

On Being Your Own Exorcist

“Won’t do no good to hold no séance,
what’s gone is gone and you can’t bring it
back around.”

—Fiona Apple

By Adelina Sarkisyan

I once read that you can will yourself to be haunted; not by spirits, but by memories. A haunting is, essentially, being totally and completely possessed and obsessed; therefore living in the past is being possessed by something that is no longer in existence. So, my mistake, memories can be spirits after all.

A fear of “magic” and a “sixth sense” caused witch-hunts in Salem and throughout Europe that vilified the very nature of femininity—a fear of womanhood, nature and healing that resulted in uproar and the murder of innocent women. This imagined sixth sense was initially everything the other senses were: touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste. These women were the healers, the bohemians, the outsiders, the threats; they touched, saw, smelled, heard, tasted—lived—in a world that was not acceptable.

Even as children we knew the power behind the whispers of the sixth sense that hung like naked limbs from monkey bars, yet we’ve failed to recognize how the first five are

just as powerful and haunting. And that is the plot twist: even us “normal” people who have just five senses, are magic.

And how frightening it is to realize that our senses can haunt; how a certain smell, song, or place can bring it all back: all the borrowed things you had to return that were once yours—your forever library book.

Love is a forever library book, constantly being checked out in your soul.

Love is a forever library book that told the story about you and that boy who were meant to be.

Love is a forever library book about you and your best friend who just drifted apart one day.

Love is a forever library book about you and your heartache.

It is a book that you kept past the due date and paid \$5 for when you had to finally



return it, torn and stained. And even after you’ve returned it, you can still feel it etched against your chest as you sleep. We all have spirits of borrowed library books roaming around us; some more than others. Some books are quiet; they whisper their words into our books and rub their spines against ours softly. Others are loud, vibrant; they yell at us from across the street and wake us up at 3 in the morning, begging to be read.

You can read that book and return it, but you will be forever changed by its words—nay, siren song: how its pages felt in your hands, how it smelled like an ancient heirloom dug up from Marie Antoinette’s closet and doused in cheap Chanel No 5.

You will remember the first time you said its name out loud, and every time you opened it thereafter, how it comforted you when it was midnight and you couldn’t sleep and used a tiny flashlight to create the universe under the tent of your sheets just to finish that last chapter.

Oh, mon cheri, the hours I spent loving you.

And every time someone mentions that book, you want to shout, “That was mine, if only for a moment; it was my good morning and my good night.”

But borrowed things always have a

way of staying even after they've been returned. You don't know how to wake up without it, how to sleep without it, how your days were spent having anything else but it in your head. And even if you're lucky enough to borrow it one more time, you can never get it back in the same condition because the second time around is never the same.

And sometimes it feels like home. The haunting is so familiar that venturing out of it seems scarier than staying in it. It becomes your own private library filled with that one book that sits on the highest shelf in the room, and you can't reach it no matter how hard you try.

I just want to touch it. I just want to smell its cover one last time.

But, behold: if you can will yourself to be haunted you can also un-will yourself. If the women in Salem were witches, then we all are. Do we not have the same touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste they did? Do we not bare the same femininity within us that cursed them to death?

We all know of haunted locations that have been exorcised of its demons. Well here's the secret, come closer—ah, there you are: you can be your own exorcist—or witch, rabbi, priest, shaman, voodoo priestess, and so on.

What you need is: self-awareness, patience, strength, forgiveness, hope, love and a little chocolate.

The mantra “time heals all” is comforting but sometimes leaves us feeling powerless. We are not hourglasses nor do we

have sand to slowly tick the minutes toward healing. Relying on time to fix our troubles equates to having an external locus of control. This means we lose all our power and rely on outside sources to control our lives. What we need to do is internalize it, to tap into that magic that has been waiting for us. You have the power to exorcise yourself of the memories and pain that haunt you, of that forever library book still hanging around on that shelf.

Sometimes we all need some kind of ritual to symbolize it. Closure isn't closure just because you tell yourself it is; would a rose by any other name smell as sweet? You have to truly feel that you have closed the door and are wholly able to move on, and how can you move on when you have old spirits that still linger around every time you hear a familiar song or smell a familiar perfume?

So do it: step out of your comfort zone; forgive yourself; forgive the spirits; and let go.

Construct a ritual for yourself, whether it is burning letters, deleting old emails or texts once and for all, or donating all the gifts and clothes they gave you. Wear a silly outfit, paint your face and do a ceremonial dance. Feel the power you hold inside yourself because believe me, you have more than you think you do.

Be your own exorcist. Close the door to that haunted library in your mind, turn in that forever library book once and for all and walk away. The spirits won't follow. • • •

“This is what rituals are for. We do spiritual ceremonies as human beings in order to create a safe resting place for our most complicated feelings of joy or trauma, so that we don't have to haul those feelings around with us forever, weighing us down. We all need such places of ritual safekeeping. And I do believe that if your culture or tradition doesn't have the specific ritual you are craving, then you are absolutely permitted to make up a ceremony of your own devising, fixing your own broken-down emotional systems with all the do-it-yourself resourcefulness of a generous plumber/poet.”

—Elizabeth Gilbert, “Eat, Pray, Love”