



eleanor
and the
tiny machines

a
haunting

Summer comes back undone, like a needle through an eye. A dry riverbed. Eleanor combs the paper for lost loves. Doves tangled in the shrubbery. All along, we thought it was weather. Brought along a sweater in case of cold. But Eleanor says it's easy, just knock three times against the table. A flock of birds buzzed the horizon, and suddenly the roof comes crumbling in with the weight of their wings. The garden goes soft with rot. Eleanor collects objects, a shiny spoon, a busted doll, and plants them in a long row of pots. Whatever we've forgotten slips through autumn like a sheet, loosed from the line.





Eleanor goes out. Eleanor stays in. Mice nest in the hollows of her hoop skirt. Loopy with arsenic. Dead from all that love. Above the kitchen, the witch moths flicker in the fixture. Eleanor, the doctors try to fix her. Pin her to the board, her smile just in place, but she slides off the wall. Goes wild with hunger. No one would know her movement through hallways, crouching between the floors. The ghost that haunts even the smallest spaces makes peace with the smallest things. Fever ridden and almonds on her breath.



The house we build is a small house, full of venom, Full of women pulling at the nails. All day long we lose door hinges. Cabinet handles. All day long, the chandelier swings and dangles from the ceiling. Eleanor keeps putting doll parts into the furnace. We can't stop her. Can't prop up the walls that keep folding in on us. Eleanor prepares an elaborate feast, but it spoils as soon as it's on the table. Throws the dishes in the cradle and keeps setting the curtains on fire. We're certain it's over, and then it all starts again. We're certain it's love, the way she folds each doll into her chest. Her best coos and murmurs. The endless mothering.





We build Eleanor a bed, but she keeps sliding off. In the summer, she tangles in the curtains and hangs there all night. A fright to find her gasping, her breath raspy with cobwebs. How we tried to save her with laudanum and buckets of oysters. Her voice we could not summon from the ribs. The tiny box she locked it in. Eleanor puts her feet on the floor, but keeps floating up. We tie a knot to her wrist, but still she rises. Every night, she tells us she loves us in letters, burned before bedtime in a tiny fire. We don't know how she sleeps with all that rising, but sleeps she does. Her eyes flickering and then gone dark.





Eleanor sleeps and the sky goes dark. Keeps hiding things in her small pockets. Lock of hair, tiny tooth. On the roof, we take turns chucking her off the side of the house. But she survives. A real live girl. A smoldering match. Catches the wind and sails over the garden. We tie her like a balloon to the fence, but still she lifts. Drifts from yard to yard, breaking everything she sees. Swing set, shovel, busted patio chair. Everything she touches touches her, bruises the inside of her thighs. Just when we think she's high enough, she sinks into the rosebushes and goes out, pitch black.



Every time it rains outside, Eleanor floods. Water flushing the blood stream, humming. The hollows of her heart. Her eyes caked with mud before we knew it, before we threw her in the trash to stop the seeping. Before she ruined with the furniture with so much weeping. The body holds too much, and has to let go. Liquid in her ventricles, her left knee. If you tip her, she ruins entire sheet sets. Water pouring from her ears.



Eleanor rings a bell and everyone comes. Moths thrum in the attic and the birds collect in the rafters. After the flooding, there is no choice but to break our bones against the house, one by one. In the beginning, it was nice, full of casseroles and bundt cakes. The kitchen filled with muffins. But now it's embarrassing. How much she cries. How at night, she lies down in the yard and begs to be swallowed whole like a stone.



Eleanor does the dishes. Wishes for better weather. Tethers her heart strings to the nearest telephone pole. In the fall, we take turns burying the dead. Rabbit, fox, the tiniest of shrews. The yard fills with their broken bodies. Soon we barely can tell them from the living, from all the things we've buried there. Phone books, curling irons, the television remote. When we dig them up, we cradle them like children, then place them back in the ground. Eleanor waits in the dining room with birthday cake and faded streamers. All the cutlery shined spotless with spit.



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