

Isadora Vogt: Schattenspiel

I close another tab. The backlit LED image vanishes from the screen, but remains scorched into my retina, its outline superimposed momentarily onto the next tab.

The snap of a branch behind you in the dark.

The sunlight was bright by the river. I closed my eyes and relaxed into the heat. I could hear her red and white skirt gently moving near me. Sometimes the sun seemed to be trying to whisper a word onto the back of my closed eyelids.

“Ollie, Ella, Ollie, Ella, Ollie, Ella.”

Figures long since forgotten remain that way.

Schnitzler. Kraepelin.

The machines on the conveyor belt that slice the metal for your Subaru.

Wretched childhood nightmares return to me in the throes of my fever. Their laughing faces dance and writhe, swimming in and out of focus. They've never left me, and never will.

So heavy and yet so fragile.

I stare at the hand-painted face of my grandmother's childhood doll, as it lies beside her. In three minutes, she will be dead. An old Disney movie plays on the hospital television somewhere in the background.

Intermittent laughter circles around me in the fog.

The little things. The things behind other things.

Small black flowers have started to grow in my house. In the corners mainly, but also now in more open places. I don't know what they want.

Gelert the Dog, Prince Llewelyn's faithful hound, was assigned the task of protecting the prince's baby whilst he was away hunting. On the sixth night, a hungry wolf came for the child, but Gelert bravely fought the beast, driving him off and saving the prince's young son. On his return, Prince Llewelyn could not find his baby, but saw Gelert's mouth covered in blood. Assuming Gelert had eaten the child, he took his faithful dog outside and executed him. Only as Gelert's dying yelps faded did the prince hear his son crying and realise his mistake. Gelert the Dog's grave now lies in the small town of Beddgelert, North Wales.

The opening 12 seconds of *Kid A* by Radiohead.

The *Tobii Pro Lab Eye Tracker* software had been ceaselessly following my eyeballs every move, drawing layer after layer of overlapping lines on the high-definition UHD monitor.

A sliver flash of something large momentarily pierces the watchful darkness of the deep.

The sight of my own blood dripping down mother's baking apron.

Sometimes a glance is all you need.

He licked his lips and leaned over, before quietly saying: "Remember my love, the wolf is carnivore incarnate and he's as cunning as he is ferocious; once he's had a taste of flesh then nothing else will do."

I reach toward it. I take hold but it turns to dust, passing through my fingers.

The first time I saw the PLAYSTATION logo.

A draught made the flames of the candles dance and the air grew thick with the smell of hot wax. My eyes had grown more and more accustomed to the candlelight and I could make out carvings in the bed frame: flowers, cherubs and words. Yellow weeds blossomed and somewhere moisture dripped.

The feeling of looking for strength but not finding any.

Withered spirals of orange and yellow, broken only by the bedside lamp's elongated shadow creeping up the wall. They still sometimes come and visit me in my secret moments. They know how to find me.

Simon Buckley 2020