

Rosaleen In Mourning

by Heather Fowler

She is tired. The men who come since Tom died, they want to take out her garbage. They want to fix her broken disposal, renew her subscriptions, fool with the remote of her garage door, which ceases to open anything. They want to relieve her of her cashmere twinsets the palest of blue, undo her long straight skirts and let these fall to the un-vacuumed carpet, make hot love to her cold body on her cold sheets. She hardly twitches. Her face regards the stars. If her body is an object, it is the isthmus before global warming.

They want to find the source of the glacier in her eyes that is always melting. Maybe they like a woman who cries. Why else do they come? She becomes an expert at distance. She becomes and she becomes more becoming. There have been more than one of them, these men. They give it their best old college try.

When they leave her, she hardly notes this closure, or notes it, in the way one notes the sudden cease of greeting cards from business offices not frequented for fifteen years. She cannot help that she is blind in seeing them. "Forgive me what I don't remember." This is an apple. This is a steak knife. That was a man.

She finds a stirring kindness in her heart for small birds, small anything. Large things rankle. A stray dog frequents the yard. When the men go and there is no one, she pulls the dirty handle of her garbage bin to the curb and the stray is out front too. She watches him one day, negotiating traffic. Triumphant, brown, dirty, mid-sized, he bounces on the curb on the other side of the street a moment later, barking at a larger dog. She does not know why he likes her or her yard. There is no food.

Sometimes she shoos him away. He scares her with those sharp white teeth, with how wild and strange he seems.

Each time the weather warms, the men who come think she should go to concerts with them. They want to walk below the stars and tell her all about them, as if they invented the sky; they want her face loose and free as it is sometimes when she wakes, before

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she remembers. Remembering is so hard and long. They want her to understand them, forget more what she knows and learn more what they offer, telling her long stories about their childhoods and their homes. They cook things for her, carry off the dead plants, speak gingerly of planning for the holidays, about hanging lights.

She regrets her blank stare, but has no other. They try and try and go away. Blond, brunette, black. The stray dog continues to approach, closer and closer, nudging her legs as it runs by. She feels it is attempting to be her pet. One day, she sees it seated in her back yard, walks up to it, and kicks it right in its dirty side. This is an act she tells no one. The dog whimpers. Yet he returns.

"I hate you, stupid brute," she hisses venomously. "Why do you keep coming?"

His tail wags. He sits.

Disgusted, she goes in. On another day, watching him roam through traffic out front, she is struck by the fact that she holds her breath as he crosses, that it is taking too long, that his dance between the cars has become dramatic. Then he is hit. A dark blue Ford rides up and knocks him to the curb. A memory occurs: Tom once shooed this dog away. Later, Tom secretly fed him and she found the plate hidden in the ivy. The plate told the story, crusted with old tuna. For months afterward, the canine had lingered, even then, before the hush.

She looks at the dog like a sudden harmed child. She walks into traffic on her residential street, her arm up like a policeman's, whispering, "Stop, stop." She picks him up to carry him back to her drive. She sits down on cold cement with him cradled, stroking his dirty fur, crying to him, humming. She looks into his little wild eyes, which are afraid. She knows his fear. "Shhhh, shhhh," she tells him.

Another man comes walking up the drive. "Rosaleen? I came to light your pilot."

She has eyes for nothing but the dog. "It'll be okay," she keeps telling him. She does not care that her hands are dirty now, that the dog's blood stains her long skirt, that she sits on her driveway flashing silk panties to the street, that he was not her dog. She is

guilty about kicking him, says, "Oh, my god, I'm sorry." So tender are the hands she uses to touch him. As he is dying, the man waits; the dog quivers, bleeds more, and she will not let him go.

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