

You Can Go Now

by Chanel Dubofsky

The summer when I was six and my sister Audrey was eight, she'd walk around our house pretending to be in a trance, fingers strategically hovering over my mother's vases and lamps, leaving smudges behind on my father's heavy oak desk and rocking chair. She'd lumber past my room, eyes open just enough to prevent her from running into the banister, her mouth open as she made low, breathless moaning sounds. When she reached my parents' room, her moaning always got louder. "I can see you," Audrey whimpered, "I can see you!"

My parents knew better than to interrupt Audrey in the middle of her investigations, so they waited, usually until after dinner, when my mother was loading the dishwasher and my father was drying the wine glasses, rubbing the towel carefully over each stem. "Who were you talking to before, Aud?" he asked. "When you were in our room?" "The ghost," Audrey said, picking a twig out of her tangled blond hair. It was leftover from bird's nest building, her pre-trance activity. "Well that's something," said my father. "Matthew, did you see it too?" I shook my head, thinking of the unfinished bird's nest on the back porch. I was deep into my cape wearing phase that summer, and when my father did the dishes, I'd stand beside him, chewing faithfully on the cape's bottom left corner.

"Does the ghost have a name?" my father asked "Micheline." "Like the Michelin man? With the tires?" "No! Micheline! She's a girl." My mother looked up from the dishwasher. "Audrey Jane," she said. "Lower your voice." Audrey mumbled something, then returned to studying the ends of her hair, glowering at me from her perch on the bar stool. After a minute, she jumped down, and as she passed me on her way out of the kitchen, she leaned into me and whispered, "You're disgusting. Micheline thinks you're disgusting. She told me. She's coming to your room tonight."

Available online at <http://fictionaut.com/stories/chanel-dubofsky/you-can-go-now>

Copyright © 2011 Chanel Dubofsky. All rights reserved.

After that, I lay awake every night, Audrey's words wet and angry in my ears. If my eyes managed to close, I was afraid to open them, sure there would be a face in front of me, mangled, screaming, resentful, looking not unlike my sister's. It was the same summer that my parents, in the den or the basement or mudroom, turned to one another and said, "You can go now. You're off the hook."

