

GHOSTS

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It's difficult to write about love and desire, at a time where it feels that everything is permitted and yet nothing is possible. The subject/object of my affection sits across from me working as I type this— and I am distracted by his glances and the occasional clicking of the mouse. It has taken a long time to reach this point of feeling comfortable and overtly in love, of showing affection without hesitation.

After months of hasty, spontaneous meetings in various cities, I meekly admitted that my feelings for him were more than platonic.

The moments after my confession felt like sinking into an icy pond. Waiting for the familiar cooling feeling of rejection. All bodily organs shut down, the senses are dulled, the light dims.

I am much older than him.

Men are brought up to feel like they must be sexually active or actively desiring sex as much as possible, while women are conditioned to feel ashamed of their desire. The opposing expectations of one and the other are equally violent and alienating.

When women express their desires, and especially if their desires do not meet the criteria set for them by outside forces, the results are often painful, met with disgust and outcry.

I have never felt older than when comparing my age to his. I have never felt older than when telling my friends there are nine years between us, and watching their eyes widen, or ask me if I'm really being serious, or for permission to make me the butt of their lighthearted jokes from now on. I know that I will never tell my parents about him. I know that if I were a man instead of a woman, this relationship wouldn't be judged in the same way.

These are my ghosts.

Spectral yet human voices that manifest themselves and reside cozily in me now. The voices that tell me I'm immoral, that I'm wrong, I've lost my path. Deviating from the structure of expectations renders me utterly grotesque, animalistic, no longer human.

My ghosts are plenty, and they also visit the lives of others. They don't discriminate with their victims. They punish and cultivate their violence against any women who expresses herself, her true self, or what she wants.

Slowly and steadily we shall exorcise them all.