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# A Compendium of Ghosts

Jennifer Hanks

*Andrea Saunders Gereighty / Academy of American Poets Award Winner*

1.

When I get worried I make a ring of vines around our couch, and smaller ones for our wrists. I lift your shirt and tie one around your ribs, but not right under your breasts.

Sometimes I wish for them to stay, flattening themselves into pendants and shards of glass that might get in my feet.

2.

There is hissing in the house tonight. It is like the noise you make when I try to get out of the bed before you, but you aren't here.

3.

Once a ghost talked to me through you. More often they are subtle, but I keep expecting to get into bed and find it already occupied, lay down and feel like I am sinking into the deep part of a pool, the part where you know every shadow is a shark with teeth it can afford to lose in your skin.

4.

Closet ghosts, ghosts that float out of your tights when you shake them out. A ghost that talks only to cats, exerting its transparent, breathless vocal chords to produce a convincing meow.

5.

I wish I could see something else in the dark, the way I used to think of an assembly line of girls going down on me one after another while I sat in an armchair. Tonight this is too sad as if the girls and you, watching diligently and moving them along, would all be disappointed.

Why can't I hold the ghosts of what I no longer look like at bay? When I am trying to break your bed I feel them behind me, their long hair brushing against my back.

6.

The ghosts of big stars. The ones I point out to you when we are in a rare place where you can see them. The stars I think about when I'm listening to a band that claims the moon is coming for us and I think, *we will not be anonymous for ever*.

I want us to be visible from space after we die. I want our ghosts upright as wooden arrows, marking the places where our blood stopped running. Our ghosts should be solid as skeletons, made of opal bones that capture light.