

No Contest
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JULIANNA SPALLHOLZ
from The State of Kansas

HOME

We argued about what home is. I got the dictionary. I looked up home. I read the definitions out loud. One. The place where one resides. Two. A house. Three. A customary environment; habitat. Four. You rolled your eyes. Wait, I said. Four. A place of origin. Five. To the center or heart of something; deeply. Six. Having an easy competence and familiarity. I put the dictionary down. I told you, I said. You opened your mouth but then you closed it again.

We reside in a house in an environment that is not our place of origin, and though we are accustomed to an easy competence and familiarity, we know that we have not gotten to the center or to the heart of something, deeply.

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YOUR MAID IN REAL LIFE

I had a dream that you were fucking your maid. In real life you don't have a maid, but in my dream your maid was terribly in love with you and you were taking her for a ride. I knew that you would break the heart of your maid.

Your maid was older, short, and rather plump, and her teeth had gaping spaces. I walked by a room and you were in there dancing with your maid, spinning and laughing amidst the laundry, white billowing sheets everywhere. Your wife was at work. You were making your maid's day.

Your maid was very stupid to think that maybe you were really in love. Your maid was very stupid to think that maybe you wouldn't kick her to the curb.

I kind of felt sorry for your maid and I kind of hated her. I stood with your maid in an alley while she spoke passionately about you, her neck craned, her arms suddenly and gracefully athletic, her hands tensed, poised, invigorated. I didn't correct her. I understood. The streetlights shone down on us. The cobblestones were romantically wet. Your maid had stars in her lonely eyes. Your maid felt like a girl again. Your maid had so much hope.

It wouldn't be very long before your wife came home from work. It wouldn't be very long before your maid was reminded that her actual job was to clean the pubic hair off your bathroom floor.

Your poor stupid maid.

I envied her. I remembered being that stupid, how perfect it was, all billowing white dream sheets and dancing, you, the feeling of believing that every beautiful impossible thing could be real.

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BUSINESS IDEA

My friends come up with a business idea. For days I hear them talk about their business idea. They make plans about their business idea. They draw an outline for their business idea. They sit at the kitchen table. They use fine point black markers. They become excitable. They draft a budget for their business idea. They use imaginary money. Their business idea will not work. After several days they stop talking about their business idea. They never talk about their business idea again. I am relieved.

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NEIGHBORHOOD

They have closed off the underpass for rebuilding. Everyone is mad. Now we must go around, climb over the tracks. There have been accidents: homeless people, drunk people, friends. Homeless drunk friends. One bad one in particular. He lived. It was a miracle. The neighborhood was very concerned, which is good, which says something good about our neighborhood.

The neighbors across the street have a pit bull terrier that gets loose and comes over and terrorizes my cats. I scream for help. I scream and scream. I scream obscenities. The neighbors do nothing. They watch from their porch. Eventually I am triumphant. My cats are unharmed. I drag the pit bull terrier back across the street and put it angrily behind the neighbors' fence. I look angrily at the neighbors on their porch. I do not speak Spanish and the neighbors do not speak English, except the children, three little girls who told me I was pretty once when I went outside in my nightgown to take out the trash. They are also very pretty.

The 24-hour bar and diner has been closed for three days because of plumbing problems. There is a terrible smell. We walk by or ride by on our bikes and we look sideways at the bar and diner. No one says anything but we feel rather uncomfortable. We don't know where to drink or to eat eggs together. We are out of sorts.

They are tearing down a building. We think that they should not tear it down. It is an old building, very beautiful. We don't know what they will build there. Probably something boring. We talk about it on the sidewalk and are mad. We have not been to any meetings. We should go to meetings. We should not have to go to any meetings. Jesus. They should know enough to not just tear it down.

A friend down the street built a chicken coop in his backyard. He got twenty-five chickens. A neighbor complained. The city intervened. Now he has to kill half the chickens. He does it with the help of other neighbors. They spend the day wringing the necks of chickens. They are unskilled. While it is happening, the rest of us go to each others' houses and speak quietly, over coffee. We discuss death and responsibility and the lives of animals.

We are up all night drinking and then we decide to drive out to nature. We climb up on a rock. We watch the sunset. It is beautiful, amazing. This is why we live here, says one of us, and I think it's embarrassing. I do not think we need to discuss how small we are.

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JULIANNA SPALLHOLZ'S collection of short fictions, *The State of Kansas*, is forthcoming from GenPop Books in 2010. Her work appears or is forthcoming in a variety of literary magazines online and in print, including *Caketrain*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Folio*, *Gargoyle*, and *SleepingFish*. An editor for Trickhouse.org, she currently resides in Upstate New York. "Neighborhood" originally appeared in *In Posse Review*, Issue #24