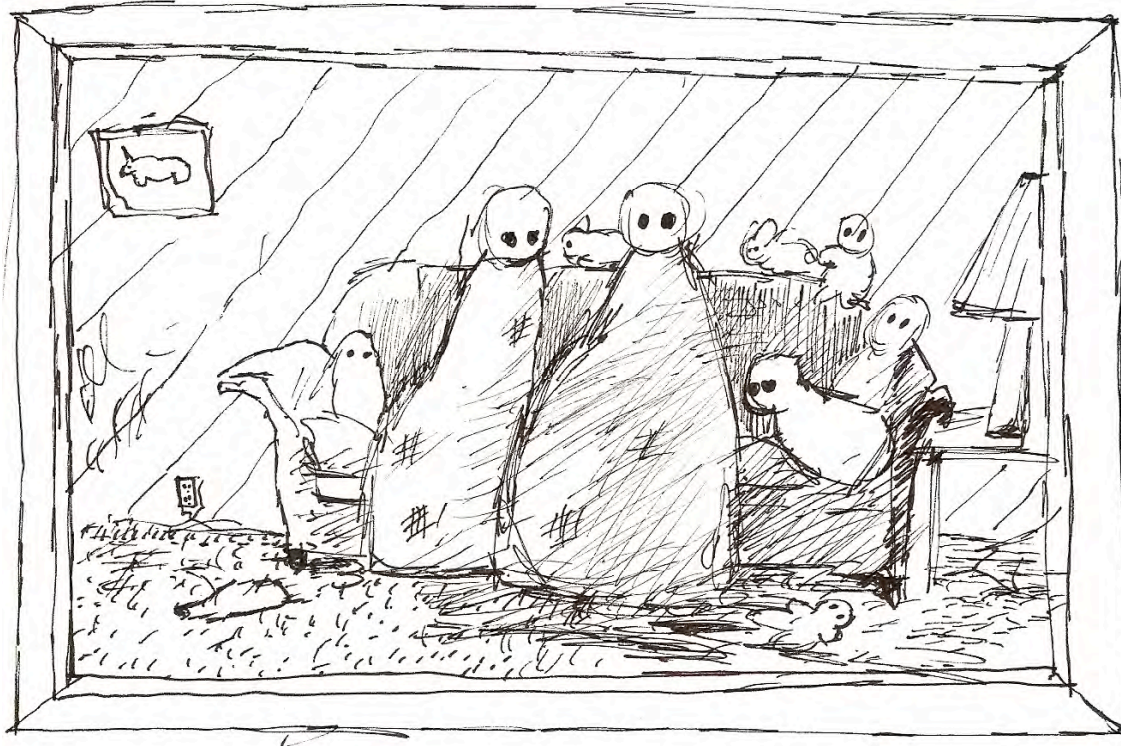


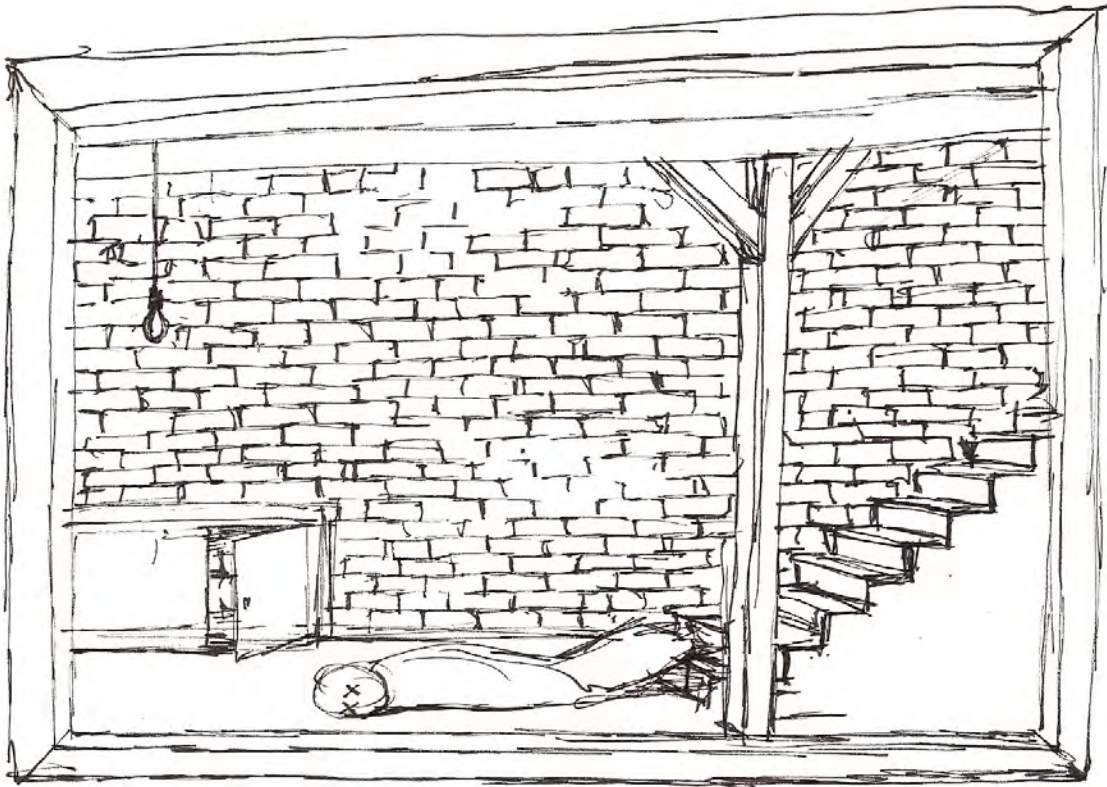
Ghosty



i. Ghosty's Last Missive

The ending began with the Christmas card I got from you, your wife, and your dog two years ago. You were almost a ghosty. Your shell was shrinking. Your wife was wide and short. You were wearing a black sweat suit and a Santa hat. Your couch covered with stuffed animals. There was a ghost coming into the picture from the left. The kind of black smudge that paranormal TV shows use as evidence. I got your message. The darkness creeping in and my last chance.

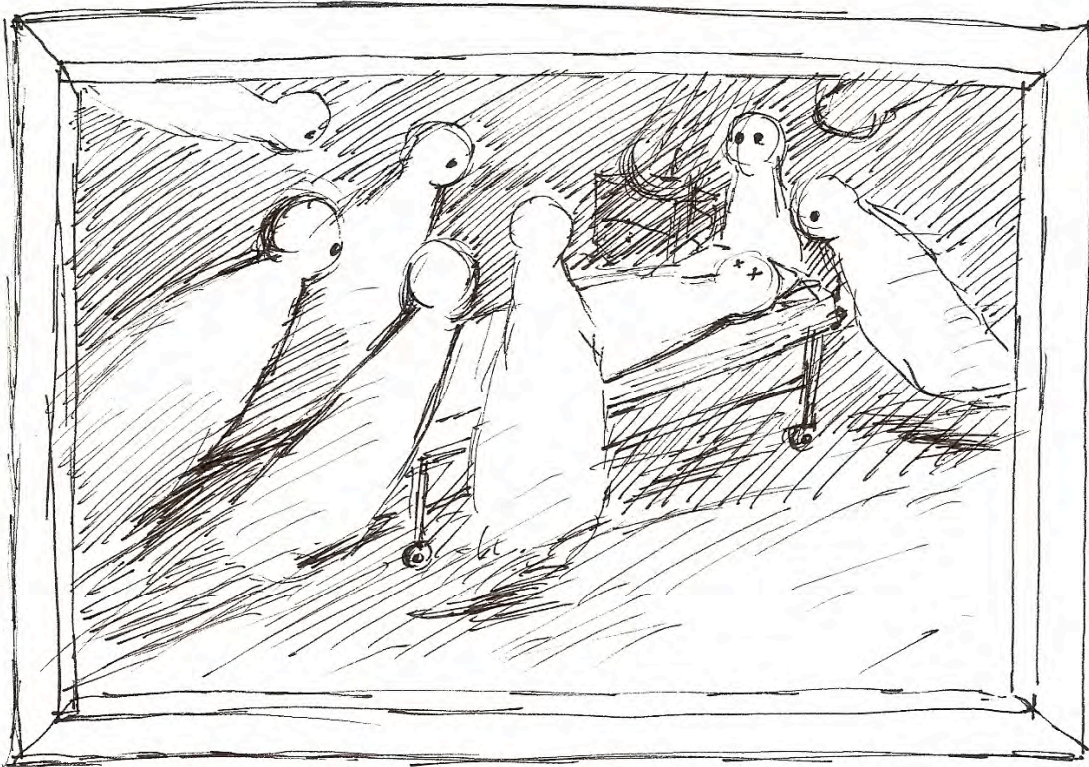
I visited you that Christmas. You cried. You invited me back last Christmas. I did not come. Your wife invited me to watch you die in February. I came.



ii. How Ghosty Died

You fell down a flight of steps. Your heart gave out. You lay there dead at the bottom of the steps until a medic brought you back. Then, Ghosty, later in the hospital, I saw the blood in your ear, and I wanted to lick it out like a cat. My cat has a chemical burn under his ear that is always rough. Now when I rub him there, Ghosty, I think of you. Your body was burned. That caked blood on your face was burned.

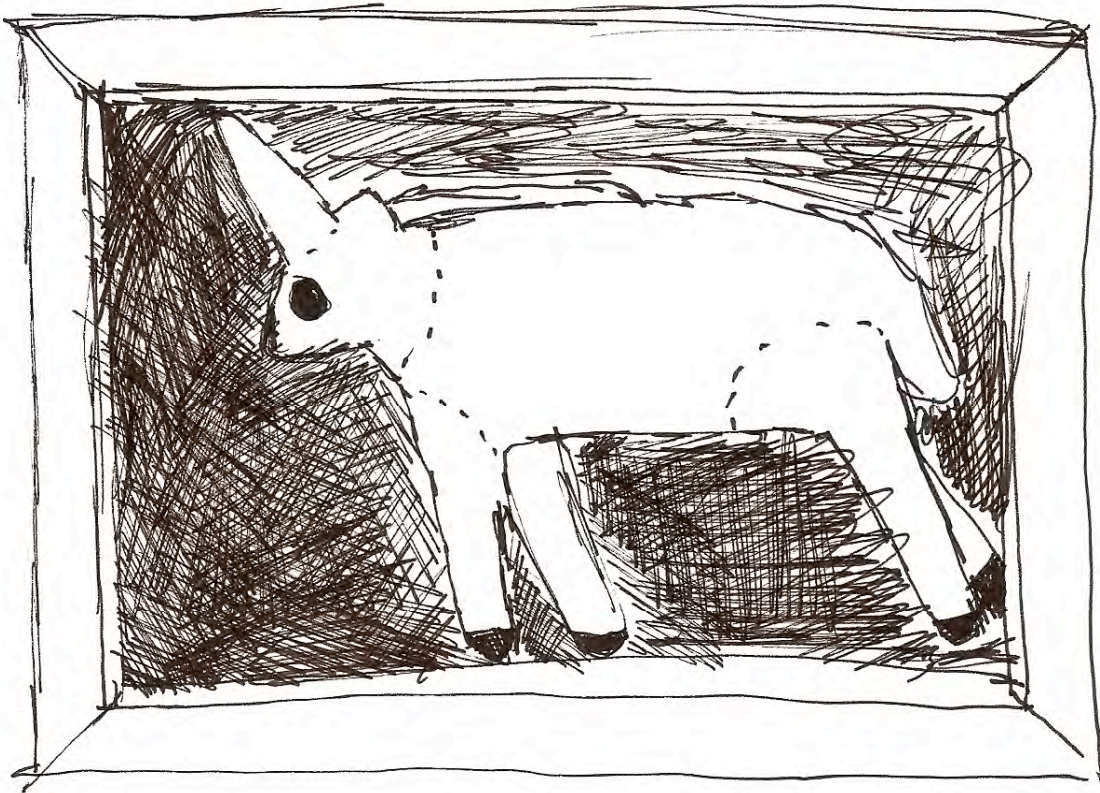
Your wife gave me the ring you wore every day with the inscription, *Who Dares Wins*. "He wanted you to have this," she said. The words are rubbed almost illegible. I never saw your thumb rubbing over *Who* rubbing over *Dares* rubbing over *Wins*. I watched the nurse use hand lotion to pull it off your dead finger. She slipped it onto mine, still covered in lotion. I didn't take it off or wash it for days. I don't rub it, but I read it, wearing *Who Dares* down with my eyes.



iii. **When Ghosty Died**

When I killed you, I wasn't there, but I tried to be. My alive sister was there. My dead sister hovered above you, always willing to wait for you. Your friends were at the foot of your bed. They were ugly, pock-marked, swollen, badly-groomed, ignorant, unkempt. Ghosty, were you ever proud of me—your well-educated, nigger-loving, dyke daughter?

Your wife was by your head with doe terror. She kept repeating, "What am I going to do without him?" I never called you after you got married to tell you that your wife and mine had the same name.



iv. A Present for Ghosty's Wife

They called you *Hero*, because you used to be a cop. They called you, *Good Husband*, because you didn't beat your wife. They called you *Good Friend*, because you told off-color jokes.

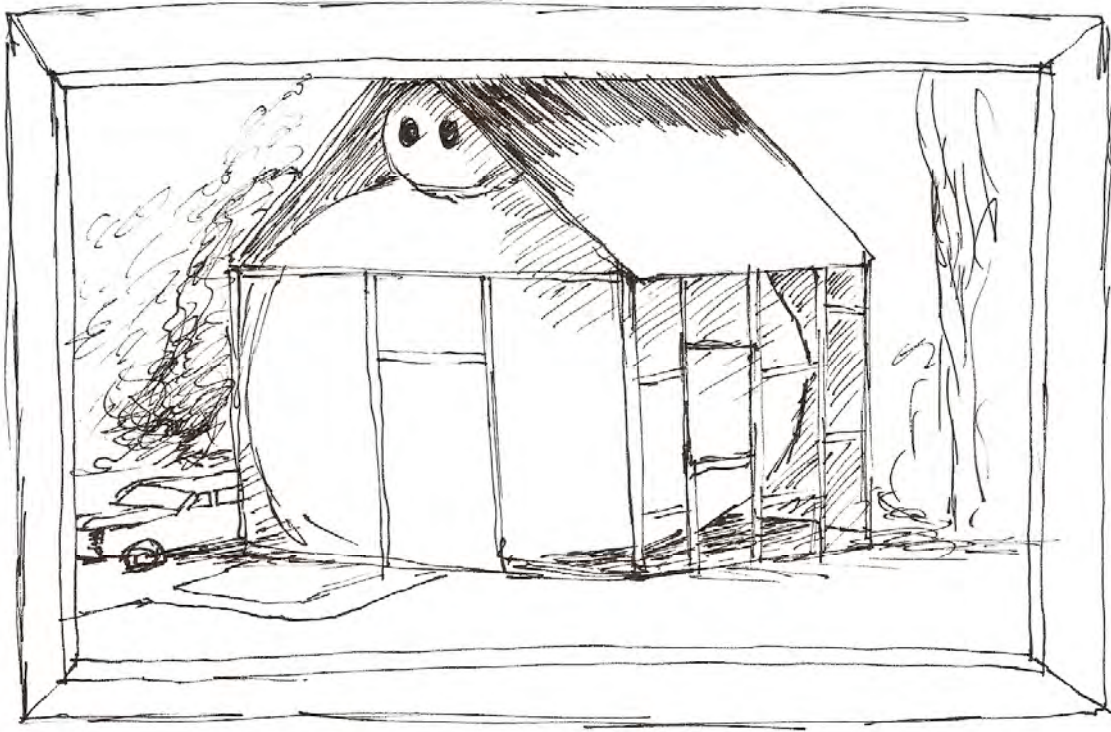
Your wife, Ghosty, is an idiot. When you died, I couldn't buy her flowers because you did. Once in eight years of marriage. Carnations and baby's breath in a throw-away glass vase. Your wife photographed it. She kept it on her kitchen table with the ribbon still attached after six years. She filled it with fake sunflowers.

When you died, I bought her a purple, sparkled, winged, stuffed unicorn from the Price Chopper, where she introduced me to strangers as her daughter. Once when I was 16, you took me to brunch at West Point. You introduced me as your daughter to strangers. I have only met your wife three times. She clutched the unicorn to her chest and cried. She thanked her daughter for the present.

Your wife called me, Ghosty, and asked me for five hundred dollars to pick up your ashes. She wants to put you on top of the TV. I did not give her the money.

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v. Ghosty Filled up the House

This is how I remember you. While you were dying your wife said, "He was a cop in New York City." The assistant hospital chaplain said, "Wow. He is a hero." She stared at my sister and me expecting another example of a life well-lived. I could not come up with anything. My sister said, "He took up a lot of space."

Everyone in the ICU (your wife, your friends, your preacher, the chaplain) nodded as if this was a normal thing to say. A friend said, "Yes, he did have a big personality." I looked at your shrunken dying body. You used to be a big man with broad shoulders. You filled in the cracks of every love relationship my sister and I have ever had. Your drunken voice on my answering machine last Father's Day got louder and louder. You got bigger and bigger in my heart until you popped it when I was ten. When I was a kid you were larger than life, sometimes a legend. But, Ghosty, you were never my hero.

I am still waiting for something to say to the chaplain. My unspoken answer fills up my mouth. It gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger.