

Moths

a memory

Memories are sometimes coherent and sometimes fragmented. This one I remember well. It was cool inside, as intense heat was burning the grass outside to light yellow, almost white. My grandparents house was old and big, I spent my summers there. I was about 10 at that time.

I created a world of my own inside, finding old books in the attic and shutting myself in empty rooms. I appeared to prefer books to people. The house still appears in my dreams. I appropriated this space as a symbol. Whenever I think of a house, it is this house that I imagine.

Moths were attracted to the old walls. They were the same colour and at night there was a street light attracting them just outside the gate. Sometimes in the evenings I could also spot bats flying. The evenings and the nights were the best. As the heat subsided, children would go outside and play hide and seek on the street. The freshness returned and the sky become intense dark blue, happy children's voices, running feet, the world become active again. The intoxicating smells of a warm summer night spread everywhere. After my granddad had sprayed the garden with water we would eat watermelon outside.

During the day the moths would sleep on the wall, camouflaged. The old walls were sand coloured, with gradients and stains, the moths blend in beautifully. I have been looking at them for a while by than, admiring the almost random patterns. Their wings mimicking water stains.

There was a boy one evening, he was my age. There was something, a beginning of an interest. A little sparkle in the eyes. He had an idea, something fun, an excuse to play with me. I followed him and it was fun, I was playing with a boy. He showed me how to do this. We found some alcohol and poured it in a shallow pot. It was an early evening, the moths still sleeping. We caught so many of them. Dipping them in the alcohol, they became paralysed. Completely stiff, not moving at all. Then we pinned them on a polystyrene block. Captured beauty. Pinned beauty. I had a collection, the boy let me keep them. We had a wonderful time.

The next morning, the moths I believed were dead, woke up. Pinned, scrabbling the polystyrene, trying to fly off. My grandfather, a GP was glad I was displaying interest in biology, collecting. My grandmother was horrified "This is so cruel, I can not even look at them." I still remember her voice. Almost under her breath, opposing my grandfather. Her reaction was deep and the tone of voice quiet and distressed, it bypassed my grandfathers' logic and went deeper. I understood, I was ashamed. But they were pierced through, I could not let them go now. They were dying for a long time. I learned I can be cruel then, the capacity is there. And I did not like it. The collected beauty lost its taste. The desire to possess has been tainted ever since.