

COLLEEN WAGNER

THE MORNING BIRD

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A stage of light and shadow creating the impression of a city; a street, the dark recesses of alleyways and alcoves, a streetlight; and of modern, middle-class interiors, a living room, a café—all appear and disappear into shadow and light, like a waking dream, or in the way that thoughts flow uninterrupted in the mind.

Doreen, a street person, runs ON wearing an expensive designer jacket overtop of worn, dirty layers of clothing. She hides behind steps outside a hospital admitting area and rams her hands into the pockets. She discovers something—a cigarette and a lighter, a silver one with a flip lid. She is impressed and sets it down on the step beside her and admires it.

DOREEN.

Oh! Hey! *(She picks it up with precision and moves it closer to her. She looks at the entrance to the hospital then speaks to the lighter.)*

The winter is no time to get sick I'm telling you. Freeze your butt off waiting for doctors and what do they tell you—"you're pretty sick. Come back next week if you're not feeling any better."

Sure eh. How long you gonna do that before you get the message? *(notices the coat)* Although, if you're a somebody... with money... *(takes a puff of the unlit cigarette and pretends to be someone special)*

(confessional) I'm afraid that if I die in the winter no one will come to my funeral—because it's cold in the winter and grey and it makes people depressed and they don't want to go out. They just want to watch TV and eat pizzas and cokes—which have been delivered—and it'd be just me in the funeral parlour, in my coffin, and the funeral assistants standing at the door waiting to show people in, smoking cigarettes on the

steps cause they can't smoke indoors—well, no one can anymore. Everyone smokes outside, which is just adding to the ecological problem. (*puts the cigarette in the pocket*) But even if I die in the summer no-one will come. I don't know anybody. Not really. Like, not close. Intimately, like. (*feels the coat and remembers*) Not since me and my husband broke up. Because of my illness. He couldn't take it—too hard on him.

He was more fragile than me as it turned out. I always thought he was the rock. Turns out it was me!

Blows your faith to smithereens.

Pause

Know what they did once? They took me down to the bottom of the hospital in this cold dark room that smells funny. Know that smell? The smell of metal and tungsten light and they put me on a metal table and twisted my legs around to get a good shot of my hips and they shone this square light on me with a black cross through it like a window with four panes, and it's framing my abdomen and they push a button even though I'm telling them I'm not ready – “I'm not ready. Wait. Not now I'm scared” and they push it anyway because nobody in the basement can hear because the metal down there has made them deaf, so they push the button even though I'm screaming now “I'M NOT READY!” and the table vibrates and the radiation shoots through me like invisible bullets and all the tiny molecules and atoms are blown to smithereens because radiation does that but most of the time we don't feel it unless we're sensitive and the doctors don't even think about it because all they want is a good clear shot of your bones but they got to get through everything else to get there. Like your heart even to get through to your spine.

Long pause. Looks at the hospital.

I died then and there on that table. I died and woke up in a hospital bed someone else.

Slips her hands into the pockets and rediscovers the cigarette, picks up the lighter, flips the lid with panache and lights the cigarette.

Someone who smokes. (*inhales deep and exhales*)

Silence. Feels the coat.

Maybe somebody will come out soon. Maybe they'll have more smokes. I bet you're going to get lonely sitting there with nothing to light up. (*brushes some dust from the jacket.*)

(*worried*) They used to hang men for stealing. If a woman stole they burned her alive. (*about to take the coat off, then pulls it tightly around her*)

Boy, it's getting cold eh. You could freeze your butt off before...

Okay, don't think about those things.

Doreen sits, leans against the stairs and tugs the coat tighter around her.

Know what I love!?! The moon. When it's just coming out of the black moon phase. When it's just a sickle of light on the left side. I don't know why I prefer the left sickle moon to the right. That's just how it is. And I picture myself curled up into that curved sickle shape like fruit coming to rest inside a bowl. (*curls up and lies on the ground*) And I lie there in the moon's belly until she becomes full and I'm completely swallowed. (*closes her eyes*).

