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## She Was Not a Cousin A Mentor or a Sister, Only a Phantom Who Taught Me How to Bury My Life in the Ground and Run

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### Abstract

When I was six an older girl  
came to live with us.  
I never learned for sure if she was human  
or a ghost.  
She could have been an exchange student.

### Keywords

Poem, poetry, long titles, people



September 14, 2012

# **She Was Not a Cousin A Mentor or a Sister, Only a Phantom Who Taught Me How to Bury My Life in the Ground and Run**

Caitlin Vance

When I was six an older girl  
came to live with us.  
I never learned for sure if she was human  
or a ghost.  
She could have been an exchange student.

She had long skirts made of paper  
and hair that held the wind  
and made low moans of harpsichords.  
Crow feathers hung from her ears.  
What she'd do: she'd glide

alone in glass shoes through crowds  
in our city. She said streets  
filled with strangers freed her.  
Instead of swallowing herself, pushing in and under  
like eyeballs in meditation,

she could just exist.

She'd walk to a nearby hill and smoke.

Instead of sneaking out  
between her teeth the smoke hid  
inside the toy trunk of her chest.  
She thought we wouldn't know,  
but I could see through her skin.  
The crow feathers tinged

at the ends, like scraps of paper  
floating and slowly burning  
in the wind.  
Once I followed her to the top  
of the hill and hid under the bench.

She had miniature doors in her pocket  
that day and she lined them up in the dirt,  
one after the other.  
She took out a tiny doll and stuck him in the front.

All the doors were open  
with ants crawling through them,  
except the last, which was stuck.  
The tiny doll threw his arms at the sky  
and howled,  
like a seagull flying out over the ocean  
to greet death.  
The girl did the same.  
The doll and doors vanished  
with a flash of light, and so did she.

She left those crow feathers behind,  
which sit in my palms,  
sparkling even now.

Caitlin Vance is a writer living in Brooklyn, where she has worked at various schools, coffee shops, and nonprofits. She received her BA in Philosophy from Colby College in 2011. Her poems and stories have been published or are forthcoming in *Tin House* and in the now-defunct *FortyOunceBachelors*. She hopes to continue writing and growing.