

ANTIQUITY

By Laren Grey

I stood there as still as possible, but the old boards still creaked under my feet. I could sense one other person somewhere there because of the boards creaking on the other end, although I saw no one. Rows of fluorescent lights hummed above me like angels, some soft white, some pale yellow. They were newer, only forty years old and floating beneath a tin ceiling that was over a hundred years old and caked in lead-based paint. A small radio played at the furthest corner. The static laced melody of a Duran Duran song echoed from the back wall. I thought maybe radio signals had weakened over the years. With a fingertip I touched the smooth wooden handle of a ball-peen hammer jutting out of the treasures and it shocked me, making the static disappear from the distant radio. I knew that somewhere near that radio an old lady was meditating and waiting. I don't know what she was waiting for. Maybe she was waiting for the end, maybe the beginning, but maybe she was waiting for now. Her days are as long as her life. It is amazing how long an empty life can be. If only I could harness that time and apply it to my busy ways. Around me was a carousel of characters coming to life. The ball-peen hammer swayed. Salt shakers and bowls that I recognized from my childhood began to swirl. Marbled green and yellow wrapped around their white shell, and the taste of Cap'n Crunch and milk seeped across my tongue. It was good milk back then, thick milk. I don't think cows secrete milk like that anymore. The swirling bowls and dancing hammer seemed to stir some curiosity, as now the lamp lit up and several rainbow trout swam around its shade, even though the plug was dangling from a mahogany bench, unplugged, adorned with a price tag that fluttered. To my left a seagull soared, a wooden seagull with a metal rod in its belly. Somehow it soared while stuck to its mount, and it stuck me to a pebbled beach and put brine and mud in my nose. I could feel the rod in my belly as I looked down at the lines of one-inch waves that repeated like a perfect metronome. I could see the sun drop from the sky as a red oil lamp glowed. In the middle of a stack of books was a book I once read, a James Bond novel called Goldfinger. The books smelled like fermented pulp and dust from the wings of moths. I could even smell the old mustard glue hidden behind their spines. On the floor in an old box, newsletters archived the entire history of the American west. Dusty towns were in there. Dreams never found were in there. Death was in there. Starvation was in there. The only thing that kept it from drying up completely and blowing away was the tears of Natives. Blood drained from my face. I felt as if I had lost many brothers and sisters. I thought of all the friends that were never born because of human atrocities. At this moment, a buffalo drum on the wall began thumping, and it matched my heart. I could still feel the floor creaking beneath my feet, now silent, drowned out by the memories. Back-dropped by the years of blue skies painted on the plaster wall, with cotton clouds slipping by unnoticed. Warmed by the glow from the chrome toaster. Wrapped in an old leather belt that still smelled like the palms of a craftsman. Dizzy from the copper compass spinning; every direction was true north, south, east, and west all at once. Led by the old clock that ticked and tocked backwards at different speeds. Comforted by the menagerie placed here by a ghost or some burgundy and brass Victorian time machine. A hundred years had gathered into one minute and everything vibrated. Soon enough there was only one motionless item: a mirror against the far wall. Within it was stillness, a timeless artifact present in the now, with gray disappearing from its beard and white leaving its hair and wrinkles softening from its eyes. I stood there in the mirror, reversed, going backwards in time, and I could hear nothing but the old boards creaking beneath my feet.