you *want* to be one of them. There is nothing holding you back from climbing back into the house and turning on your bedroom light and locking out the eyes of someone else who could be watching you. There is nothing holding you back from this, but you do not move. You enjoy the fragile and cold silence that has been woven into the world tonight, and you are happy here. You are content.

Or maybe it's the edge of the universe.

You are alone, and you do not look back, for fear of someone coming to save you. You do not want to be saved. Ahead of you are the stars, an infinite void with glimmering pinpricks of light that stare back at you with equally curious eyes. You can see them dance together, intertwined in an endless waltz of darkness, and you hold out a tentative hand, wondering if you can join them despite your earthly tethers. Beyond the stars is the moon, watching over its children with a gentle gaze, and you yearn to be under its protection as well. This place makes you feel like you're with your mother again, wrapped up in a sheltered warmth that you haven't felt since you were much younger. Your hand is still held out, and although no one takes it, you know that

you are home. The skies that you saw in the past seem tragically dim now, and you have never felt this calm. You do not dare to close your eyes, and this glorious threshold between you and the heavens offers your infinitesimal existence a new beginning.

Maybe it's the edge of your own soul.

You have left behind your family and your dreams, and everything else that has made you human to get to this very point. You aren't sure if it was all worth it. This place, your own soul — it frightens you, but it also reaches out. It wants you to tell it that things will be okay. Your emotions swirl around you in a chaos of colors that reminds you of something you cannot remember anymore. The colors are stronger now, your soul is desperate to escape but you cannot let that happen. You have come this far already, so you are determined to stay here. Your soul only wants to surround you with emotions that you thought you'd forgotten, with passions that you've long given up on; it only wants to help you. Let it help you. You are lost within yourself. This place is filled with whispers and you are not alone. You think that you should just let yourself be covered. That would be lovely.

Maybe it's simply the edge of a lifetime.

You've lived long enough. So you've walked yourself towards this edge and you stand and wait for something to happen. Who knows what happens at the end? You want to sit, but you are scared that you may miss something if you do. Instead, you find your thoughts wandering a path that you haven't let them go before. But now is a good time, and you let them explore. You think about your life. Your memories are fleeting, faint lullabies being hummed in the background and encasing you in glowing affection. You didn't think that the edge of your life would hold you with such kindness, and you feel like you aren't here anymore, but in your childhood bedroom, blankets and pillows at your reach and drifting off to sleep with tenderness in your hands.

You're at an edge. You don't know what kind of edge it is, but you're here regardless. This is okay, you think. You have all the time in the world to stand there and exist for however long it takes to realize where you are. You wonder if you will be disappointed, but you shake your head. No. You don't think that you'll be disappointed at the truth.

It's cold, wherever you are. And you are tired. Your head feels heavy and your eyes are closing. Don't sleep yet! You're not ready to sleep, not until you figure this out.

But you also don't think that this matters much, at least not right now. After all, aren't you happy to be here? Think about it.

You do.

You breathe in deeply, and you ponder your own happiness.

And you feel the salt of ocean air caressing your shivering face, and you see the distant lights still bright with unfinished work, and you hear the stars waltz and laugh above you, and your soul is warm with whispered colors, and your life is ending, it is ending, but you do not feel like ending. You hold on to whatever is still holding you to the ground, and you still wonder if it matters.

It does not.

You shock yourself a little with your own brazen words, but you don't take it back. No, you're right.

You did not exist when you were at the cliff, or on the rooftop, or anywhere else you were prior to this very moment in time, here, at this undiscovered and hazy edge of *something*, you did not exist. How could it have mattered if you were happy in oblivion?

The unknown does not frighten you, and you are still encased in such tranquility that the edge starts to fade, until it meets the rest of your musings. You are good, here. Stay.

You can stay here.

Blanket of soul

There is an abandoned cabin in the woods. It sits there, pleasantly humming its lonely life away, as the trees continue to grow and watch over that rotting corpse of a home. Within the creaking doors, mere moments away from falling off their unsteady hinges, a forgotten blanket waits.

still soft.
still warm.

still loved.

Someone knitted that blanket. Someone lived in this cozy abode, rocking back and forth into late hours of the night, long after the sun had lazily fallen asleep, after the stars had slowly opened their eyes and let the infinite possibilities and wonders of such an endless night come spiraling towards the earth.

They might have cried while knitting, with tears pouring their way into the yarn, anguish weaving a cutting path into the serenity.

Or they might have smiled, content to be as they were, in this ever glowing place surrounded by sunlight streaming through the windows, illuminating the fragrant dust patiently floating around them.

As they knitted, perhaps they thought of their past.

It's been a long while since they've seen their family, and they miss their parents, their brothers and sisters, their cousins and aunts and uncles, everyone who had shown them any affection at all, whether it be a passing smile, or a desperate and tightly clutched hand, or a whispered *stay with me* by the bedside of someone terrified to sleep once more.

They think of their regrets, no longer bleeding and raw and choking them with silence, making them gasp with the pain of salt water trapped inside their lungs as they drown deeper into a past they thought they had escaped.

They think of their triumphs, the ecstatic glory no longer making their heart beat faster with pride and carrying that sparking fizziness into eager veins, setting their mind ablaze with an entire arch of flames that surely must have reached the cosmos.

They knit their story into this blanket, their sorrows and joys, their failures and victories, past lovers and past enemies, lost dreams and reluctant hopes, everything and nothing at all.

Yet.

no one will notice when their vision begins to blur, and the colors and lights grow dimmer.
no one will notice when their thoughts begin to scatter, and then fade for good.
no one will notice when their hands finally stop shaking, and grow still.
no one will notice when the yarn finally drops, reunited with the ground at last.

no one will notice their departure.

But the blanket will stay, and it will thrive amongst the memories that were woven into it, the ones that still twist playfully through the empty rooms and out the broken windows, up higher and higher and higher, past the treetops and far past the clouds, back to their gentle and quietly tender heaven.

The end.

The sky is a backdrop of bloody smears painted across an aching horizon, and Hal watches it fall apart with weary eyes, sitting on this silent sidewalk and counting down the minutes of their life. They know that the rain will come soon, final tears cast upon a world that was too brittle to contain the fragmented realities of a broken people.

Someone calls Hal's name in the distance, and they do not turn towards the source. They have found that at this moment in time, they simply do not care for words anymore. There's been enough waste already.

The sun is dead. And the moon is asleep, and the stars have fallen. What a fitting place to die.

They remember how the entire world was in a rush, people clambering over each other to reach the heavens first, eager to be the one to plunder the sun's fire. But the sun was quickly left hollowed and cold, and now look at the telltale gods: beneath the ground and burning in the very fire they had wanted to hoard. And the moon had refused to rise for the people who had torn apart its lover, instead mourning in the stars that began to rain down in tears of darkened glass that misted over the ground and turned the world gray.

There isn't any rush now.

The entire world is at a standstill; everyone else has fallen stagnant on the steady earth. Silent and empty, porcelain emotions for porcelain bodies treading slowly and heavily upon the dead. And Hal is alone with only their memories for company, for even they could not escape the simple tragedy of giving up.

As still as the earth is, they are running out of time. They know this. But in the absence of a dawn, they do not feel that there is much to look forward to anymore.

Hal wonders if the sun could forgive them for failing it.

Maybe in another galaxy, another timeline, they could have saved themselves at the very least. Or maybe they were just destined to perish along with the rest.

They long for a good timeline though, a good ending, the one where the sun still shone in the day and the moon wasn't so angry, where they could be with their loved ones forever and hold them close to their heart with all of the strength they could muster. Where has that strength gone? This wasn't fair. Hal looks up at the gashes left behind by the stars, and wishes that it wasn't the end.

But they can look upwards all they want. There will be no escape from the inevitable sorrow. So this timeline was broken, maybe. It was broken but it was still supposed to be theirs to live in,

hoping and dreaming and running into eternity with freedom on their back and wings to carry them forward. When they die, nothing will change. It'll just be the end of a system of memories intertwined with ones already buried.

The sky continues to bleed, and they do not want to watch it anymore, so they look down, and they close their eyes.

Their name is called again, cutting through the wind and Hal does not want this, not now. Hasn't there been enough wasted time? Can't the voice wait until they meet again as ghosts? Surely it won't be long. It shouldn't be long now.

Hal does not want to spend these last moments listening to echoes. They want to sit here on this sidewalk and listen to the grand nothing at the edge of the universe beyond the bleeding sky, where souls hum to themselves and curiously ponder the lives they had led in a dreaming world that became their downfall.

Hal thinks that perhaps the moon had the right idea. Mourn the end of a lifetime, and rage blindly in the background until falling asleep.

Oh, how they'd love to sleep. They are weary of it all.

The voice calls for them one more time, imploring them to listen, but Hal is done here. They are not coming back, and they are done here. They are done here. They are done here.

The rain falls at last, and it is cold on their skin and hauntingly gentle, a sweet lulling sensation that curls the remaining heat away from their body and back into the atmosphere. Hal does not feel the hands pulling them close, nor the voice that desperately whispers their name. They let go, and they are gone.

Goodbye, now. I'll miss you.