

Instructions for Opening a Document Found in a Black Cabinet

by Kathryn Kulpa

You've been successfully drunk for three days, or maybe it's thirty. You're not the kind of person that keeps a calendar.

You're not the kind of person that keeps anything long.

You're locked in a black cabinet. The lock is broken, or nobody can find the key.

The door to your apartment is unlocked. It's not as if you ever lock it. You're not the kind of person that fears burglars.

Soon J---- will walk through the door. It's her Hail Mary moment, when you've been silent long enough. She's the one that lets you out.

You're locked in a black cabinet. Shoved in the back like an old carry-cage for a cat that's long since died. There's a black cloth draped over you to hide the shabby edges.

When the black cloth falls on you it keeps the light from shining through. It's a rough, scratchy cloth. It feels like moldy cellars. It smells like rained-on dogs.

When the black cloth falls on you all food tastes like airline food. Every song sounds like Barry Manilow. Every poem sounds like Rod McKuen. It's all just noise to you now.

Sometimes you make lists of books you can still read. City streets you can still walk through. Things that don't yet disgust you, like snow and sleeping cats and the way barn roofs look in the very early morning. You try not to test these assumptions. You keep the last safe things at a distance, like a spun-sugar village seen through a bakery window. You are afraid to breathe poison on them.

When the black cloth falls on you, you start to disappear. You stop answering your phone. You let your phone die. It's easy for a phone to die.

You were in bed before, but now you think you're on a rug. It's not terrible, as rugs go. It's got a red pattern, mostly faded. Nearby, also on the rug, there's an amber-colored plastic bottle. The cap is off and it's empty.

You were probably going somewhere when the rug distracted you.

Soon the door will open and J---- will walk in. She will run you a bath. She will make you coffee, and you will drink it. She will make you food, and you will eat. She will put you to bed, and you will sleep.

She will tell you she's not doing this again. But you know she will.

The small part of your brain that's still able to think of something beyond your own misery wants her to give up on you, to just let go, to be so happy somewhere else, with someone else, that she won't keep bribing hell's boatman to let her pass safely into that dark place to get you out.

You'll miss her coffee. You can almost taste it now. It's the only thing in the world that might still have a chance of tasting good. You will hold the cup in both hands, trying not to shake, trying not to spill. You'll like how hot it feels after a long day outside in the snow.

You're lying facedown in the snow, on a red sled.

This was the game you played as a kid. Sliding down the sloping hill that was your front yard, into the street. Timing it so you'd pass right in front of a car, just to see the driver swerve and curse. *Stupid kid!*

You were a stupid kid. But that wasn't why you did it. It was the moment just before. When the snow was packed hard and tight beneath you and you were flying and you knew you couldn't stop. You knew the cars would stop for you because they always did, but still.

Maybe this time.

