

THE GHOSTS WE KNOW

Written by
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3rd Draft
Registered WGAe
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FADE IN:

Reds and golds. Fallen leaves skitter across pavement.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

A high wire moving back and forth gently. We sense that someone perches there, delicately balancing themselves, moving along the tight wire.

MAN (O.S.)
You know how much I think of your
kids.

INT. CARY'S KITCHEN - DAY

A woman's feet and ankles. High heels. Tentatively moving back and forward, nervously tapping as she moves about, talking on the phone.

CARY
You keep saying that.

Her form silhouetted against the window, she leans against the wall, phone to ear, curling the phone cord in her fingers.

MAN (O.S.)
It's true ---

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Out of focus hand reaching against sky for a high wire.

MAN (O.S.)
I only want the best for you.

Blazing reds, leaves blurring. The sense of falling.

INT. CARY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Cary Summers slips down, back against the wall, tears welling her eyes. She's an attractive woman in her late thirties, soft blonde curls, a natural look. She's dressed nicely, as if for a special night out.

The CLICK OF THE PHONE hanging up. The swirl of a curtain against the floor. Silence. Footsteps padding along floor.

Two young girls, age six and ten, come to the door, worried.

SARAH

Mommy, why are you in the floor?

The girls rush to Cary's side, confused.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Mommy? Please don't cry. You're scaring me. Don't. Please don't---

They all tear up, begin crying, holding on to one another.

A clock face, time moving slowly. The hands stop at 3:45.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Barren trees on a cold winter day.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Hallway windows look in on a darkened room. Illuminated only by the glow of a projection screen, clicker in hand, Cary shows slides of Edward Hopper paintings to her class.

CARY

--- and this is Hopper's? It's called what again?

(a few murmurs from class)

Exactly. Automat. Who can tell me what they see? --- Lisa.

LISA (O.S.)

I see you, Miss Summers, I see you.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL, LADIES RESTROOM - DAY

Through an open stall door we see a distraught Cary enter. Urgently she hugs up to the cold tile wall, cheek to tile, trying hard to ground herself, to keep from breaking down.

EXT. BACK SIDE OF CARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The CHUNKA, CHUNKA sounds of a dryer. Light spills out onto the patio through the open kitchen door.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A video game screen remains frozen on the TV. The house is a mess. Still in their school clothes, the kids have fallen asleep in the living room, sprawled on the furniture.

Cary sits at the dining room table, a cold cup of coffee before her, staring out into the night. It seems an intimate setting, made for two, but the second person is missing. Time stands still.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, BASEMENT - NIGHT

Clothes are piled everywhere. It's hard to tell which are clean and which are dirty. Cary opens the dryer, begins pulling out clothes, then stops, slips to her knees. She stares at the mess, overwhelmed. The glass of the washer door reflects her face.

EXT. COUNTRY BACKROAD - DAY

Rain streaks down the car window. The thrum of wipers CLOPPING BACK AND FORTH. A dirt road meanders through dense green forest.

Cary is at the wheel of her white Volvo. Up ahead the road ends, surrounded by tall trees.

INT. CARY'S VOLVO - DAY

She comes to a halt, stares out into the deep.

EXT. COUNTRY BACKROAD - DAY

Wipers still SLAPPING against an almost sprinkle of rain, she gets out and closes the door. Absently, she stares at her reflection in the window, then finally looks up to the trees.

She wanders off the road into the vast green darkness.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The rain has ended. Light streaks in from above. Cary wanders along, drawn by some unknown purpose.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

She comes out into a clearing. Across a wide verdant field sits an old Airstream trailer and a rusty 60's Chevy Suburban. Several sets of white sheets flutter on the clotheslines out front. The lines bounce and flutter as if someone walks them.

Cary walks among the layers of sheets flapping in the wind. She sees a colorful sign in a window. It reads: "The Lady of the Snakes, always open."

INT. AIRSTREAM TRAILER - DAY

Cary looks in through the open door. It seems dark and mysterious. A voice calls out from the void.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (O.S.)
I've been wondering when you'd get here.

Cary is confused. A face appears. Wise eyes. Wispy. Once beautiful. An old woman, about the same height, same frame as Cary. The same sensibility.

CARY
I think you have me confused with someone else.

The old woman smiles, then turns and opens a closet door, revealing rows of wooden boxes. She selects one and pulls it free.

LADY OF THE SNAKES
It is possible I suppose, but I don't think it is so.

She moves past Cary, disappears into the sunlight.

EXT. AIRSTREAM TRAILER - DAY

Sheets billow in the breeze, reveal the old woman sitting the box on a wooden table, then disappearing, revealed once more picking a variety of sprigs, seeds and petals planted along the side of the trailer. She drops the pickings in a large clay cup. The sheets hide the old woman once more.

Cary turns, then stares as the old woman seats herself. She watches her add a strange liquid, mix the ingredients into a potion.

Cary edges a little closer. The old woman stares at her, still stirring the potion.

CARY
I just want it to stop.

The old woman lends a sympathetic nod.

LADY OF THE SNAKES
I know.

In need of refuge, Cary takes a seat, a tear trying to force its way free.

CARY

I can't take it anymore.

The old woman stops the stirring, considers Cary, then she reaches out, takes Cary's hands. Cary pulls back at first, but the touch is somehow comforting and she finds herself relaxing into it.

LADY OF THE SNAKES

Give me your heart.

Cary doesn't understand.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

(whispering now)

Give me your heart and I'll take the pain away.

Cary's lip begins to tremble. It's all she can do to keep control. She closes her eyes. A tear finally frees itself.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

Sweetheart, it'll be alright. It'll be alright.

Cary takes a breath and opens her eyes. The old woman's hands slip away, revealing a cheap necklace now cradled in Cary's hands. Cary stares, disbelieving, at a delicate red valentine heart, its plastic core marred by a series of tiny cracks. Confused, she looks up at the old woman for an answer.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

You must tell it your secret.

Cary doesn't understand.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

Tell.

Hesitant but ready to believe, Cary brings the trinket to her lips and whispers quietly into her hands. The act seems to drain her. As her arms slump, the old woman pulls the trinket away and dips it into the potion. Smoke rises from the cup and floats away on the breeze.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

Your heart will never know hurt again.

She pushes the cup toward Cary.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

Now drink.

Trying to blink back tears, Cary stares at the old woman hoping for an answer. The old woman stares, blankly, waiting. So Cary takes the mug in her hands and lifts it. Only then does the old woman reach out, place a hand over Cary's wrist.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

There is a price.

CARY

I have to be able to take care of
my girls.

The old woman nods sadly. Cary brings the potion to her lips and drinks it in. Then she slides the still smoking mug away. The old woman takes it and places two fingers on the draped end of the necklace.

LADY OF THE SNAKES

What is a stone? A weight? A
measure? A monument?

She pulls the trinket from the mug, revealing the plastic heart, now turned to cold gray stone. Cary stares at it, but her stare is distant, blank.

LADY OF THE SNAKES (CONT'D)

It can never know hurt, but it can
never heal, never grow. Never know
love again.

She drops the stone heart into the wooden box with a CLOP.

SUPER OVER BLACK:

10 years pass....

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

The flutter of curtains along the floor.

Moving down the hallway toward the light. Clean shiny floor.
Open door to the basement.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, BASEMENT - DAY

Ten years older, hair much shorter now, Cary folds the
laundry with care.

Even for this activity, she looks put together, meticulous. Towels, socks, etc. are all perfectly stacked, clean and organized in neat rows.

A woman's feet perched and moving along a tight wire.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The place is museum pristine. Artfully thought out. Meticulously well kept. Photographs of Cary and her now teen age daughters. One in college, one in high school.

EXT. BACK OF CARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Through the dining room window we can see the family having dinner together. A mannered threesome.

INT. CARY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Despite the fact that dinner has just been cooked here, the room is pristine. The kids deposit leftovers in the trash bin and their dirty cutlery and dishes in the dishwasher.

CARY

Hannah, I'm depending on you to look out for your sister.

SARAH

Mommm? I can look out for myself.

CARY

No drinking. No wild --

HANNAH

It's the Appalachian Trail, Mom. Hiking. Ten other girls.

Sarah silently mouths Cary's next words, having heard them a thousand times before.

CARY

I just want you to be safe.

INT. CARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight streaks in though the window. Cary sleeps alone on one side of the bed. The other side obvious in its emptiness. She turns on her side, subconsciously reaching for a hand that is not there. Slowly, her hand closes into a fist. After awhile her eyes open and she stares at the empty night.

EXT. LAKESIDE TRAIL - NIGHT

A quick cut. Ten years ago. Cary and the guy that broke her heart. His face a mystery, hair dark, full. They walk away from us, hand in hand, a sense of playfulness between them.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Clock face. Three forty five am.

Cary stares out the window, no longer in pain, but haunted by her past. We can see her reflection.

Absently, she runs her finger horizontally along the window pane muntin, as if removing some invisible sign of dust.

EXT. CARY'S HOUSE - MORNING

The open trunk of a car, the last of the camping gear is placed there. Hannah shuts the trunk, revealing Cary giving Sarah a hug and a kiss. Hannah comes over and Cary takes her into the circle, too. Hannah adjusts her mom's blouse sleeve mimicking Cary's world of things just so.

Cary waves as the car drives off.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

Moving down the hallway toward the light. Clean shiny floor.

Cary walks away from us, carrying a laundry basket, slow motion. Alone. Even the dirty clothes seem organized.

EXT. LAKESIDE TRAIL - DAY

Car parked in foreground. Cary walks away from the car, among tall trees, toward the lake. The composition seems off balance as if someone is missing from the frame.

EXT. LAKESIDE - DAY

Among the trees looking out on the lake. The view is idyllic. Cary leans against the foot bridge railing, staring out over the water. It is as if she is searching the lake for some unknown thing. A breeze sends the leaves fluttering.

INT. CARY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ten years ago. A shadow of dance across the wall, fleeting. A hand on a shoulder, the fall of long blonde hair and a man's form, dark hair, and gone.

EXT. FARMERS MARKET - AFTERNOON

Cary stands with her back against a wall. Absent the present. Staring. All around her, people mill about the market. A shadow flickers along the wall, across her face. She touches her shoulder as if the hand is still there, but only finds the strap of her handbag draped over her shoulder.

A man walks past, about her age. JAKE MASTERS is rugged, open, salt and pepper hair, dressed in nice jeans and a polo shirt. Cary pays no notice until he is well past her. Then not so much aware, but instinctively, she looks his way or maybe it's just to find the direction she's going.

Jake stands in profile to her, looking over some vegetables. She walks past him. Neither seems to notice the other.

She wanders though the market, looking at flowers, at produce.

He checks out the strawberries. She floats by in the background.

Now it is Cary who looks at ivy plants as he moves past in front of her. After he has passed, she glances his way.

Their movements become almost a slow dance, as they move about the market. A slight glance, now an unwatched stare. Two moths moving closer to the flame.

She looks up casually and finds him standing by a produce stand. She stares at his hands as they move up slowly to shoulder height, then to his face. He cups them in front of his mouth as if whispering. Almost prayerful.

Next they find themselves walking in the same direction, separated by a row of roses. She stops and picks up one particularly fine looking rose. He moves past her and disappears. She looks up, his direction, then down again. Soon he reappears and stops across from her. He picks up a rose, examines it. She looks up at him.

CARY

What were you doing? -- Over there.
It looked almost as if you were --
praying.

JAKE

Back there? -- I was trying to remember.

CARY

Remember?

Jake tries to figure out what to say.

JAKE

The last time we met.

CARY

The last time we -- I'm sorry, I don't -- I don't recognize you -- Was your son or daughter one of my students?

JAKE

I don't think so.

CARY

I think I would remember you.

JAKE

I think I would remember you, too.

CARY

Then how might we know each other?

JAKE

I think ---I think we met at this market. It was Tuesday, June 15 ---

He shows her the face of his watch. They look at the time together. The watch face shows three forty five.

JAKE (CONT'D)

It was three forty five in the afternoon.

(he smiles at her)

I think it was the first time we ever saw each other. We stared and smiled at one another for one full minute.

CARY

A full minute. Did we now?

INT. SAL'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The place has a warm cozy feel. But it is empty except for one table, two people engaged with only the other.

Cary and Jake, smile and talk. A single rose is laid out on the table. The food on their plates remains half eaten. They seem to pay little notice to ROAR OF A VACUUM CLEANER nearby.

JAKE

So Hannah's thinking about grad school after she finishes at State?

CARY

Yeah. She wants to do genetic research, mathematical analysis.

JAKE

The family scientist. Wow! So I take it she didn't get any of your artist genes?

CARY

Not a single one. But my Sarah, she has them in spades.

The VACUUM'S ROAR closes in. Jake leans in, so does Cary.

JAKE

I think they're trying to tell us something.

CARY

I think they've been trying for awhile now. Dinner was amazing.

JAKE

It really was. But maybe we should go.

EXT. LAKESIDE TRAIL - NIGHT

Two cars parked in foreground. Cary and Jake walk side by side, backs to us. Slowly their hands reach out, touch, and take hold. They walk hand in hand.

EXT. LAKESIDE TRAIL - NIGHT

Through the trees, moon glow clouds float by overhead.

CARY (O.S)

I've been coming here since I was this high and could barely ride a bike.

They lean against a bridge railing, looking out on the water.

JAKE

You are so lucky. I never knew this was here. But then I haven't lived here that long. What were you like back then? What kind of girl were you?

Cary turns to face Jake. Instinctively, their hands reach out to one another, intertwine.

CARY

Freckle faced, outdoorsy. A tomboy. I was in love with the water. Boats. Skiing. Fishing even.

JAKE

I bet you were a heartbreaker.

CARY

Gut a fish with the best of them.

JAKE

Maybe that's when we first met.

CARY

You think?

JAKE

No --- I would have remembered.

Slowly, they ease into one another and kiss. Very soft, very sweet, very tender.

EXT. CARY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Jake's convertible is parked alongside Cary's sedan.

INT. CARY'S KITCHEN - EVENING

As steaks grille outside, the two prepare salad for the meal. The rose from the other night is in a vase. Two more roses, each fresher than the last have joined it.

Cary sees Jake having trouble stirring the dressing. She takes a whisk, then with her hip, pushes him around to face her. She pulls the wooden spoon from his hands and replaces it with the whisk.

CARY

Use this.

Jake smiles. But then he spies flames rising up from the grille outside.

JAKE
Oh, crap!

EXT. BACK OF CARY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Jake and Cary rush out the door. Jake stabs at the flaming steaks, trying to save them.

JAKE
Watch it! You'll get burned.

He plops one, then another onto the platter Cary holds.

INT. JAKE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The door from the deck flies open and Jake and Cary, both laughing, rush in with more burnt steaks on a different platter.

CARY
I am so sorry. I really am a better cook than this. I promise.

Jake dumps the smoking meat in the sink and turns the faucet on, full blast, then shakes the sting from one of his hands.

CARY (CONT'D)
Let me see.
(taking his hand)
I burned you. Oh...

JAKE
It's okay. Just a flesh wound.

Innocently, she kisses it, like a kid's boo boo.

CARY
Better?

JAKE
Definitely.

CARY
Will you live?

JAKE
I think so. But next time, I think we'll have to eat out.

EXT. JAKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Through the trees, moon glow clouds float by overhead.

Close on a wire. The sense of someone trying to maintain their balance.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE, GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Music plays, a soulful gentle pas de deux. We float through a darkened room, shafts of moonlight from skylights in the high ceiling above illuminate the darkened room. First we see shadows on the wall. Almost duplicates of Cary's past.

And we finally find Cary and Jake moving as if they are one, a quiet harmony, a gliding slow dance. She looks up at him and sighs. He holds her more closely. She responds, pressing him more tightly.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

This carries over into a different night. And we find, once again, two shadows on the wall, then discover Cary and Jake, in different clothes as they continue to dance.

LATER

Cary stares out a window into the night. Jake leans against the wall, facing her, listening.

CARY

He was a lot younger than me. Never been married.

(after a pause, turning to Jake)

It ended so badly. I thought I would die.

Jake pulls her into a gentle embrace. He strokes her hair softly. They stare at one another, both silent, contemplating. Then they share a long deep kiss.

INT. CARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Another darkened room. Curtains gently swaying. Cary and Jake are both asleep. Jake lays on his back, one arm stretched across the bed, the other over his bare chest. Cary is on her side, nestled in the hollow of his outstretched arm.

Slowly, unconsciously, she reaches out for the hand on his chest. And slowly she takes his hand in hers.

Sensing her actions, he opens his eyes, but doesn't move. Realizing the moment, he takes in, and inside, he smiles.

INT. JAKE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

As the soft light of morning lifts the darkness from the room, Jake and Cary are in the same positions, just a different room. Jake is the only one awake and still he is careful not to disturb Cary's peaceful slumber. Finally, she moves and her eyes open. She stares directly at him and he smiles. But her hand slips away.

INT. CARY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Fresh strawberries and blueberries. They share breakfast together. She in a silk robe, he in his boxers and a t-shirt.

Using her fork, she plucks a strawberry from his bowl. He gives her the eye, does likewise.

INT. CARY'S HOUSE, AT THE FRONT DOOR - MORNING

His open hand covers her closed palm, then slips away.

As he departs, he stops and looks back to her. She smiles at him. It's one of those smiles that might seem like forever.

JAKE

I finally found you.

He doesn't wait for an answer, he just goes. She shuts the door behind him, holds his declaration close. Enigmatic.

INT. CARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elbows on knees, her hands held tight to one another, Cary sits on the edge of her bed, quietly thinking.

INT. CARY'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Cary's smart phone RINGS repeatedly. A call from Jake. Unanswered. The time on the phone reads 3:45pm.

EXT. CARY'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - DAY

Cary leans against her fence, staring off in the woods. From the house, THE DOOR BELL RINGS. She seems to ignore it. It RINGS AGAIN. She turns and looks back toward her house.

DIRECTLY AFTER:

Green trees surround them. They stand facing one another. She, in a red dress. He, in a white shirt. Silent. Unsmiling.

INT. CARY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Her hand, closed like a fist. His hand caressing hers. The weight of the closed hand becomes too much for Jake's open hand to bear alone and Cary's hand slips away.

They face each others futures, uncertain. Beyond talk. Sad. A stillness stands between them as they each wait.

JAKE

Can you at least tell me why?

She looks as if she wants to speak, but remains silent.

JAKE (CONT'D)

If you're going to burn down my house....

(beat)

I have to know why.

She can only stare. He meets her stare, the comes to a decision.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I choose you.

Cary remains silent.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Only you.

He leaves. Cary stands there, unmoving as the door closes behind him.

EXT. LAKESIDE TRAIL - DAY

Through the trees the sky floats by overhead.

Cary leans on the bridge railing, looking out on the water. Alone. Dried tracks of tears show along her cheekbones. She follows the horizontal edge of the railing with the tips of her fingers, in the same way she did along the muntins of her window.

EXT. FARMERS MARKET - NIGHT

The clock reads three forty five.

It's raining. A lone light illuminates the empty market. Jake stands under an awning, barely protected from the rain, looking totally lost.

INT. CARY'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Rain streaks a window. The basement is clean, too well organized. Cary folds the laundry in careful neat stacks. It is almost seems as if she works in slow motion. Emotionless.

As she comes forward, we see only part of her torso, far right, she sits as if exhausted, stares off into nothing. The two by four studs of an unfinished wall seem to imprison her.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Through a wall of glass and uprights, Jake stands before a group of businessmen making a presentation. In mid-sentence he has to stop and excuse himself.

INT. MEN'S RESTROOM - DAY

Through an open stall door we see a distraught Jake enter. Urgently he hugs up against cold tile wall, cheek to tile, trying hard to ground himself, to keep from breaking down.

EXT. CARY'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - EVENING

Though the window, we can see that the kids have returned from their trip. The threesome share a welcome home dinner.

INT. CARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cary lays in bed, late night, still awake. The empty space beside her defines her world. Absently she curls on her side, reaches for a hand that is not there. Her hand folds into a fist.

INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is a mess. Jake sits alone on the far end of the coffee table staring at nothing. He bring his hands to his face to hide his pain.

EXT. COUNTRY BACKROAD - DAY

Rain streaking down the car window. The thrum of wipers CLOPPING BACK AND FORTH. A dirt road meanders through dense green forest.

Jake drives his car until the road ends. The car stops.

INT. JAKE'S CAR - DAY

The car clock reads three forty five. Jake stares out into the deep. Wipers still SLAPPING BACK AND FORTH against an almost sprinkle of rain. He gets out and looks around. Lost.

EXT. COUNTRY BACKROAD - DAY

Jake wanders into the vast green darkness.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The rain has ended. Light streaks in from above. He wanders along, drawn by some unknown purpose.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Jake comes out into a clearing. Across a wide verdant field sits an old Airstream trailer and a rusty 60's Chevy Suburban. Several sets of white sheets flutter on the clothesline out front. The lines bounce and flutter as if someone walks them.

Jake studies the sight, and makes his way forward.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END