

A Prayer for the Haunting

L.S. Moyer

(First sentence was provided by NPR 3-minute story contest)

Some people swore that the house was haunted.

But then some people swear that President Obama is a Muslim, that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and that Jesus was the son of God sent to forgive our sins.

Everything is haunted. The earth, the sky, the wind, the rain. You are haunted. Like me. By the families that deliver us and the people we meet. By the movies we watch and the books we read. By the events and media and imaginations that crash into our lives. Today is September 11th and the world is haunted. I am haunted by a woman I have never met, a woman at the center of a story that defies belief.

In her house high in the forest facing the sea, the house that people swore was haunted, she appeared to me. *The story hides the truth like the fairy stories of the changelings.* I was eleven when she spoke to me. Too young to understand the complexities of storytelling, but not too young to doubt. I knew how babies were made, and they weren't made by a visitation from God. But when I spoke my mind, the man with the white hair and perfectly manicured fingernails delivered a lecture on faith and reason. It would have been better if he had told another story.

After that, nothing was the same. The haunting. The searching. The libraries. The books. The seminars. The lectures. The peeling away of the stories. *It is the job of the storyteller not to impose the truth but to lead us to the truth.* Never enough. The scholars. The dissertations. And the stories, the stories, the stories. Leda and the Swan. Danae and the Golden Rain. Europa and the Bull. The Beautiful Io. The Annunciation. *Reason and truth have many disguises, some people call it faith others call it myth.*

It wasn't until I read "A Prayer for Owen Meany" that her words made sense. Her story is not the story of a virgin birth, it is the story of a daughter raped by her father, a story that has been told over and over again. How many stories, she asked, are born out of denial? At eighteen, when the professor let the question rummage about the classroom, I only thought of lies.

In September, with war still filling the sky, I returned to the house in the forest where Mary spent her final years. I lit a candle and said a prayer. I thanked her for haunting me all these years. I thanked her for the stories, her subversiveness—her forgiveness. And then I sat in the garden amidst the whispering reds and greens and golds of the trees looking out to sea watching the light smiling on the water.

Every story lies.