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My head is full of buildings. Each house I have ever lived in, traced three-dimensionally, able to be navigated, ascending levels of an intimate computer game interface. Faces, words and moments fused in space. Treasured recollections and things I'd prefer to forget, all housed within the distant shells of fibro and brick. I cannot remember the street names of half the places I have lived in but I could draw you the floorplan of all sixteen.

One building alone, is a ghost in my head. It defies my memory, a fictional dwelling although I know that it existed, but to me, always as a ghost. I was aged nine and living in a shack with my family, in the bush at the edge of Sydney. We weren't in the middle of nowhere, but to a small boy with no perception of the scale of the world, the bushland around me seemed endless. I climbed trees, looked for bird's nests, chased rabbits, explored caves and swam in the creek, back when water used to flow there.

Just a few minutes walk from my house there was an enormous patch of blackberries, a city of huge arcing branches, each guarded by a bracelet of thorns. I was intrigued as to just how far the blackberry patch extended, so I climbed a gum tree, to get some perspective, first leaping up and hooking my arm over the lowest branch then swinging my body up and over. I looked out over the huge field of brambles and dead centre was an open rectangular clearing, a building of which only the shadow of the structure remained. The scene reminded me of hearing about people in Hiroshima whose shadows were burnt onto the pavement by the nuclear blast, photographs developed by the chemical reaction of their bodies' disintegration. Whatever building had been there, was obviously long gone, yet the blackberries respectfully skirted around its perimeter.

To me this ghost building seemed the perfect hide-away, so I used planks of wood to flatten pathways into the dense blackberry scrub, forming tunnels underneath the largest thorned archways. It was slow work, first tunnelling into each new section then compressing a pathway with heavy wood, jumping and thumping on it with all my weight. I repeatedly climbed the eucalypt, to chart my progress towards the centre. I tried to make as direct a path as possible, although was sometimes forced to curve around old farm machinery or chicken cages that had been absorbed by the barbed-wire greenery. After about three days solid work, I reached a point where I

could see the hollow den ahead of me. I impatiently cut my way through the last tangles of branches and climbed inside, my skin delicately scratched from all directions. The void was strange and cold, with walls of blackberry and a ceiling of icy grey sky, striped with vaporous clouds.

The old building was marked out by a small skeleton of fallen wall frames which the blackberry seemed hesitant to cross. The floor was mud and despite digging small excavations across the site there seemed no evidence of stone or cement underneath to discourage plant growth. It felt as if the place were somehow caught in time, a memory of people and events which had marked the earth, where new growth was unwelcome. I spent one summer entombed inside my house of air. I allowed a few friends to enter after making them expound appropriate gratitude and my sister spent some time there but was less interested than I. To me that empty space allowed me to think. The blackberry maze formed a separation between me and my life, as carefree a life as it was, the separation felt enlivening.

I can't remember when I stopped going there, or why—perhaps heavy rain made it an impenetrable quagmire, or just the natural progression of childhood from one thing to the next, quickly forgetting the last fascination. The memory faded and the ghost became so faint that I began to doubt it had ever existed. In my late teens I again climbed the familiar gum tree, by then, well within the blackberry growth rather than outside its fringe, and finding it much easier to climb with longer legs and stronger arms. I got my balance in the fork of the tree and searched out across the view for the shadow-house. The clearing was gone. I could make out the traced framework of the building by a few thinner tracts of bramble and the subtle rectangular geometry still imposed over the thorned chaos. But the strange ghostlike void had been reclaimed by the undergrowth. Perhaps my time spent there in my childhood, running, digging and scrambling, had aerated and reinvigorated the soil or perhaps time had passed and the voices of ghosts had diminished. Some memories seem sacred to a particular period of life and accordingly fade and disappear to nothing.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lionel Bawden.*