Homecoming

‘Science is a differential equation, religion is a boundary condition’ Alan Turing

The room is smaller than it was, since last time I visited here. Perhaps my bones crept that last few centimetres taller, my line on the kitchen wall if measured now will be taller than Joes, although in my own house I have long since ceased caring about such things. Perhaps too it is my eyes now facing forward and ahead, instead of before when they would not look above the floor. The ceiling is bound to slip closer to the ground, the room become smaller, when my shoulders, once sloping, became perpendicular.

Although the wood is older, the furniture has not moved. Beneath the ornate curtains, still sits the chintzy armchair. The bookshelves are as full of the classics that they always were, and I am sure as unread as they always were. On the dark wood desk, sit the same family photos that there had always been, and before the old classics new ones are added: Tommy's little girl at five months old, Joe's new wife pregnant and happy, Lucy on her wedding day every inch the blushing bride.

Tommy's girl must be twelve now, her pudgy face given form, her personality developed and her opinion ready to be shouted from the rooftops- screamed from one side of the house to another. Did Joe's Beth have twins that pregnancy- it has been so long since I have returned, so long since I loved and was loved. I wonder if Tommy's little girl- Martha, Mary, Molly, I cannot recall her name- possesses the dark eyes and hair of Tommy and I, or the blonde common to my mother, and her own.

I cannot find her older, photographed and identified in my father's spiky hand her name and age, and the date of taking. Surely she must be somewhere in my father's shrine to his lovely children and lovely wife. Their shining glories, moonlike, to him exist only to reflect his own achievements. Here is a layer of holiday photos painstakingly printed and framed: Lucy blonde and tanned on the top of a hill, her blond tanned husband behind her, Tommy and Joe younger, sixteen perhaps, playing football on the sand of a foreign beach domestic enough that everyone spoke English. One family holiday that they all took together, a photo opportunity taken, carefully chosen for my absence.

I would not have returned, if I could have chosen it. Would not have returned but for those people who called me a monster, for what I had done.

Even within the multitude of burnished frames, Tommy’s eldest still remains unseen. There are two little boys of eight: toffee hair and toffee noses, freckles dotting their sleeves but not their faces. Beth must have had twins then- they take from her the shape of her bones, the bend of her smile. Here sit mother and father in the garden Tommy and Joe playing together outside like bear-cubs, Lucy a sloth in mother's lap. Tommy aged by life and pain
with a boy I assumed was his stand together. Their poses match- younger copying elder in perfect form.

Tucked into the corner- a holy baptism, Joe’s little twins squirming in the church’s white. I have never liked the church on the corner that we returned and returned to. Inside the windows were always too high- Jesus brave and masculine blocking my view of the outside world. It’s funny, knowing what I know now- if they’d known what the sour-faced child would become would they had let her in, or would I have been abandoned at the door- a heathen? Would I have been baptised there, had my confirmation there tongue tripping over my promise to the lord. They will not bury me there.

Where is that photo- is Tommy’s little girl less loved too? Is she able to disappear within the cracks like I did? They tried that before, out of sight out of mind, and I was so unseen. It was lonely in that big house for a little girl who thought so different to Tommy or Lucy or Joe. Was that the problem, that I was so different?

I scratch my toe across the wooden floor. Why was it here that I sought protection? Here, where I have not returned to in many years? If my father was still alive I would not have come- and if I did, I would have been turned away at the door. Yet this is now some temporary sanctuary, where I can wait until. I do not yet know what I should wait here until, until the men of God change their minds about my wickedness? Wait as long as Galileo?

It’s funny. A church is where you used to go to escape persecution.

It all goes back to here; this house, these walls. This room was shut, for children and animals and all the riff-raff. Would he in this his room, our father if he knew then what would be, let me in? Even the children and the cats were let in on special occasions. Would he have judged me less than sticky fingered children, less than cats? I am here now- but not with his blessing, but rather his ignorance. He is dead after all, and I am still alive.

Maybe the room isn’t smaller, maybe it has always been this small. I was young when I left my house, a simmering eighteen unwilling to live within his rules any longer. This study, now just a room, was then a box where my father inscribed the laws that we all lived by. Without him there it is just a room, as large as it ever was and ever would be.

They say that I am destructive. That I would destroy humanity, family and God himself. If they lived in this house, would they see me as more destructive than my father, a bull in his wood-panelled box, a pious man.

How do you class destruction? Is what I did less of a destruction than what they did. Their history is dotted with scarlet. Thirty days’ notice until the inquisition came, torture and questions and murder most foul. The wars fought on Jesus’ name, I cannot name them all: the Hundred Years War, the Crusades, the Troubles in Ireland, Jerusalem- holy land consecrated by all of the dead. Why are their churches holy and not wicked, as rotten as all the suffering makes them.

The glass of the frame shatters, a photo of Tommy on his wedding day slipped to the floor. There is a crack though the middle of the frame. All that happens here is as distorted as real life, the alter is altered by the crack in the glass, drawing man and wife as apart as they remained in the life thereafter. I ran from that place, so beautiful in the photograph, smoky
with candles, full of life and candles. Those men hidden in that beautiful world hate me for what I have done, what I have created.

It is fear that causes so much hatred- the uncanny valley, close to humanity, close enough to be made imago dei. They say that I played God, created a monster too close for them not to fear. (Their tongues will not let them say better, the intelligence artificially created is stronger than the real thing- that is too much for them to take). I cannot uncreate, no less than God can uncreate, what is done cannot be undone.

Even when I was a child, I was leashed. Twelve years of education in the church- beneath the colours, and the fun, and the lies lay ‘thou shall not’. You must obey the lord, lest the lord strike you down, as he struck down Sodom and Gomorrah, the walls of Jericho, a whole world in a dash of water. Where is God now? Here I stand: sinful, yet still living- no plague of locusts appear to torment me, no righteous armies at my door.

Is that why I fell into science- less what I could not do and more what I could, and did? Is that why I sit here under another kind of house arrest in a house that is not my own? They say that here, in this place we are a Godless people, yet they fear to disobey a lord that is not there. I do not fear what I cannot experience. Is that what brings me here, to my mother, brings me to my father’s house (although he is dead and I live on)?

Sarah is not photographed, not a beloved grandchild to boast about to friends and neighbours. My little girl, for have no doubt that Sarah is as much a little girl as Tommy’s own daughter, as valid a child as Joe’s own sons, will never get a present from her grandparents, never meet Auntie Lucy, blush at embarrassing Uncle Joe. I have brought as much family to this family with my dear child as Lucy, beautiful and infertile ever did with her unfaithful husband.

Why is Sarah less?

I have no doubts Sarah can think, she will grow to be like me- bright as a button, sharp as a tack, and all other euphemisms my mother used for difficult. My little girls mind will be nurtured, inspired, cultivated- not stifled like mine. I suppose there lays the problem, that she can think. For if Sarah can think, and she can learn, and she can remember, and she can form a personality, and she can run, and speak, and live as much as any of my brother’s children, why is she not herself a child? Why is she other, dangerous, un-human?

She is created artificially- but so are all the ‘test-tube babies’, the models caesarean sections, the MacDuffs not from mother born but ripped, those gained from surrogates, DNA mixes, every other kind of mix and match you can imagine. Is Sarah so alien, so far from this God, who therefore can love her not. It is true she cannot beget more Sarahs, yet that first biblical Sarah was barren, as Lucy with her wedding-ring and crucifix is the end of her line. Can you be as human inside a shell made of metal, as one made of flesh and blood and things to make you sick if they were on the outside rather than in? Sarah is different, but not more than I was, a child who hid inside with her books while Lucy fluttered into the sunshine, Joe shone in the light, and Tommy fire-bright raged against the injustice of the world.

There, behind the picture of my mother as a girl is Tommy’s girl- her hair has grown into a mouse brown neither dark nor fair. On the back my father has inscribed her name as Megan, a pretty name for a pretty girl. Tommy’s girl does not take after her father. Her build, her hair,
her eyes are all her mothers. But for a few similarities you would hardly know that the two were related at all. The photographs are all over the place, examined and discarded. They must go back now- after all they were arranged so carefully- the perfect shrine to the perfect family that her mother did not have.

And the excluded Sarah? She cannot become an alcoholic like Joe, like father. Cannot drift waiting for a man to fulfill her like Lucy, until one slips a ring on her finger and into other girls bed's at night. She will never become like Beth, malicious and judgmental- and unlike mother, hunger will never thin her face, plenty will never fatten it. She will not be the slave of what she has, but operate separate. She will only be bothered by the cerebral realm, not leashed to the outside world like I am. She cannot become sick and die young, like Tommy, who I loved the dearest who listened to me every time I called so far away from their world.

Sarah is in a draw now. A little girl, as alive as all other children is no longer a child. She is an experiment, a monster, a freak. She is locked in a drawer, for safety, for humanity. She sits in a drawer and is no longer alive. They have taken my little girl, but they think it is ok, they think it is ok as long as she is not a little girl anymore. Now she is an object- to be classified and forgotten. They treat my child as they wish they could treat me, no longer needed, a liability and so. So she sits in a drawer, and does not walk in the light.

My mother will come back into the room with the tea soon. Explain yourself. Explain why you did these things, you wicked girl! I know what I have done cannot be undone. Although the holy become leashed and obedient to their make-believe god, science cannot be stopped. Why did I come here, to the house that is no longer home and keeps no photographs of me, of my child on the desk? What was I looking for?

I tidy the photographs on the dark wood desk, tilt my head up, keep my back straight and wait.

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Soon Evelyn Maxim will exit her mother’s house and face the world. Sarah will be murdered, destroyed- what would you call it? She will be no more. Sarah was an experiment never repeated. Some boxes once opened cannot be closed, but they can be ignored, forgotten. All that’s left are newspapers out-crying the spark of life codified, made by man. All that’s left is the knowledge that artificial intelligence can, and must not be created. All that’s left is a photograph of a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl- knees tucked to her head, book in hand- that lays in a drawer in her mother’s bureau, and not on the top of the desk.

This will not be mentioned in essays on Science and Ethics, citing her name and spelling it Evelin. What was achieved? She went to her late father’s study where her mother provided tea and no sympathy, and then returned to the house she chose herself to die. A return to the beginning, does not guarantee a redo-button. Most children that are cast out in disgrace can never become prodigal sons. After all what is done cannot be undone, what is created cannot be uncreated and only God can see what will happen in the future.