



## **MY SISTER'S FOOT IS HAUNTED**

**Written and Illustrated by  
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**S**HE WEARS A red sock to keep it quiet. Every morning, Mother brings her a new red sock and Sister takes off the old one and says, “You get one thing.” The foot makes demands.

At first, it’s nothing, really. Lotion and a fan. A massage, a tickle. Sand.

“Easy enough,” Mother says, and we load up in her busted sedan.

At the beach, Sister removes the red sock and buries the foot like treasure. “Leave us,” she says. And they get to talking.

After thirty minutes of sweating and squinting under the bald sun, Mother hands me a Coke she’d brought along in her purse and tells me to take it to Sister. She pronounces soda *so-tha*.



“Coke, Mother. Just say Coke.”

With a firm hand on my back, she pushes me away, into the salty wind that stings the mosquito bites where I’ve scratched them raw, over to Sister who sits in the frothy tide. The incoming waves curdle around that greedy foot.

It’s just a foot. You’d never know it was haunted except that if you look close, rose-gold light emanates from within.

“Mother is complaining,” I say. “And I need to get back to cook dinner. You know he’ll be mad if I’m gone again.”

Sister looks up. “You’re a good wife, Louisa.”

Then she stands and dusts the ass of her flimsy summer dress and takes the Coke from me. A passing jogger, a glistening man

without a shirt, stares at her, his head twisting as he runs past. But I don't let her affect me.

"You're all wet," I say. "You'll make a mess in the car."

"Thank you," she says, and looks me in the eye. This is what makes her the worst. No one can hear the foot's demands but her. We are taking her word for it because of who she is. Poor little almost-widow severed from her poor little almost-husband who died from a quick-strange illness. Look at how she cares for her mother even though she hurts. No one feels a thing for you once you're married off.

"I'm pregnant," I say.

"Stop lying about that."

I dig the toe of my chancla in the sand. "What's it want?"

"To drive home."

"Well, we're going. Come on."

Sister stares out at the car. "For me to put him on the pedal. To push him down."

"So it's a man," I say.

It's the first time I worry.



The next morning, I'm at Mother's house when the red sock comes off, and she produces a faded shabby-pink replacement. Mother calls socks *sock-a-tins*, an embarrassing combination of English and Spanish.

"Choose one," I tell her. "No one—"

“A bowl of Fritos.” Sister interrupts me.

“It wants to eat?” Mother says.

“He says it’s for me.” And Sister smiles.

As Mother puts the fresh sock on, we realize the foot is nearly the same bubble-gum color. Its light has lost its golden happy hue. When Sister presses her finger to the skin, it turns corpse white. She winces. “Are you okay?” she yells, as though the foot is deaf.

Mother shoos me out of the room to get the Fritos. In her daughters she has cultivated a cursed love for Fritos and cream cheese. I bring the little white tub for good measure. Opening the bag and the tub, I eat the first creamy scoop on the first salty chip. “In case these are haunted, too,” I say through my chewing.



Sister eats real slow, crunches minimally because the foot has gone silent. Ever since she ate the peach I brought home from the little witch, that foot hasn’t shut up. What’s it got to be so quiet about now?

**T**he love of a sister is volatile. It can spoil unexpectedly. But who’s to say that even then it’s not love?

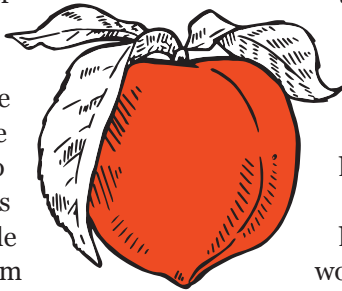
I washed the peach and sat it whole on a plate.

Sister loved her fiancé because he was as good as her. That’s

enough to doom anyone. I'd warned her about their goodness, reminded her that sugar rots teeth. Even showed her my silver fillings to drive the point home. I knew she would have done anything for him. She would have been powerless all her life. And that's no way to marry.

I balanced the rolling peach on the plate all the way to her room. Sometimes she slept the whole day in her dusky room full of body smell.

When her fiancé died of a quick-strange illness, I hadn't expected her to be so gross. She was supposed to snap back to herself, her clean kind self. It wasn't like her, this unwashed helplessness. So, a few months



after he died, I'd gone to the witch and asked for a spell in a peach like any concerned sister would. How was I to know the spell would sink in her body, down through her heart and stomach and womb, down through one leg, and lodge itself in one foot? How was I to know the foot would instantly glow with love for her?

That, I should have known. Look at the world looking at Sister.

Yes, that I should have known.

"The peach is blessed," I said.  
"Got it from the little witch."

Sister sat up. "Curandera."

"Fine. Healer."

Even in the dark, at her lowest, Sister's beauty was so thick it

suffocated me. She needed protection from herself.

I raised the peach to her lips. “Open up.”

And I guess because she was so sad, she did.

The foot and sister grow close. A couple weeks after she eats the peach, she stops sleeping so much. She cooks for Mother. She brings me and my husband pecan pies from the grocery store and the packs of watermelon gum I like. All of the foot’s demands are meant for her now. Bubble baths and cakes and kittens that tickle the foot with their velcro tongues. Sister grows fat, spoiled, more like me. But she also limps

happily, favoring the culprit.

This morning I’ve snuck into Mother’s to borrow milk and witness the removal of the red sock, only to find the foot is purple, nearly black.

“It’s choking,” Sister says. She looks as though she might cry, her lips tightening in their corners. I try not to smile.

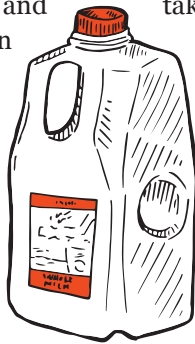
Mother says, “Ay,” and grabs hold of my arms. Then she sees her milk jug in my hands. She takes it from me, scolding me with squinted eyes.

“What?” I say.

“It’s choking,” Sister says. “But it wants...”

Mother sets the milk on the table and takes Sister’s hand. “Qué quiere?”

“What does it want?” I say slowly, eyeing Mother



and snatching up the milk again. Sister wraps a delicate hand around the foot. Her nails are painted red, too. “It wants an axe.”

I barge into the witch’s shop. “What did you do?” I demand.

Her customers step aside as if I’m the haunted sister. I steal the money-candle and Virgin Mary statue from their hands and shake them in my fists. The shop is located in the corner of a strip mall. Nothing sacred about it.

“You believe this dog-fart of a woman?” I say. “Money and prayer? Idiots.”

The witch watches me from behind her counter. She’s small but built like the trunk of a tree, all muscle, no fat, like she’s better than us. Despite her

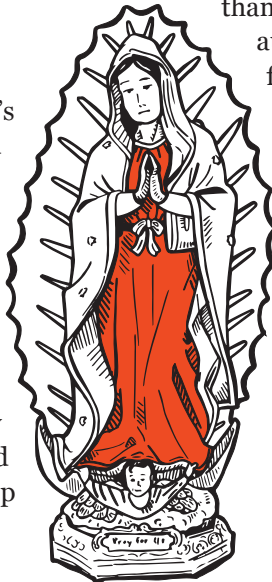
authority, the customers flee, the door’s electronic bell pealing in their wake. I set the candle and statue on the counter, straighten my dress, and say, “What did you sell me?”

“What you asked for,” she says. “A lowering of standards, no?”

“To match me, not to be haunted.”

“You are haunted, ’jita.”

“Don’t ‘daughter’ me.” I grind my teeth and reach for the candle



and statue again.

The witch scoops them up and sets them out of my reach. “Your sister falls for a foot. You don’t think that standard is low enough?”

“Who did you put in the peach?”

The witch pulls a dry rag from behind the register and wipes the glass counter between us. “You’re a dark heart, Louisa. So dark, you never saw it coming.”

I lean forward and spread my hands on the glass. “It’s stuck in her foot. It wants an axe. What the hell kind of ghost gets stuck?”

The witch throws the rag at me and points at the counter. Then she steps out the back door of her shop. I wipe the glass but watch the door. She returns carrying an eight-pound maul, its handle as red as Sister’s newest sock.

“Do as it asks,” she says, “and all will be forgiven.”

“Really?”

“By me,” she says. “Not sure how you’ll make it up to your sister.”



**M**other says she won’t do it because, as a mother, you swear to never harm your children.

“Physically,” I clarify.

She makes her mouth into a knot.

The axe sits on its head in Mother’s kitchen. Its red handle rises to my belly button. I can



only lift it by making my entire body a muscle. Mother and I stand around it while Sister sits with her foot raised on a chair. Mother pronounces Ch like Sh and Sh like Ch. *Shair* for chair, *chame* for shame. As in, *For chame, Louisa.*

“You do it,” Sister says to me, her eyes large and wet.

Nobody mentions my husband. He’s always at work, and besides, I can already hear it. *What have you done now, Louisa?*

“I can’t,” I say.

The foot bulges like the belly of a worm-ridden dog. There is no light left in it. It’s oily and black, some pupa shifting within. And I hear it. It’s Almost-Husband’s voice, that low timbre even lower now, rattling at the back of my throat. *You did this, Louisa. You. Now fix it.*

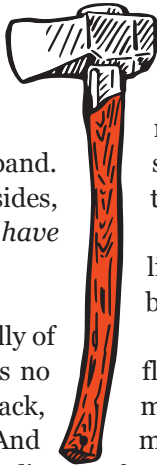
“Do you forgive me?” I say.

“I do,” Sister says, even though I wasn’t talking to her.

And she looks me in the eye and it’s so horrible I muscle up the maul and swing it over my head like a red rainbow and sever the foot at the ankle. Everyone in the room screams, and the screams turn into cold light that blinds us.

When we quiet, when the light recedes, oh, you wouldn’t believe.

That a foot can become a flesh-and-blood man, a much-loved man, a too-good man, a fiancé months dead from a quick-strange illness that was really just poisoning that was really just mushrooms in a soup that was really just generous cooking by... me.



Everyone is so happy, no one cares that Sister's foot is gone for good. That righteous witch would tell me to consider this satisfaction and forgiveness all rolled into one. But my sister is made up of many parts, and I love her too much to quit. ♦



