

H O U S

E S

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1.

I have now turned into a person of longing. Someone who pokes their beak across the fence and sniffs the air, oh that's just lovely that is—I'd say—and then my depleted leg would swing itself over the wire fence and walk on through. Gross really and also very confusing. If only there was a way to split myself into a few me's and then perhaps, only then, I'd be content? But no, that of course is not possible. So here I am living out a sort of fantasy for a month, one where I live in the middle of nowhere in an old bank. I have a dog. I write, light fires, toughen up my drying hands and I wait. I am too young to be old, but equally, too old to be young.

I came to this place on Friday last week. It's on the west coast of New Zealand, in what was once a thriving wee town. The old bank is now my friend's house. Its walls have changed many times over the years. There is a life to the wood lined walls, ceilings and floors that encapsulates my imagination. Each night I battle with being both afraid and intoxicated with this space. The dark, the middle of nowhere dark, absorbs me and my thoughts. The distant sounds of the highway become my only thread to life's continuum. Somewhere so much is happening, but not here. The slow, certain unravelling of myself, before the ghosts of this place is undeniable. I leave the kitchen lights on throughout

the night. I open and close my eyes 40 times before I finally drift off to sleep. In the morning I set about my daily tasks. How suddenly one's actions can become a daily routine, if only for a short while. How long justifies what a routine is? One week? A month? Years? I am always glad to see the beckon of some end. There's a strain of unnaturalness that I feel in routine. Aristotle wrote, 'We are what we repetitively do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit' or arguably it was Durant who also phrased this. Either way, as I sit here writing this I am starting to question my excellence. By snubbing routine does this in some way make me not excellent? I feel that something is perhaps broken within me, because I have such a reluctance towards routine. The world, of course, is always changing. So, with this in mind perhaps routine is a very human way of trying to control something we can't? New Zealand feels like routine to me, it always has. The ease in which everything is executed here is quite seductive. But sometimes, I don't want to feel like I'm in control.

2.

The benefits of being truly alone were difficult to attain, despite having taken myself out and away from the things I am accustomed to or absorbed by. I found that I was still seeking this chamber in which so-called loneliness lived. I so wanted to feel lonely, what is in there? I wanted to mine deep

for this. I would walk for hours on the wild sandy beaches and the sensation of someone or something was always with me. The success of being truthfully alone never came. Perhaps, this was just indicative of being back in New Zealand? Everyone knows everyone, right? The ocean recognises me, that gull, those cliffs, *hey look it's Aimee's cousin*. Or perhaps, it's just that wherever you are in New Zealand there seems to be a presence of something indefinable.

Each morning he came to the house and each morning I panicked slightly. Not because he was someone to fear, but more that I had to prepare for conversation outside of the cave of my thoughts. You could already see the way his mouth was going to age. The lips had started to ardently pull back on themselves, hugging the teeth. It was the Judas to his body, an indicator that he had lived, spoken many times in his life, eaten many meals and perhaps kissed a lot of bodies. I could imagine the old man inside of him struggling, at times successfully, to take over any youthful past or future he might have still possessed. With his gibbous back already leading him into 'old man' territory, I could see this also happening within myself. My neck, my friend's faces, the way my Mother now holds her body as she walks.

When it comes to interacting with older men I sometimes find myself asking them mindless questions. This is to fill in the void of where I am poised, uncomfortable, wanting to leave and probably going red in the face—a terrible 'high colour' that my sister and I both experience. This question asking to men, only serves to make an appearance of my being potentially ignorant. My own polite dismal of being an equal. Seriously, I think I have the automated manners of someone from the 1950s sometimes, it disturbs me. Yet perhaps, unwholesomely, I enjoy the curious ways in which the man in question will interact with me in these deflating moments. Sometimes, it's as though I've complimented him. Or told him that *yes, yes you are so very wise and right about all the things*—he leaves with loud applause, the clapping slowing down more and more until it becomes just skin smashing upon skin. Another story or thing well explained, bravo. When really, I have barely been listening, the whole trickery. It's awful and it is the kind of trickery I used whilst growing up with my father, because I felt I

had to. I was never given the unconditional ear of having anything interesting to say. Instead things were constantly explained to me, even the basics. Naturally, I learnt to tune out to this and began to accept that men in all their explaining, were in fact ignorant to the fact that I already knew. In any case, it is difficult to deploy this 'act' of listening and questioning. The end of my feeling uncomfortable around men is unfortunately, never ending. Despite having wonderful, caring, trustful male friends, the urge to lie to or disconnect from men for my own self-preservation is always simmering with new acquaintances.

3.

Evenings were the hardest. Once the routine of feeding myself and attaining any mouth pleasures was complete, I would shyly find myself in front of the TV watching anything that would make me feel, well, nothing. I repeatedly told myself that I couldn't see anything out of the corner of my eye. Then, find that I would be speaking out loud, telling something to *fuck off* or *oh my god stop it!*

When I was about 6 years old, I took it upon myself to camp down in the lower part of our property. The grassy patch I pitched up on was on a hill and quite far from the house and also quite far from my parents. It's possible you might have heard someone yelling from there, but I'm not sure. Anyway, once the tent was ready—I assume a parent did that part—I moved my soft toys down there and lined them up inside the tent. That night I went to bed when it was still light outside. It was summertime and as always in New Zealand, a bit windy. The birds were all softly saying their goodnights to one another and I went to sleep mildly terrified. I knew I had to see the night out. I had to brave being down there in the garden on my own. With no one but Angelina the mouse, Big Ted, a 'My Child' and a few other odd characters from my toy collection with me. I was scared. I'd done this to myself. I didn't have to be there. This was my own personal challenge. When I woke up in the morning, I was dead. Of course I wasn't, I was actually completely fine. In fact I was more than fine, I was happy and felt like I had proved to myself that I could go anywhere. That I was brave. Maybe even braver than my brother.

I often think of this time and wonder what possessed me to do such a thing? How did my parents feel about my doing this? I was so young, it was an odd request for something for a seven-year-old girl to do, as what, entertainment? I think of my bravery and again this search for isolation, that I was seeking then and wonder, if it was a way of setting myself up as an adult? It was the beginning of equipping myself for leaving this island. Leaving New Zealand for London felt as though I was coming from a beautiful kind of naivety. Sadly, at times I headed into a world of darkness. With no one but make pretend friends, like spectators around the tent. And now I live alone, in the middle of nowhere, with no one but a dog for company. Something keeps waking me in the night.

4.

Being back in rural NZ brings back memories that I'd not considered for a long time. One of which, is when I was 10 years old and my family and I moved to the outskirts of Dunedin city, to a place called East Taieri. I went to a country primary school there. I loved it, made friends fast and gobbled up country school life easily, perhaps because of the small numbers in the classrooms. Anyway, one friend I made there was a girl with straight blonde hair. She would've had a name like Verity or Elizabeth or something. Her parents were wealthy from selling new cars. Their house was built like a mansion. A classic styled house made by people who had a concept of what wealth looked like. Much like Romania with the fancy mansion houses there, where the family lives in one room and the rest of the house is empty but perfect. Maybe I don't really know what I am referring to there, looking online I see I know nothing, isn't that just always the way. Anyway, one day I went to my new friend's mansion house. I was very impressed with the driveway, the open foyer space as you came in the front door and especially the pool house. So impressed was I that I decided I also wanted this, so I drew it. Well I didn't draw that exact one, but I spent the next few weeks drawing blueprints for the kinds of houses I wanted to live in when I grew up. I told my Mum during this time that I thought I might want to be an architect. She swiftly squashed this dream saying that if a person wanted to do that job, they had to be good at maths. I was terrible

at maths, hated it even. So at some point I stopped drawing.

On my 30th birthday I was living in my friend's basement in South East London. Their Victorian house, which was an old cooperative, was undergoing a paint job. It had scaffolding all around it which meant you could climb up onto the roof, three stories high. One afternoon I took a lover up there and fucked him awkwardly against the brick chimney. I felt as though I was winning at life. Later, he said he loved me. I had slept with three people in one week, this had never happened before. One of these people was much older than me and lived in an old bomb shelter down the road on a street called 'Friendly Street'. He was pretty friendly, but I didn't want him either.

My relationship to uncertainty incites the feeling to masturbate. It's like, the uncertainty of relationships is the only thing that gets me engaged in a way that makes me feel completely present, completely fixed. Perhaps, this is also one of the many reasons why I left New Zealand for so long. The sure uncertainty that you can feel from being in a different country, or anywhere but here, was very appealing to me. London has a wonderfully disturbing way of changing its face constantly. Just when you think you have figured it out, everything lapses into a different flavour altogether, I am ravenous for this. This lack of routine and predictability feels 'safer' to me than knowing what is laid out before me each day. I want to excel in change or more; I want to readily accept metamorphosis.

My inclination for contrasts meant squatting agreed with my initial needs when moving to London. The various old houses, warehouses, old churches and buildings, half decayed and without walls, were all vacuumed up by my imagination and bought into the reality of my life. I loved exploring these spaces that had been abandoned or disregarded by the dead and the wealthy. Living in central Soho in an old 17th century church was one of the most disruptive, amazing times of my life. It was the first of the many disused buildings that I came to inhabit over the next 2 years. The joy of figuring out the ways and means to support oneself, whilst pirouetting on the line of the law was difficult and for the most part super exciting. Three months in a zone 1 building, usually meant a mild success for those

occupying the place. Occasionally, we would go to court and present ourselves with fake names, it was a lot of fun and at no stage was money ever crossing hands. Sophie Shirley would have a lot of fines and things to answer for, had she been a real person.

5.

Why is it that some hours of the night are considered 'scarier' than others? Say 3am or 4am is potentially terrifying. Whereas at 8pm on a dark winter's night, not so much? Even though the whole blinded night is before you. Or dusk... maybe dusk is scary?

I had a friend called Dusk when I was a kid. Our Mothers were friends, so therefore we had no real choice in the matter. I remember being at her house and collecting ants in a jar. We'd make a little home for them, full of leaves and bits of twigs. A true likeness, we thought, to their actual home. As if they might not realise that they now lived in a glass prison. We would accidentally feed them too much raw sugar. By morning they would've turned into little shrivelled crescents and have died. Sometimes, there might be one or two survivors stumbling about in circles utterly traumatised and stoned on sugar. We never quite managed to monitor how much sugar was too much. My friend and I felt remorse at the loss of lives, yet we would continue with our mission of trying to make these ants our pets. Sometimes I feel as though I am also stumbling around traumatised and stoned, not on sugar, but on the knowledge of all various lives and jars that I could be living in.

Another game we used to play was called 'Mum's and Dad's'. It consisted of pretending to have sex. This was done by lying naked upon each other and kissing with our mouths wide open, like way too open. We'd have arguments about who was going to be on top. Neither of us wanted to be on the bottom, because that meant getting a mouth full of spit. I'm not really sure if either of us really enjoyed this game. We knew we weren't meant to do it because we kept it as our secret. We didn't quite comprehend as to why we would maybe get in trouble for playing this game. My friend lived with her mum who was an academic and used to brush my hair until it hurt. I have thought that perhaps Dusk and I played this game as an attempt to make a family,

like the ultimate dolls game. For many years after this game I felt a deep shame and embarrassment for having played such a game. I still haven't quite placed it, I was so young and obviously it was a long time ago. For a while, it made me question my sexuality, which is a good thing for any person to do. She is now married and has children. It's strange because in some ways that is what was expected of us as children. To grow up and become a parent and someone's partner for life, oh and live in a house a lovely, lovely house.

I am going to go over the fence with my beak and fading leg. The air changes and the wind kicks up. I know I'll be headed over another paddock and another soon. Docking into places for long or short whiles. What is it to lay ones head down and sleep and call that resting place a home. I wanted to swim, so I went to the beach and did so. An hour later as I drove away from the beach I wanted to swim again.