

flashquake Editor's Picks
Volume 6, Issue 1
Fall 2006



"The narrator's voice grabbed me and held on, transforming what could have been merely a rant into a gripping, moving, resonant story."

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Didi Wood's Editor's Pick:
Curtains
by Katie Rose Guest

It took me less than twelve hours from the time you left my house last night to buy these goddamn curtains. I'm standing in my living room, one foot on a kitchen chair and one foot on the back of the antique red sofa I got from my grandmother's house when she died. My grandmother would die again if she saw me balancing on the back of her old sofa hanging curtains and die one more time if she knew why. All I can think is that if I fall and crack my skull on the wood floor I'll have a really hard time deciding if I should be more angry with you or with me.

It's easy to be angry with you. You're easy to pity, a middle aged man abandoning your family and blaming it on your artistic temperament. Please. "I know what's wrong with me," you say over and over, as though your memory is going the way of your hairline. "I have lyric poet's disease." And all I think is, *No, you have a weakness for young girls.* Yesterday I finally said, when you repeated your excuse yet again, "If you're so *lyrical*, you can make up a new reason for leaving your kids." I didn't even care that I hurt you. And I could tell I did, when you looked down at my hands. I certainly don't care now. I put both feet onto the back of the sofa and inch my way along, sliding the curtain on the rod. "Creeping in the *bushes*," I say to the window. "My *bushes*. Let's see her peep through *this*."

It's easy to be angry with me as well. After all, it was me who said okay when you suggested we meet at ten o'clock at night after my seminar ended — it sounded so sensible. And I agreed when you said we should meet at my place, since I have a place to myself, and what did we have to hide — we're just friends? My foot slips on the back of the sofa and I slap my hand on the wall above the window, *smack*, searching for stability. The curtains slip on the rod and meet in the middle. I jump down, and rip open another package.

You sat on this fucking sofa twelve hours ago and said, "Let's go somewhere together," with your black boots, your cool blue jeans, your slicked blond hair. Then there were lights on the street, and somehow these lights were different. Somehow you knew, even though my street is busy, that these lights were for you, because of you, because that connection is still there between you and her, no matter how much you lied to me that it wasn't. We killed the lights inside, and I, who barely wears clothes when I go get the mail, who certainly doesn't wear clothes behind my window sheers found myself hiding from your wife in my living room. I felt more than foolish. I looked at you, hopping from heel to toe in your ridiculous boots, fists clenched by your skinny thighs, and I thought, this is your fault, too, this is your rotten life peeping through my windows. I wanted to know, *Didn't you tell her that I am nothing?*

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Katie Rose Guest earned her Master's degree in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. Her work has appeared in Ellipsis, the Evansville Review, the California Quarterly, and the Connecticut River Review, among others. She lives in North Carolina and is working on her first novel.

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