

## ELIZABETH STREET APPORTS

The first afternoon when they entered the Elizabeth Street house, it was K., her mother, and her grandmother. K's mother had been given the key by her boyfriend the night before he left to return to his teaching job in Northern Ontario. In K.'s memory, he never once came into that house while they lived there, and no one had been inside the house for at least five years.<sup>1</sup> This is important to remember. The house was unnaturally unruly. The smell that poured over them when they stood in the entry foyer was not as offensive as it could have been. The air was stale with subtle undertones of sickness. Past the foyer, straight ahead, they entered a living room. To the right was a bright red door. This was the first portal they were compelled to open, beckoned by its emergency hue.<sup>2</sup> Behind the door was a closet containing the angled backside of the staircase. It was quite cavernous, the size of a small bedroom. K.'s mother pulled a cotton string to trigger the hanging bulb overhead. This room, compared to others, smelled fresh. The smell of sweet dough and eggs and butter wafted toward the trio. There were two card tables set up alongside one wall. Their tops were lined with baked goods.

Nothing was moldy. K.'s mother reached out without pause and ran her finger through the frosting on a white cake, stopping short at bringing it to her lips. Everything was beautifully arranged. Artificial flowers surrounded platters of cookies and tiered

---

<sup>1</sup> E593.3. *If no lamp is lighted in a house for a period of fourteen days, ghosts take it for their dwelling*. India: Thompson-Balys; The Stith Thompson *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* allows for the classification of folktale motifs across cultures. Rooted in the structural (some would say reductionist) approach to the study of folklore, this system implies that, while the content of stories may shift over time and geographic location, their function remains somewhat static. I have applied this framework onto the semi-autobiographical vignettes that appear throughout this book as a way to neutralize my own narrative against more fantastical stories, to heighten meaning, and to make jokes; see Thompson, Stith. *The Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-58).

<sup>2</sup> E599.11. *Locked doors open at touch of ghosts*. India: Thompson-Balys.

cakes on polished silver risers. The cake's icing was fresh, like it had been spackled earlier in the day. K's mother touched a pyramid of chocolate cookies and jumped back in shock, declaring they were warm to the touch. The prospect of eating all of these desserts excited 8-year-old K. But her mother backed out of the room with a look of confused horror. She forced K. and her grandmother to follow. K. found this upsetting. What were they going to do about all of those treats? "Throw them out," her mother said, definitely. She was convinced they were a trap, a test laid out by a vengeful spirit in waiting.<sup>3</sup> There could be no other explanation for their freshness. The contents on both tables—pounds and pounds of hand-baked goods—were some of the first things that went into black trash bags and out onto the curb. They lived in the house for six months, but it felt much longer. K. often wondered if the house would have acted more amicably if they had partaken in its offerings.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> F473.6.3. *Spirit leaves food in table or cupboard*. England, Wales: \*Baughman.

<sup>4</sup> Z13.4 (j) >> (Man chased by coffin, which follows him)