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Shut the Door

I took another drag of the cigarette and watched the ash drop on the floor below and scatter. I wished I could find an ashtray. The apartment was in squalor, and Manda was lying on the couch with dried vomit in her hair.

I regretted asking for a key 6 months ago. I sat down on the chair and looked at my phone. Should I call someone?

Manda and I had been college roommates. She was a manic art type who would stay up all night, drinking and writing and fucking strangers. I had never cared for that. I just worked my job and did my schoolwork. She got Bs in her classes surprisingly, but she cared more about her writing and I didn't care to stop her from being the way she was. Her best work was done when she was hung over. She guzzled coffee, spilling it on her laptop, on her pages, and on herself too, probably, and pushed out works of literary genius.

Another drag. The smoke poured out of my mouth into the stagnant room. I got up from the chair and paced. I started picking up plates and bottles that had fallen from the disgustingly full table, which smelled like urine and pot. I wished that I had brought gloves. I went into the kitchen cupboard and grabbed a large black garbage bag with red drawstrings and proceeded to dump the contents of the table into the garbage bag. I tied the bag and threw it down the chute.

The last time I talked to Manda she was leaving a 711 with a six-pack and an 8 pound bag of jelly beans. The bag broke on the way to the car, and she was

scooping and attempting to eat the rainbow jellybeans pouring from the bottom of this massive bag. I offered to help her out, but she politely declined, throwing the bag into her passenger seat and speeding off like, well, a lunatic.

The light flickered as I picked up black stockings from the floor and put them in the laundry basket. I closed the bedroom door. Walking up the hallway and into the dim bathroom, I rinsed some grimey toothpaste down the sink, and closed the window, shower curtain, and toilet seat.

I would wake up at 7 AM when we lived together but Manda was kind of nocturnal. She would still be awake from the night before, probably drunk or high, but probably also having a blast. Her nights were long and debaucherous, but I liked hearing about them. I would wake up and drive a half hour back home to check on my mother, work at my job, and give her money to get by. I was the responsible child, I guess. My other siblings had moved away. When I came back home, before or after my night classes didn't matter, Manda would be up again, starting her day with eyeliner streaked down her cheek. It was so rare that I would see her sleeping.

Another drag. More ash dropping on the floor. Manda's desk was spilling over with drafts from her writing. I put the stories in the bottom drawer and turned the lock. I closed the laptop she had left open. I always felt like I had responsibilities to other people in my life. I never felt that I could live spontaneously, or stay up all night and drink. I never felt like writing was a lucrative enough job, even though as a child, I thought myself to be a creative type, mixing paints and putting on plays for my family. I settled into the path that I needed to follow, but still I don't know if I regret that.

When I made the call, they arrived quickly. I lit another cigarette, dropping ashes on the wood floor and flooding the corner of the room with smoke. The coroners ignored me after they asked the initial questions. I shut the door and walked out, catching only a glimpse of the glossy black body bag.

I had no memory of later that night because I went out and got drunk. I sat at the best bar in the shitty part of town and poured down double shots of whiskey. I left my keys there, cried and threw up upon getting home, and woke up at 5:30 to get my car and head to work.

At the burial, when they lowered the casket I had picked out, I was the first to cover it with a fistful of dirt, like it was some sort of honor. I left after that, clutching another cigarette and letting my breath fill the autumn breeze.