



Ogham Antennas

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This is what I know: A text brought my wife to an old rail warehouse where she was locked in. She breathed too much smoke, and the folder she had and the contents of that folder were reduced to ash. And then I found her again. As a ghost frozen in bits and bytes.

Leisha had been tall, and she had thin, delicate fingers, and this was how I knew it was her in the window on my computer screen. Her curls reached the top of the frame, and she held one hand on top of the other, thumb pressing knuckle, at the apex of her ribs.

A subtle sign of unease, the thumb pressing the knuckle. I don't know how long Catherine, my reporting partner, had been standing at my desk.

"Find something?"

I withdrew from the screen. I was supposed to be researching a story. I tilted the screen so she could see.

"What am I looking at?"

"This," I said, pointing to the second story of a squat building. "What do you think Leisha's doing in this office park in Atlanta?"

Catherine appeared blunted, a bent nail. She looked again.

"Go home," she told me. "I mean that in the nicest way."

I followed the letter of Catherine's words, though not the spirit. I went home to pack.

I was an editor at the *Smythville Sentinel* in upstate New York. Leisha had been deputy vice president of finance for a major fracking concern. She had told me about some kind of shell game happening with her firm's finances. Rumor around the newsroom was that her CEO was going to run for Congress. This was newsworthy.

We were having dinner, salmon, when I told her that I'd had to pass along the tip and that Catherine would be in touch for documentation, strictly on deep background. Leisha forked a piece of salmon and made figure eights through a sheen of lemon vinaigrette. She shook her head and looked toward the hutch where we kept the holiday china. On top of the hutch was a pewter frame with a picture of us at a lake somewhere in the northeast kingdom, knit hats and toothy grins and deep sparkling blue.

I packed, and early the next morning I drove from Hartsfield-Jackson to the office park. Behind the squat building there was a lot and an entrance

with shattered double doors. The building had been abandoned sometime after Google had captured it.

I reached through and unlocked the doors. Inside, it looked as if everyone had simply gotten up and gone to lunch. The cooler still had a few inches of water in it. There were printed pages in the tray of the printer. A pen in a white coffee mug on the reception desk had a fuzzy pink creature on it. But, looking again, there were no family pictures, and everything had a thick layer of fine dust. Then something rumbled up the drive: a bulldozer. Now a backhoe. Two dump trucks. The vehicles stopped on the gray, baked asphalt, weeds growing from the cracks.

The demolition crew stood at their vehicles, scratching their heads, until one of them approached me. For a man with such enormous forearms he proved to be very patient.

"Hello there," I said. His wet eyes searched me. I caught a faint perfume of witch hazel. "What are you doing?"

He looked back at the men and the vehicles. "What are *you* doing?"

"I'm protesting," I said.

"You are?"

"This is an historic building."

"This building was built in 1998."

"It's of historic significance to me."

"I don't want to call the police. My guys are just trying to do their jobs."

"I believe my wife was here. She died. I'd like to know why she was here."

"I'm sorry. What do you want?"

"I'd like to go upstairs."

He motioned for one of his men to come over.

"Give him your hat," he said. "Can we be pretty quick about this?"

"Depends," I said. "It should just take a minute."

My tennis shoes left tracks in the dust on the stairs. The foreman followed close behind. Upstairs, the rows of desks looked like government surplus. Each had a gray metal frame with a pressed wood top and four drawers. The first three drawers of the desk at Leisha's window held little of interest. A stapler, sticky notes, a stress ball.

"You don't clear a place out before you destroy it?"

I picked up and put down the office items.

"We'll clear it out," the foreman said.

The last drawer appeared empty. But stuck in a crevice toward the back I found a paystub. I blew dust off the desk and flattened the paystub so I could read it.

"That what you're looking for?"

The name and address on the paystub were foreign to me.

"Yep, this is it," I said. I folded the paper and put it in my pocket.

"Thanks a lot."

I looked out at the road where the Google car had passed some time ago.

"We need to get out of here," the foreman said. "Let these guys do their jobs."

I watched from my rental car as the crew streamed in. The paystub in my pocket was as valuable as a leftover peso. I squinted for glimpses inside, but the building's windows were black, reflective, and impossible to see through.

I recalled a conversation I'd had with a detective. She told me the police were investigating the fire. She said the law wouldn't care much about me pushing Leisha to blow the whistle. "As far as we're concerned you've done nothing wrong," she said, as if acknowledging the possibility that I was guilty of something outside her jurisdiction.

No charges were filed.

Days passed after I returned from Atlanta. I finally opened my eyes to the clarity of a mellow fever. I was on the floor of my study, and my cheeks were sticky. An orange glow had thickly settled throughout the room. My lips tasted salty. Scribbles overflowed from the oak writing desk that Leisha and I had picked up from an antique furniture store in central Pennsylvania. The desk had been our wedding present to each other. Against the wall a yellow newspaper was curled in the pose of a child disinclined to share a secret that very much wanted to be told. I wondered whether I ought to ever move again.

I placed the newspaper in a metal waste bin, took the bin outside, and held a lit match to the newspaper's edge. I changed my mind and waved the paper through the air. Ashen bits twirled and fell. On the page there remained the rail warehouse being consumed. There remained the bare facts, Catherine's words, a code of unintelligible characters, Ogham antennas. As always, there was one name that cut through the printed noise with its own light and clarity: Nick Jessup, then-CEO of a certain major fracking concern in Smythville.

I knew something about the habits of Senator Jessup (D-NY). He hardly slept. First to arrive. Last to leave. Many evenings I myself arrived at his upstate office. At a time when he would be alone. When the Senate was not in session. Perhaps the day before a holiday. Just time to catch up on a few things. The black handle of a large kitchen knife sticking from my pocket. Purple nitrile gloves. "Hello there. What are you doing?"

The acts that follow will remain a silent letter in an unpublished word.

Catherine called seventeen times before I went to her apartment.

She held the door for me. Fred Rogers was mid shoe-change on her television. Her soft brown blanket was falling off the back of her couch. An empty bag of ruffled potato chips crept across the floor in the breeze from the standing fan she kept running.

"Have you been crying?"

"Come in," she said. "I was watching the Mister Rogers documentary." I sat on a stool at the bar that separated her kitchen from her living room.

"Is it good?"

"I mean, I'm crying. Do you want wine or something?"

"I don't think so," I said. "Are you having some?"

Catherine poured two glasses. She took a gulp.

"You didn't call the police did you?"

"Almost," she said.

"How long was I out?"

"A week this time."

"Sorry for just showing up. So how have you been?"

Her eyes traced the lines of her refrigerator, down to the floor and up again.

"There was nothing to it," I said. "I don't think Leisha set foot in Georgia in her life."

She ran her finger in a deviant circle through baguette crumbs on the counter.

"My offer is still there for you," she said. "Think about it."

"Maybe I'll think about it."

"This is what we do. We solve puzzles. With facts."

"I know. I'll think about it."

"I have to pee," she said. She put back the rest of her wine.

I thought of Catherine in the bathroom, performing the routine she liked to follow before we would come together in darkness. She removes her makeup with a premoistened wipe. She splashes her face with cold water. She pats dry with a white towel. She swishes with golden antiseptic mouthwash. This time she catches herself in the mirror, half-moon sickles slicing her brown irises, and wonders if she's crazy. We have not been asking the same questions. The truth, as a binary proposition, does not matter to me anymore. It has not mattered to me for a while. When she returns I'm a streak of smoke passed out of sight.

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