

James
Cohan

In the corner stands the trap

By Sophie Mackintosh

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I woke up in a place of enchantment, a place where I possessed my own logic – a logic you had to look sideways at, slippery as it was. Touching my palm to the wall next to where I lay I found it to be a lung, undulating with my own breath, the diffuse light of alveoli surrounding me. How strange, I thought, to find my own body here. To find myself within my own body. Then I breathed out in a rush and the wall was no longer lunglike, though remained smooth, faintly alive under my hand. I felt myself distinct from it, once more, and was relieved, though not afraid.

No, the main thing was not to be afraid, and I wasn't afraid as I got up and made my way across the floor towards the stairs which opened their way to me. In fact I could have laughed in delight, then, at how the structure unspooled in accordance to the half-formed flickering of my mind. But only if I looked sideways at things, slippery as they were.

Below me, light. The hushed quiet of snow. Smooth floors, endless, spiralling step by step. Trailing my hands against curved lines of polished luminosity. Smooth bars of light. Silken quality of this light, beads of brightness hovering around my vision. But I lost my thread or concentration for a second, and I was falling, the floor lifting me back up as if it were a sheet pulled tight and flat, a warning or (perhaps) a tease.

I reminded myself to remain alert, even as I felt my vision glaze, the walls pressing in now and then, as if waiting for their chance. Reminded myself that illumination itself can warp, can push objects and ideas out of shape, make it so you can't look directly at logic's slipperiness. I felt a kinship with the structure, a longing to spill and cleave to the walls.

(Rising to the surface of dream, almost – cold air somewhere beyond, the threat of memory – and then a falling back below, into undercurrent. The line of myself dancing itself into a silken shiver of light itself now, looping and knotted.)

The corridor responded by opening up new avenues to hesitate in front of. But I knew somehow it was so important not to lose the thread of myself, whatever remained of it, important to not quite lose grip on these refracted versions of myself just out of reach. I heard a voice not my own say, distantly, *in the corner stands the trap*, but I was still not afraid of these narrowed walls, or of the dawning knowledge that I must surely change direction.

On reaching the bottom of the stairs the ground lifted again, but this time I was ready for the rising of the structure, my place within its breathing. My own breathing: how strange to meet myself in this way. Hands counting beads of light, I kept losing the thread of myself, but what could it really matter in territory so seductive? When I pressed my hands for the final time to the wall, it sunk under my fingertips. My own logic an enchantment, an entrapment. Eyes closed as I welcomed the enfolding, the compression of this territory of light.

Sophie Mackintosh is a British novelist living and working in London. She has been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Women's Prize, has won a Betty Trask Award, and has been selected as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists.