

ghost girls never sleep

by Olivia Landry

we're going to have to be the ones to do it

We decorate baseball bats in our spare time. There is news in town of men breaking into women's homes at night, and the police aren't doing anything about it. We keep the baseball bats by our beds. We hold meetings in the library theatre, in circles in the grass, swatting bees and talking about how to keep each other safe. We're going to have to be the ones to do it. We memorize sunset times, watch the days get shorter. We call ourselves a *baseball bat gang*. We screen movies about girls clawing their way through high school, fighting their way out of dystopias. We stay up too late organizing protests and rewriting racist syllabi. Ghost girls never sleep anyway.

ghost girls take a night off

It's February 14th and the art show is over. We stayed sober all night and held on to each other's elbows, fiercely. We watched all our favourite professors eating fancy cheese from the sidelines, trying not to run into anyone we were hoping to avoid. You take our picture in the reflection of an art piece of framed buttons that say *party without party* in different languages. We really do look like ghosts in it, like we were never really there. It was the only picture on my desktop for a year, just you, me, and the party buttons.

It's dark and I walk you home in my black flats, quickly becoming absolutely soaked with snow. I didn't bring my hammer to the art gallery so I have nothing up my sleeve to protect me on my solo walk home. You live all the way up King Street, and tonight, for once, I feel like nothing can touch us. There's no reason for this, I've just decided it: tonight is not a night to be afraid.

I'm cold and giddy and years from now, I'll wish I could live this night over and over again. Just to relive the feeling of sharing a world with you, sharing a night where nothing went wrong, where no one got hurt, where we really knew, *we can be anything*.

most girls know

I used to send you pictures of sunsets whenever I saw them. The summer before I left town, I walked down to my old elementary school with a lump in my throat every night, sitting on the bleachers and watching the sun go down to Conan Gray's *Idle Town*. We didn't talk much that summer, but I knew you loved seeing the sunsets like I did. Sometimes you sent pictures back of sunsets you watched from your bedroom, the window screen obscuring most of the view.

Every day the sun sets earlier than the day before, did you know that? I always know the time off by heart. I spend the entire sunset wondering about when I should leave, worried about the walk home in the dark. Knowing that girls can't have routine, should always stagger things, you never know who might be noticing you. Even still, I can never make myself go home before the sunset is completely over. Every moment of it is beautiful and important and it can't

be stopped. It's stressful to watch something so temporary disappear. I always risk the dark walk home to see every minute of it.

Tonight, the grass is overgrown under my feet. It's one of the most beautiful skies I've ever seen. There's a man with a grey truck in his driveway that watched me walk down here. I've seen him before. He's sitting on his step, and I can see that instead of looking towards the sky, he's watching me. I've already memorized his address, his license plate, it was the first thing I did when I saw him come out of his house. But still, I've made all the mistakes. I walked to a dead-end road at sundown. I made a routine of it. Shouldn't I know better by now? That girl's summer clothes don't have pockets big enough for hammers, knives? Surely this won't be the time I don't make it home. I can picture the comments on news articles, the whispers between neighbours at the grocery store; *really, you'd think she would have known by now, girls aren't meant to go out by themselves at sundown.*

ghost girls never sleep

Ghost girls are late to class. Ghost girls hate the syllabus, ask for readings that reflect their experiences. Ghost girls ate all the cheese at the art gallery opening. Ghost girls have a rip in their tights. Ghost girls won't stop giggling. Ghost girls stay up too late sending song lyrics back and forth. Ghost girls can't stop crying in the library. Ghost girls keep replacing the bathroom graffiti every time it gets erased. Ghost girls know he's guilty. Ghost girls never sleep, keep baseball bats under their beds, ready, waiting, waiting.

ghost girls know the end

No one believed us. At first, we tried to explain ourselves, we laid down the map of everything that had gone wrong. We pointed to the posters in the hallway, the policies, the way bad men just kept getting shuffled around instead of thrown out. Eventually we had to stop trying. Instead, we started noticing other ghost girls crying in the library. We caught them rewriting the graffiti in the bathroom. Heard them yelling at someone who catcalled them from the sidewalk. Saw them curse and scream until the bad man left the party. *How many of us could there be?*

I used to think if I met one more ghost girl I'd scream. With each new girl, I never did. I didn't have to. All of us ghost girls already knew, there's a last time for everything.

Olivia Landry (she/her) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies from Mount Allison University (2018) and a Master of Arts in Gender Studies from Queen's University (2019). Since 2019, she has worked across Nova Scotia in the field of sexual and gender-based violence prevention. She has been a volunteer leader for Girl Guides of Canada for many years and is proud to support girls in building community and trying new things. She is from Halifax, Nova Scotia, and is grateful to live so close to family, friends, and the ocean.