

HOUSE OF GHOSTS

by Eric Bosse

The blue Victorian at 1145 White Street shifts in its foundation, creaks, and settles in for the night. The girls are bundled into their beds. My wife, too, has gone to sleep. I'm alone in the kitchen, steeping chamomile tea, coughing phlegm into the wrinkles of my palms. Toast crumbs on the table shiver when I exhale hard enough. The refrigerator groans. The candle pops. The back door swings open, and the ghost of my father's lover stands there in the moonlight. I offer him a mug, a tea bag. He accepts and smiles as if tea or death were an exquisite pleasure. I pour his water and tell him it's been five weeks since the night my wife called me David. I kissed her breast and watched her lips as she whispered it: *Oh, David*. Her eyes bloomed with the horror of her mistake. Her cheeks turned pink, then pale green.

David? I said. Who is David?

My father's lover's ghost takes his tea with honey and sips from a *Number One Mom* mug. I ask him if my father was passionate in bed.

The ghost's gaze trails away toward the knife block and the spice rack. He sets down his tea and beckons me to follow. We walk to the back porch. Its boards squeak beneath my feet but not his.

Everything is gray in the yard—the moon, the stars, the dilapidated fence. Other silver ghosts wait out there. My grandfather, in a pale blue polyester coverall suit, plucks cherries from a branch of my wife's apple tree. My childhood dog Farrell, half mutt, half beagle, naps at my feet. My high school football coach, Butch Stuemke, stands with his burly arms wrapped around the keg of his chest, watching, waiting for me to throw a block or catch a pass, something, anything.

My father's lover's ghost puts his hand on my shoulder and presses me to sit. So I do. He sits behind me, holds me, and whispers that I am brave to go on living. I slide down a couple steps,

rest my head in his lap, and for the first time in many nights I feel myself drift toward sleep.

Did he talk about me? I ask.

He did, says the ghost.

How much?

Oh, all the time. You were the most lovable kid in the world. You were his cupid, his darling boy, his perfect little cherub.

