Here in the Night

Stories

Rebecca Turkewitz
For my parents

with infinite gratitude
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At This Late Hour

I’ve been working the front desk of the Leavitt Hotel for three years, but booking rooms and greeting guests is only part of my job. It took some persuading, but William, the owner, lets me haunt the place. When William hired me, the Leavitt was already considered one of the most haunted spots in New England. At first, William dismissed the spooky stories and the ghost-hunters’ claims. He’s a history buff, and he’s been meticulously restoring the two-hundred-year-old mansion to as close to its original state as he can possibly make it. He couldn’t see that hauntings and history are really just two sides of the same coin, just different ways of using what came before us to make sense of our lives. After a few months of gathering visitors’ and staff members’ accounts, I went to William with my proposal: I wanted to play up the hotel’s ghostly reputation. I told him it could attract business, especially in the off-season when the summer beach-goers and the fall tourists have deserted us. I assured him I could draw in a crowd that would appreciate the original fireplace he had restored in the lobby and the antique light fixtures he was buying for the dining room.

To test the waters, William let me add a few eerie touches to the hotel website: a picture of the small graveyard on the northern side of the property and a black-and-white photo of the building with all the windows dark, save one. I left a few false reviews online, added some stories
to ghost-hunting websites, and dimmed the lobby lights in the evening. When business picked up and guests started asking about the Leavitt family tree hanging on the lobby wall, William relented completely. Together, we installed new locks on the doors so I could present each guest with a heavy brass skeleton key. Once a month I give a ghost tour of the property, pointing out the spot in the yard where no grass grows, the empty stone well hidden behind a stand of birch trees, the unlit coal room in the basement, and the study where Samuel Leavitt supposedly died at his desk, still tallying the debts others owed him.

I’ve learned that the best way to cultivate spookiness is to only hint at it, letting the stories stand for themselves while I express my doubts. I tell people on my tours that I’m only the reporter. The last guest just told me the craziest story as he was checking out, I say as I hand over maps of hiking trails. Every now and then, when I’m feeling anxious or bored or the urge to pack up and move, I slip into empty rooms and leave handprints on the windows and mirrors or scurry noisily through the halls at night, rapping on the walls. At first, I didn’t tell William about these last flourishes. But William spends hours trying to recover old tax records and photos, tracing the Leavitt-Johnson family tree, and scouring antique stores for rugs and furniture that match the original design of the house. He understands fascination with strange and particular things.

Blackstone, New Hampshire is a town that lends itself well to hauntings. Driving in on the main road, you pass the wide, hilly cemetery; the somber, spired churches; and the black clouds of flies swarming above the salt marshes. The town center is full of winding streets and old clapboard houses, and its crooked shoreline reaches, like a long arm, into the bay. Its nights are dark and full and brooding. It’s the first place I’ve ever lived that has not lost its character or that excited feeling of newness, even with the dull slog of passing days. I came here from Manchester, leaving behind, at thirty-three, not much else besides a pervy boss at a waitressing job I hated, some friends who still occasionally forget I’ve moved away and text me about parties, and an apartment I shared with my ill-tempered ex-boyfriend.
Although I’m an avid collector of Blackstone’s ghost stories and superstitions, I’m mostly skeptical when it comes to the occult. I’m sure the majority of the guests’ accounts of sudden chills and wailing women aren’t actually evidence of supernatural phenomena. But I love the stories and the way they grab hold of people and cast a spell over the hotel, giving shape to the night and its mysteries. And I don’t doubt that people are sensing something—a shift in mood or change in the air. Why not entertain the idea that, for a few brief moments, the past can spread like a deep soft bruise into the present? How else can I explain the thrill I feel as I sit alone at the desk in the evening, hearing—or imagining I’m hearing—the rhythm of the ocean waves, even though we’re almost a mile from the shore? And there is one ghost I do believe in. Everyone in Blackstone knows the legend of Emily Leavitt, and I feel her spirit, if not her actual specter, lingering.

Emily Leavitt’s father, who made his fortune in shipping, was the original owner of the Leavitt estate. When Emily, his only daughter, fell in love with a sailor, he offered to pay the sailor to leave Blackstone. To Emily’s horror, her beloved took the money and left. Emily spent a week in bed, refusing any food but bread and water. The next Sunday, Emily finally rose and dressed for church. After the service, when her family and the rest of the congregation were filing into the streets, Emily suddenly changed direction and raced through the throngs of people towards the rocky shoreline and hurled herself into the sea. The legend holds that on early winter mornings when it’s just growing light you can hear Emily screaming as she plunges into the icy water. Especially susceptible young women might see Emily’s form floating in the ocean, blue and shivering, beckoning for them to leap in and join her. The legend implies but does not say: Don’t ever join her. The legend implies but does not say: Watch your daughters closely.

At the Leavitt, Emily’s ghost has been sighted everywhere: pacing the halls at night, tapping at first floor windows, slamming attic and basement doors, breathing down the backs of guests’ necks. Stormy nights, she wails with the wind over her lost love’s betrayal. She breaks dishes. She peers
through keyholes. She fights to be freed from locked rooms. She gives us something to whisper about when our shifts run long or our days get dull.

My first two years at the Leavitt were the calmest, most stable of my adult life. I was taking a long break from romance, trying to see if I could make my life feel steadier without the constant earthquakes of new relationships. The move to Blackstone was the first I’d made on my own, not following a boyfriend or a group of friends or taking some time to recuperate on my mother’s couch. Sometimes I wonder why I wasn’t lonely, but I felt at home, happy to wake up alone in my rented first-floor apartment with everything just as I had left it. So when Julie, a bartender in the hotel dining room, told me that she couldn’t believe I hadn’t noticed how much William wanted me, I was surprised to find how curious I was, how an old longing stretched inside of me and shook itself awake.

Several months ago, I took Julie to lunch at one of the seafood restaurants in town. She was having an uncharacteristic bout of self-doubt, worried about her looming college graduation and the formlessness of her future. Julie, a round-faced University of New Hampshire student with a low voice and a deep loud laugh that makes even strangers want to join in with her, reminds me of myself at her age: bored and restless, always certain that some undetermined future event will transform her life into something more interesting and worthwhile. The comparison makes me scared for her. I’ve tried to talk to her about it, but she always takes it the wrong way. She finds the comparison flattering. She says she hopes to stay as young as I seem, as if clerking at a hotel in my mid-thirties is something to strive for. She views my easy friendships with staff members ten or fifteen years my junior as proof of an ideal adult life. I warn her about my failed attempts at college, my debt, and the uneasy blur of my twenties, but she’s unfazed.

I’d hoped to use our lunch to steer Julie through her crisis of confidence, but she was deflecting, telling me about her new relationship with her married American studies professor, whom she interchangeably
referred to as Professor Danvers and Mathew. She was in the midst of complaining about his irrational jealousy at seeing her on campus with a male friend when William came over to our table, his face flushed, a small paper bag crushed in his hands.

“I think this is the first time I’ve seen you outside the hotel,” he said to me. “I guess we both spend too much time there.”

“Do you want to join us?” Julie asked.

“Oh, thank you, but I’m on my way to my mother’s. I just saw you two in the window.”

“Were you at the Book Barn?” I asked, nodding to the bag in his hands.

“I was. Actually, when I was there I found a book I thought you might like.” He pulled out a collection of Victorian ghost stories. “I thought it might inspire you. You can consider it research, for the job.”

I thanked him and told him I couldn’t wait to get started on it. He left the restaurant, pausing in the doorway to wave at us.

“We always assumed he was gay and very discrete,” Julie said. “But obviously he has quite the crush on you.”

“I know I’m a favorite of his, but I don’t think his interest is romantic. I don’t think William does romantic.”

“Are you kidding? Everyone’s noticed. He never says no to you and he can’t stop grinning whenever you’re around. He even asks your opinion on designs for the hotel. From William, that’s practically a marriage proposal.”

“I hadn’t thought about it. I guess I’ve never had a man who’s interested in me just be nice to me.”

“And he’s old enough to be your father.”

“Not quite, Julie. And you should talk.”

“Please. Mathew is firmly located in hot older man territory. There’s a difference between an older man and an old man.”

I agreed that William was not the typical sexy older man type, but I did find him charming. I was certainly curious about him. At fifty, he’d never married, even though he is blandly handsome—sturdy and
broad-shouldered with a shy smile and dark gray hair. His passions, if they can be considered passions, are strange but straightforward and he is unabashed about sharing them. He paints beautiful maps of the area and sells them in a tourist-trap gallery near the beach, and occasionally gives talks on local history at the public library. He used to be a lawyer, but now he spends his days fixing up the hotel, spending entire mornings on one room—painting the molding or repairing a spot of water damage in the ceiling. He lives in a small apartment on the first floor of the hotel with a bell rigged up so he can be on call if a guest needs something after the staff has gone home. He never complains and seems to want nothing he can’t reliably and fairly easily obtain.

William often stopped by during my quiet weekday evening shifts, bringing me decaf coffee and books to borrow. We talked about his plans for the hotel or what I was reading. He told me about Blackstone’s early maritime industries and I told him about unusual encounters with guests. Once, when I heard he was sick with the flu, I brought him chicken soup and read to him from a book of local legends I’d discovered in a used bookshop. I’d never thought of William’s attention as anything more than an unlikely friendship. But under this new light, I re-examined the easy way we talked to one another. I could imagine going for walks in the woods on Sunday mornings, reading in front of the fireplace in William’s living room during the long winter nights, asking each other if we wanted our coffee mugs re-heated when we let them grow cold. In spite of myself, excitement flickered in my chest—not quite like the nights when I would spot a cute stranger at a friend’s party and feel the force of all the possibilities that might come from our meeting, but not entirely foreign from that sensation either.

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The next few days I took more care with my makeup and spent more time picking out clothes. William didn’t notice, but Julie did. She teased me about it relentlessly. She thought I was being cruel and enjoying the flattery of William’s attention. She couldn’t imagine I was actually con-
considering dating him. But I was intrigued—I wondered what William’s broad hands might feel like as they moved across my body.

“I find him interesting,” I told Julie one night after her shift ended. “I know he’s not the most exciting choice, but he’s different from anyone else I’ve dated. He’s the first person I can imagine growing old with. Actually, this is the first time in my life I can imagine myself getting old, at all.”

“And that’s a good thing?” Julie asked. She was sitting behind the desk with me, folding flyers for a whale watching tour into origami cranes. She kept checking her phone, so I knew the professor was supposed to have called her, probably hours ago.

“Yes,” I said, with more confidence than I felt. “I think it’s a good thing. But I wouldn’t have when I was your age. And that’s what got me into so much trouble.”

“You don’t strike me as someone who’s done with trouble yet.” Julie’s phone buzzed and she dumped her cranes into the trash. “My ride’s here,” she said.

“Speaking of trouble.”

She turned and grinned at me, the relief of finally hearing from the professor palpable in every gesture she made. She pulled on the hood of her coat and rushed outside. When she opened the door the loud static of rain and the smell of mud filled the lobby.

I hadn’t realized how bad the storm was. I came out from behind the desk and went to the window. I watched the branches of the apple trees shimmying and listened to the shushing of the wet leaves. When I heard footsteps approaching, my breath caught and I froze. In the window’s reflection, I saw William come around the corner holding a mug of tea. He looked behind the desk and then scanned the room. When his eyes fell on me he startled, and hot water splashed onto his hand. He dropped the mug and it cracked open.

“God,” he said. “You really scared me. Your stories must be having some effect.”

“I thought you said ghost stories were just easy entertainment.”
“Everyone believes in ghosts when it’s late enough. You’re the one who taught me that.”

“Ah. So you have been paying attention.” I went to retrieve the pieces of the mug, then took his hand. I ran my thumb over the burn and William’s arm began to shake.

“I doubt any guests are out in this downpour,” William said. “You can take off for the night if you want to.”

“I might wait for the rain to let up. I walked.”

I was hoping he would offer to drive me home, but instead he suggested I stay at the hotel.

“There aren’t any open rooms,” I said. “We’re full up.”

“The couch in my living room pulls out,” William said, and then flushed.

He waited for me to gather my things and we walked down the narrow hallways to his room.

His apartment was tidy and surprisingly modern compared to the museum-like quality of the rest of the hotel. I went over to his workbench and leaned over a sketch he was making of old shipping routes; several photocopies of charts were taped to the table.

“What is it about old maps that you find so fascinating?” I asked.

He ran a finger over the dark lines. “I don’t know why I like them. Maybe that’s why I don’t get bored with them.”

“You’re trying to puzzle it out,” I said. When he nodded, I told him about the times I had run through the hotel halls at night, doing Emily Leavitt’s dirty work for her. William laughed, the wrinkles around his eyes deepening. I told him about standing on the lawn after midnight with my arms raised, hoping an insomniac guest would catch a glimpse of me, and how I left my handprints on glass surfaces.

“You leave handprints on the windows—in the guests’ rooms?” William asked, suddenly serious, and I wondered if instead of sleeping with me he would fire me.

“Sometimes.”

William sat down on the arm of the couch. “A friend of mine from law school stayed in room 304 in April. He said that he woke up in the
middle of the night and saw a young woman rubbing a cloth against the windowpane, trying to clean what looked like fingerprints. When he started to cry out, he said the girl turned to him and shook her head as if she were scolding him, and then disappeared.” William tugged at the cuff of his shirt. “It was just a dream, obviously, but Jim was so upset. He swore it was real. He made me promise not to tell anyone about it or mention it again. I’ve never seen him act like that.”

I leaned against the workbench. “You’re not teasing me?”

William shook his head. I moved to the couch and sat down. “It’s probably just a coincidence,” I said. But I was excited, even though the message was disconcerting if it was real. Some specter was warning me, saying, *Stop playing with these things you don’t understand; watch yourself.* I looked up at William, who was still angled away from me.

“I should let you sleep,” he said, standing up abruptly. “I’ll get you a quilt. If you need anything, let me know.”

I was so nonplussed I could only thank him. He was really going to leave me on the couch. Maybe I’d been mistaken about his interest, but I didn’t think so. Once I had started looking for signs of his attraction, I’d seen them everywhere: in the moments he made eye contact and the moments he wouldn’t meet my eyes, in the color that sometimes rose in his cheeks, in the little things he remembered about our past conversations. When he returned with a blanket and two pillows, he hesitated for one tense moment before retreating to his bedroom. I lay down but couldn’t fall asleep. Around three in the morning the rain stopped, and the insects and night animals started stirring. A barred owl began to hoot, the sound low and mournful and questioning. It sounded like the call of an uncertain lover, saying, with its lilting tone, *Come to the window. Come to the window and throw me the key.*

* I don’t know when I fell asleep, but in my dream I could see much older versions of William and myself standing side by side behind the hotel desk. My face was pouchier and lined with wrinkles and my hair was silver, but I was dressed well and stood straight. The current ver-
sion of myself watched the tableau, standing in a shadowed corner of the lobby. William put his hand on the small of the older me’s back, and then pointed to the corner where I stood. The older me turned slowly and stared, before pulling her lips back to show her teeth. Every tooth in her mouth had been filed to a knife-like point. She kept her lips pulled back, not in a growl or snarl, but merely to show me. She snapped her teeth together twice, and I woke, slick with sweat, the covers pulled tightly around me.

I got up and opened the door to William’s room. William was on his back, breathing through his mouth, his hair mussed. I pulled the covers away and slid towards his sturdy body. I put my hand on his chest and he opened his eyes.

“Oh, thank God,” he said, taking my chin in his hand and kissing me. I was taken aback by how much he wanted me. He was careful, but also close to desperation. He was a hungry kisser, and I was relieved to find that I responded to him. His passion embarrassed me a little, reminding me that although I was attracted to him, it wasn’t in the feverish way I was used to. I didn’t feel overwhelmed or pulled underwater by ravenous tides.

At one point he stopped and said, “I’m sorry. It’s been a long time since I’ve been with a woman.”

“It’s been a while for me, too,” I said, but I knew we were using different scales to measure our abstinence.

Afterwards, as we lay on our backs holding hands, I asked him why he’d never been married.

“I almost was, once,” he said. “I never really got up the nerve again. After a certain age, dating becomes mostly an embarrassing negotiation.”

I laughed and turned to face him. “I’m just impressed you’re willing to negotiate.” I slipped my leg in-between his, and he kissed me in a way that was so grateful, I knew that if I wanted this, I could have it and probably have it for good.

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The next day, I asked Julie to get drinks with me after work. Halfway to the bar, I realized Julie had already started drinking at the hotel. I assumed something had happened, either with her close-knit group of roommates or with the professor.

After Gayle, the bartender, had served us our drinks and updated us on her daughter’s tricky pregnancy, I waited for Julie to explain what was bothering her.

“Did you know that Emily Leavitt didn’t die when she threw herself into the water?” she said.

I shook my head. All the retellings I’d heard ended with Emily swallowed by rough seas or broken against the rocks.

“She bruised some ribs and got hypothermia, but she survived.”

“I can’t believe it. How’d you find out?”

“You’re not the only one who reads,” Julie said sharply, then took a breath. “I was curious. I went to the Blackstone library and found an article from the local paper about Emily’s jump, which mentioned that she was recovering from the ordeal at home. Then I asked William for help. He did some digging and said there’s almost no information about Emily’s later life. But he found one reference to her being institutionalized a few years later.”


“William thinks she was hospitalized for typhoid fever, something about historical epidemics or whatever, but I think you’re right. It must have been a mental asylum.” Julie finished her drink and traced lines in the condensation on her glass. I’d never seen her in such a dark mood. I couldn’t figure out if she was using Emily’s story to stall or if she was trying to hint at something.

“Those assholes,” Julie said without looking at me. “Maybe it would’ve been better if she had died that day. Gone out in a blaze of glory, sending the message she wanted to send.”

“So Emily haunted The Leavitt even when she was still alive,” I said. “She survived the jump, but she was already a ghost.”
After Gayle brought us a second round, I told Julie what had happened with William, leaving out the awkwardness of the first part of the night spent on the couch.

“That’s great,” Julie said hollowly. “I mean, are you happy about it?”

“I think so,” I said. “He’s smart and honest and kind. I think maybe it’s time I tried dating someone who cares about making me happy.”

“And you love the hotel,” Julie said, staring out the bar windows at the black stretch of water. “You really love this town.”

“I do. But why does that matter?”

“No, I think this is a smart decision. Like you said, you can’t just be a hotel clerk forever.”

“That is not what this is about. What’s got into you?”

“I’ve heard you talk about your past relationships. Even the men who were terrible to you. Don’t pretend what you’re feeling for William is the same kind of love.”

“It’s a relationship I can actually imagine lasting. That other kind of love never served me particularly well.”

“But he really wants you. He’s fallen hard.”

“I’m fine with falling softly. I could use a little gentleness for once. You don’t understand that yet, but you will.”

Julie thumped her glass down on the bar, making the tonic in it hiss. “I understand now. I’m just honest with myself about what I want, and why.”

“There’s nothing wrong with figuring out how to make a life that’s good for me. I’m sick of everything ending in disaster. And I don’t know what you’re angry about, but there’s no reason to make me feel badly about William.”

“I’m sorry. It’s been a terrible night.” Julie finished her drink and ordered another. “I know you think I don’t care about any of the consequences of what I do.”

“That’s not what I think about you at all. Did Mathew break it off?”

“No,” she said. “It’s the opposite. He wants to leave his wife.”

“For you?”
“You don’t have to sound so surprised. But don’t worry. I’m not going to let him.”

“Let him? What if he just does it?”

“Then I’ll leave him. I don’t know why he assumes that’s even what I want. The narcissistic asshole.”

“I thought you wanted to be with him.”

“He treats me pretty well. But, obviously, he treats his wife like shit. Who wants to be that person, boring and taken for granted? And what does Mathew expect? That I’ll be some sort of stepmom to his kids, or dress up nice and hang on his arm at faculty events?”

Julie started crying. I knew she wasn’t going to leave him, at least not for a while. I had been in her situation, or something like it, a few times before. She was upset because she’d go to the faculty events, meet his kids, learn what he was like when he wasn’t trying to impress her, which would be all the time soon.

“Listen to me,” I said, and Julie looked up. I wrapped my arm around her shoulders. “Please don’t do this. Don’t let him do this to you.”

“I told you, I’m going to leave him.”

She didn’t believe that, I could see. She was repeating it like a mantra, the way you repeat ‘there’s no one there, there’s no one there’ when you hear a floorboard creak in the middle of the night. So I told her the real reason I had left Manchester and come to Blackstone, desperate for a place to settle.

One night, out with my coworkers, I had met a man who told me he was a musician. He asked if I wanted to go with him to see a band he knew play nearby. I didn’t even tell my friends I was leaving, just let the musician drive me away from the city center, out towards the airport. After several turns away from the well-lit streets and onto roads flanked by woods, I began to panic. I was too drunk to figure out what to do or how to read his expression, which still seemed at ease. I couldn’t focus. Even though I was flooded with adrenaline, I was so tired I had trouble keeping my eyes open. I wondered if he’d slipped me something. When he slowed at a stop sign, I flung the door open and raced into the trees. I
don’t know how he reacted because I never looked back. I wove as deeply into the woods as I could make it before my legs turned to jelly. I was sure the musician was somewhere in the darkness, stalking me. I passed out and woke at dawn. Somehow I found the road again and called one of my friends to come pick me up.

“I’m sorry,” Julie said.

“I’ve had a lot of bad nights like that,” I said. “I could have been killed. And for what? The possibility of a better party? I decided, right then, that I had to stop letting luck decide if I survived the day unscathed or not.”

“Where’s the fun in that?”

“I’m not kidding around. You see the ‘me’ that’s made it to thirty-five, but in a dozen other branches of my almost-life, I’d be a cautionary tale. I’ve only told you about the times that make good stories. You don’t want to hear about when I woke up with my roommate’s fist in my mouth. I’d been choking on my own vomit in my sleep, too drunk to wake up or swallow. She was trying to claw the bile out of my throat.”

“Gross,” Julie said. Then, “I’m sorry.”

“I was nineteen, and the very next night I had ten shots of whiskey and woke up in an ambulance. And that’s just one example.”

Julie studied the bubbles in her drink. “Have you told William about all that?”

I shook my head.

“And will you ever tell him about the night with the musician?”

“I might,” I said, knowing I never would.

“That’s what I thought.”

We stayed out awhile longer, Julie sniffling her way through the rest of our conversation. Then I walked Julie back to my apartment and set her up on the couch, a blanket tucked around her. I considered the ways she’d been both right and wrong about William and me. I thought about whether it mattered how or even if I loved him, whether any of that trumped a settled, pleasant life.
I woke up to Julie standing in my bedroom doorway, her shoulders moving up and down as she sobbed. I scrambled out of bed and pulled her into a hug. She was soaking wet and freezing.

“What the hell happened to you?” I asked. “Are you all right?”

Julie kept crying, and I pushed her sopping hair away from her face. Her teeth were chattering. There was a scrape on her elbow, and the blood had thinned and spread across the wet surface of her arm.

“I jumped in,” Julie said.

“In where?”

“Just to see what it was like,” she said.

“Not into the ocean?” I asked, and Julie nodded.

“I’m so cold.”

It was almost dawn and I could hear the birds waking up outside. I took her into my bathroom and stuck her under the shower, rubbing her arms. I kept repeating, “You’re okay, you’re okay.”

She changed into dry clothing while I made tea. Her eyes were unfocused and she was still drunk, but I could see her head was clearing.

“Jules,” I said, trying to sound comforting and not reproachful. “Why did you jump?”

“I wasn’t trying to hurt myself, if that’s what you mean. I just went for a walk and I thought, why not?”

“Have you ever tried anything like this before?”

“I wasn’t trying to hurt myself,” she said. “I swear.”

“You just thought, ‘Gee, why don’t I go for a five a.m. swim in the open ocean?’”

“You don’t remember what it’s like. Not anymore,” Julie said.

But that wasn’t true. Of course I remembered: the hot fist of need nestled in my stomach, the longing sharp and pressing but without aim, the desire to quench it in any way possible.

“You’re going to be okay,” I said. She fell asleep with her head in my lap.
Later that morning, Julie and I went to breakfast in town and the waitress told us the latest gossip. Bill Patterson, the owner of Patterson’s Clams, had seen a young woman leap off the seawall as he was getting dressed. He ran outside and down to the water, but never saw anyone surface. Soon, the story was all over town. Most people speculated that Bill had been fooled by some trick of the pre-dawn light. Quite a few locals insisted he’d seen the apparition of Emily Leavitt. Julie and I didn’t tell anyone what had really happened. We let the story spread and work its way into the town lore. We let Emily’s ghost have a little more life.

That afternoon, Julie seemed in better spirits. We laughed about what would have happened if Bill had been a little quicker and come upon Julie clambering out of the water, smelling like gin. Every hotel staff member wanted to be the first to tell us about Bill’s sighting, and we smiled mysteriously whenever anyone asked what was so funny. But the next day, Julie pulled me aside and told me that she wondered if Emily had been involved after all. She showed me a purple bruise that had bloomed on her upper arm. Four welts extended from it like the imprints of strong fingers. Julie’s face was pale and I asked if she’d slept. She shook off my question and said she couldn’t remember why she’d wandered down to the water in the first place. The spot she jumped from wasn’t particularly high, but it was rocky. People have died from less. Julie told me she sometimes dreams of a girl calling to her. She knows she shouldn’t follow the voice, but she always does. “Maybe this time I just didn’t wake up before I found her,” she said.

To know a place, you have to know its ghosts. As with people, you need to understand the particular ways in which towns are haunted before you can understand them. Emily has worked her way into Blackstone’s makeup. She walks this town’s streets and controls its tides. I see her in the faces of the college girls who come for a summer weekend,
their hair heavy with saltwater, their eyes trained on the white-capped waves. I see her in the women wearing too-thin jackets on October afternoons, holding their partners’ hands so tightly that their knuckles are bloodless and pale. I hear her in the low humming of night insects; I feel her breath in the late-August air. Here, Emily follows behind me like a big black dog, saying, *Come back to me, turn around and look at me, answer me when I call.* And I like to keep her around as a reminder. She’s also saying, *Careful of this thing that lives inside you.* When the hotel staff trade stories about waking up in unusual places or taking pills that strangers give them in public restrooms, I tell myself, ‘I used to live that way and now I don’t.’ I’ve stopped the spinning wheels of disaster and laid claim to my own life.

When I stay over at William’s, I feel Emily watching from outside the window, trying to make sense of my happiness and the steady, sure comfort that comes from lying next to William. She wants to draw me back into her world, to remind me what it’s like to return a stranger’s smile or feel the night hanging ahead of me, open and unplanned like an empty road. I will not be convinced, but still I conjure her. I cannot bear to lay her to rest. Julie occasionally jokes with me about Emily—she says I’ve strayed from Emily’s teachings about rash decisions and life choices my parents would disapprove of—but I’ve noticed Julie won’t go into the basement or the pantries alone anymore. She tells me less and less about the inner workings of her life and makes excuses when I ask her to go on evening walks down to the shore. She still hasn’t left her professor, and he almost always picks her up after her late shifts.

William often talks about what a miracle it is that we found each other. He says it’s a wonder that two people who are so superficially different but share so much came together at just the right point in our lives. It amazes him that we feel the same thing for one another at the same time, as if mysterious currents have carried us together at random. I murmur my agreement, but I am done with currents. I have put my anchor down.