

## **The Phantom Ledger**

The woman believed that every mistake she had ever made was being accumulated in a ledger. Somewhere in a distant library, every failure, every injury she had caused, every idiot thing she had said or done, her indecent internet history, things she had borrowed and not returned, small items she had stolen out of the office refrigerator or from her roommates cupboard, a knife left unwashed, a ticket not paid for, an event she had missed and promised to attend, lies she had told, men she had slept with; all this was being documented in a register marked with her name. She believed that the content of the ledger would eventually be released to the public for them to peruse and mock and all that had to happen to trigger the event was the penultimate failure that would draw the attention of the librarians. Who were these librarians? Public servants? Priests? Friends and family working secretly against her? She could not know. She began to keep her own copy of the ledger, the reason being: if there was to be a record of her failings which would someday be revealed, it would be best she has her own copy of the ledger, so that when the time came, she could defend her actions, and so she wrote each wrongdoing in red pen on a note pad, bundled in a manila folder and tied with a ribbon, and often, if she forgot the folder, she would write on scraps of paper, and then add this scrap of paper to the folder, so that the document became a bulky leaking object that she carried around with her wherever she went, shedding bits of paper that slipped through the torn edges and were left lying on the floor of the kitchen, of her bedroom, and at the front door where the autumn leaves collected and had to be swept and thrown into the compost, on the back seat of taxis and trams, her work desk, where colleagues, when placing a set of drawings on her desk while she was absent from the office, would glance at the notations and see their own names written in red. And so, the leaves of regret that formed her private conspiracy now followed her around the city, wafted and corkscrewed, floated and fell into places where prying eyes could peruse the content, eyes that were perplexed by the strange record of things they had no memory of, or barely recognized, believing that she was perhaps plotting something deranged. Sometimes the notes on her relationships with people were so piercingly relevant, so accurate in their recognition of painful things said or done, that people around her became afraid of her, thinking her writings were instruments of dominance, rather than impotence, precision comments to weaken other people's self-esteem, and admissions of guilt that were so brazen that those around her felt caught in some unspoken power struggle.

Her confessions of remorse became confessions of hate and of rage that people now saw burning inside her. They began to treat her with contempt and with a certain reticence that the woman saw as the coming of the ledger that was stored in the obscure library, a prefiguring to its release, and she believed that it was perhaps being published in serials or arriving as junk mail in people's letter boxes, or that her friends and family and colleagues were attending the secret library to peruse her innermost thoughts. The semblance of the not-yet that had kept her morbid fantasies private now began to burn holes in her reality as the faces of people transformed to contain the twinge of disdain, as the rhythm of relationships that kept her tethered to the world began to decay, and she found herself alone. The truth of the ledger, which she had expected to be a revelation and which she thought would procure some trial in which she could defend herself or at least explain herself to others, the truth was more harrowing than she could imagine; the content of the ledger had passed over the world with a strange unfeeling wind and she found that she was already living in a world passed its release, the event, come and gone like a dream.