

## To the Bedroom

Sarah Medeiros

“Yes, I can make extra for Matt,” said Mrs. Dolan. “But you’ll have to pick up more beer on your way home,” she added, hanging up the phone.

To her husband these words conveyed nothing unusual, as if everything was settled before he even called, the dinner bound to take place as he wished no matter when he decided it was what he desired this night, and the break from her company to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, in an hour’s span and a drive home, within reach. He belonged to that great clan which cannot keep his thoughts separate from his actions and must let past prospects waver before his eyes, cloud what is actually at hand, his sorrows and angers, since to such people even in the earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of emotion has the power to paralyze and clasp the moment between its frigid fingers, Mr. Dolan, driving his friend, Mr. Matt Abley, to his house, laughed at a barroom joke, as his friend spoke, with bitter bliss. He was fringed with apprehension. The pine-scent freshener, the rear-view mirror, the sound of beer bottles, cement wetting under rain, road kill freezing, gum-wrapper rustling – all these were so potent and encouraging to his current mood, though he appeared the image of perfect humility, tired brown eyes, carelessly groomed construction jacket, thinning, colorless hair, so that his friend pitied the burden he carried of taking care of a house and working a hazardous job, watching him steer the wheel into the driveway, hoped if there was anything he needed, Mr. Dolan would ask him for help.

She was standing on the porch step, hands flitting across her stained apron, deceptively unsure of their direction and waiting for him to step out with the beer bottles so she could

greet Mr. Abley and quickly run in with them to the refrigerator so that Mr. Dolan wouldn’t have to drink warm beer at the table. Mr. Dolan knew that his wife meant to please him as best she could, but he still blamed her for the fact that he was stuck in a marriage that he couldn’t afford to end, it was her fault that she got pregnant and miscarried a month after they were married, her fault that he was fired as manager for Wallace’s Lobster Catch when the hours cut into his fishing trips, her fault that the woman he once loved didn’t love him back.

The three of them ate dinner in a pleasant silence, thought Mr. Abley, wondrous that the husband and wife were so comfortable with each other that they did not feel the need to speak, that each of them knew the other was content— whenever Mr. Dolan ran out of beer, or potatoes, or green beans, Mrs. Dolan was on her feet prepared to refill his glass or plate, not concerned that she had hardly taken a bite of her own food, the loose seams of her shirt flapping in the rented air like leaves on the edge of a bonfire. She was nervous, relieved that Mr. Dolan seemed to be pleased, but wary of the new crease that fluctuated on his forehead, a crack in a sunken soufflé, on the edge of her seat and praying behind the wall of her mind that he would fall asleep in his chair tonight, that perhaps she would be allowed to call her sister and talk for a little bit, maybe even bathe without worry that he would yell and startle her and she’d have to bandage her ankle again, that perhaps she could try to just sleep, her mind sliding for once underneath the suburb’s caustic walls. He loved her, once, she thought, passing another plate of potatoes across the hand-whittled table, he spoke to her and was pleasant in the evenings and their bedroom wasn’t a shadowed room filled with anger and deception. It hadn’t been enough for her, then, and she had tried to fill the space she felt with another man, and he looked for his with a woman from her work, but she

knew that though she had ended her affair because of propriety, his was cut short by the engagement of the other woman to a local business hero: Mr. Dolan couldn't compete with style or money. And it had become her fault. The night it all ended was the first night he blackened her flesh with his fist, a blow of grief and desperation and the horror that neither of them would be able to recover.

Before dessert, Mr. Dolan shook hands with Mr. Abley, who had to return home to let in his infirm neighbor, told him that he would see him on Tuesday if the building held together long enough for them to continue construction because the crap supplies that the buyers are using won't do shit if it rains between now and then and aren't the contractors dumbasses? but he'd see him Tuesday. The cake and chocolate chips sat glistening on the table in fluorescent light when he remembered that she had once made him cake, she had said that it was her grandmother's recipe and made by the women of her family only for men they really wanted to keep – the secret was magic – to keep the men waiting for more, and he was still waiting for her to want to keep him still, and he couldn't eat any of Mrs. Dolan's cake because he did not want to lose whatever still connected him to her. Mrs. Dolan watched him looking at the cake, sure that he had once told her chocolate cake was a dessert meant for lovers and she wanted him to love her again, watched him throw a chair into kindling against the wall and knew the evening was over, realized that her quietness would never assuage the despair that devastated all in him that was good and calm and caring, that need in him for a peace she could not give, no matter how she tried. He barely saw her back away, only the vague blur of the perfect woman laughing in a red dress that came up to there intensified his craving for an excuse, any excuse to stop and back away and hide in the corner until his crumpled darkness did not

hurt so much, but since he had gone this far it was too hard to stop, so he came forward, bent over and crippled.

As he reached for the broom, she backed into a chair and fell, grasping, wondering if it was a throbbing power that kept him returning for more, if she would be able to rest within the impending blows, bloodied and waiting.