

Potato Head

by stephen hastings-king

I weighted her so she would be suspended in the water. Sometimes late at night I would go down to the edge and listen to her bump against the filtration system. The sound she made was soft and low like a strange drum.

The water system is a non-place: no-one goes near there so long as the water flows. And this is a small town so no-one is awake late at night except me.

When I checked the reservoir I included special tests so I could detect her fingerprints and facial features drifting through the drinking water like ghosts.

When they found her they had no idea who she was or how long she had been there. I continued with my rounds and tests but stopped going by the filters to hear the drumming.

On TV they say that disappearance is different in these days, that each one undermines what anchors and protects and that the only thing worse is a reappearance of someone who has been forgotten, whose disappearance has disappeared.

Commercial interests sponsored forensic reconstructions and arranged for them to appear on news and other tabloid shows along with a voice that said: Do you know her? Do you know her? Does she speak to you?

What someone looks like is a range of possibilities, some of which can make you cocky so you mouth off in the wrong place at the wrong time. But I only knew her for a little while. In my mind, she is an outline or a shape in general like a mountain.

I drank her ghosts so she is forgotten. Nothing has happened because nothing can. I watched her reconstruction become a separate thing. The TV crews started to call her Potato Head, just like I did.

