

My Space

by lisa rosenblatt

Hey, can you move over and let me sit down here? In German you would use *Raum* to mean room, or for an area, a region or something like that. There is another word for “room,” as in a room in a house, but you can't use either of those words to ask someone to move over, as in, can you give me some *Raum* or *Zimmer* here. No, you'd have to use another word altogether, *Platz*, which means place or even a square whereas in English you'd not make much sense saying hey, can you give me some *place* here. Sure, it gets complicated with all of these false friends as they're called, *Raum* and space and room and place and *Zimmer* and *Platz*, and if you just want to ask for a bit of room, or to share the space that is available, after a while you just let go and whatever comes out, comes out, whether it is the right way to say it or not.

She sits watching the television screen with the sound off. Used to be that you had to have been in that room to be taken seriously in town, you had to have met her, Gail, or her twin sister. Her twin sister's no longer around to meet now, except on the occasional visit. She's got a new life on the coast near Sydney. But Gail stayed, and she was on the cover of the tourist brochure, there, in the frame above the piles of papers, next to the cup full of lighters, to the left of the prayer flags, potted plant, and old turn dial no-longer-functioning radio. There she is, on her snowboard.

On the cupboard for glasses and plates above the defunct refrigerator-cum-cupboard for sponges, cookies, batteries, rice, soy milk, and the like is another photo, of her and her twin sister, a black-and-white print taped to the glass on the cupboard. The photo's edges are yellowing and curled. Gail is hunting around for the tea strainer. People do the washing up and put things away wherever they feel appropriate, without asking “hey, where does this go”? She says it's like a game, trying to imagine where someone might put a tea strainer. She likes to play games. She pours a bit of milk in the tea and tells me that Charlie left town, she used to play

backgammon with him but now he's gone and she can't find the backgammon game, either. So Charlie Brown is gone. That's really his name. The backgammon board is here somewhere, she says "It's probably in the wooden chest that your clothes are on." Could be in there with the dice, cards, scribbled note pads with hangmen, hacky sacks, books, blankets, and abandoned sleeping bags. She sips on her tea watching the silent tv. On the shelf below the tv are photos of her nieces, an invitation to a wedding ten years ago, photos of Max's kids whom she is the godmother of posing in their Sunday best, paraphernalia, a brightly painted wooden lizard she picked up in Australia, a shell from Hawaii, prayer flags someone brought her. "For fuck's sake" she says, as the phone rings.

She picks up the phone, twirling the cord as she talks. Lights flash from the flat screen, which replaced the little white one with the fat back that she had taken from the big house next door and set up on the shelf although it didn't really fit and always threatened to topple off. The dog farts. She strikes a match and pours another cup of tea, rolls a cigarette. She climbs out the back window to get onto the backyard, which is actually just a plot of grass planted on the roof of the pool below. Old blankets hang over the abandoned dog house. Two soft arm chairs are pushed close to the house. They're damp.

The dog curls up on the stone patio. She throws a stick. A storm moves down the valley, lightning flashes closer revealing peaks of cloud-enveloped Alps. The lights of the town below still glisten. Birds and a stray fox screech from the small patch of woods left after the whittling away by golf courses and villas. She walks back in and sits at the table, glances at the television and pours another tea. She leaves the window open, letting the rain and the Alps in.

