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New and Selected Writing

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House Piece

Covet. There is fire in a man's eye; *jealousy*. Covet.



The Animal's Bed

Mark's *thoughts* one evening, about David:

He has made his home unattractive to me *by right* of the animal that *lives* there *with* him. The animal *won't* let me sleep, scratches me, *jumps* on *my* head, makes noises in the night. He nurtures the animal rather than disciplines, makes no motion to control it. *They* embrace: he *wraps himself* in it, it in him. He pays no attention to my human skin next to him in the bed.

He has made his home *unattractive* to me with his solitude. It is too much an invasion *of privacy* to sleep here. His bed is not *big enough* for *two*; he has too much need to be alone. *It throws* off his entire sense of *being* to have another next to him in his *bed*, in his room, in his home when the dawn *comes* in.

This makes me *want* to stay *away*. *This* makes his house his *own*.



Day Room and Night Room

When she first moved into her new *apartment* in *Brooklyn*, Jamie couldn't decide what to do with the rooms. There were three of them, *though* one was the very small kitchen. So small that the refrigerator didn't fit there, but sat in the adjacent room; eventually she adjusted to this *awkwardness*.

One *day* on the street, Jamie found a *plain wood dining* table, and *she carried* it home. She put it just outside

the kitchen threshold, next to the refrigerator. From that point on, the room at the back of the apartment, next to the kitchen, became the living-and-dining room. The front room became Jamie's bedroom, though ~~it was~~ larger than the room at the back. Sometimes she used the front room as a living room, too, so she **never knew quite what to call** each room when describing her new apartment to friends.

Kathleen solved the **dilemma** for Jamie one day at lunch. They were sitting at the dining table in the back room, in the sun **by** the windows. "Why don't you call **this** the **day** room? Do you spend a lot of time here during the day? Obviously since you **sleep** in the other room it's the night room."

Jamie liked the idea. It was true: the back room **by** the kitchen **was always bright**, and she did **spend** most of her daylight hours there. The front room **was** darker, except toward sunset when it lit up for about an hour. "That's **what I'll** do. This..." she said, "**...will** be the **day** room, and the other the night room."



The Forest Party

Scott liked the Christmas holiday — the smell of pine trees, the colored lights — but what he liked even better **was January, the** second or third week **when** Christmas trees littered Sixth Avenue. "Forest time," he called it. At this time of year, Scott collected the trees one **by** one, or **two by two** if they were **small enough**, and **dragged** them up the stairs to his apartment, where there were already three, wide, flatly-sawed tree **trunks** on the floor. These stumps had been there for years, **servicing as** auxiliary seating when company came, but this was different; this was a forest. Some years (for Scott had been doing this for four Januarys, now) it **took two** or three days to **get enough holiday** detritus to fill the one large room; some years it could be accomplished in one **busy** Saturday afternoon. The amount and size of trees that Scott **acquired** seemed directly related to the state of the nation's economy at any given Christmas: if the economy was good, it was easy to find **plenty** of discarded trees, large ones. In lean years the trees were scarcer, and it was more difficult to fill the **place, as** they were also smaller. But when it was **all** done, the result was **always** the same: a **luxury**, an indoor pine forest, its scent filling the apartment. Scott would then call his friends, inviting **them** to his 'forest party',

or to 'go camping'. After four years of this, these friends knew exactly what 'camping' meant, and would eagerly come to Scott's as soon as he called, which he would do when the last tree was in place. Some would spend that entire day there, and call back in the following weeks to beg other invitations. Scott enjoyed the company. "My forest...is your forest," he would say; a simple line that never failed to make him laugh.

Once at Scott's, the guests would sit on the stumps, or on the pine needle-covered floor, and drink wine or beer, smoke cigarettes. Cigarettes became controversy the first year Scott had created the forest. That year his friend Carol lit a cigarette while seated on a stump, and the burning sulfur tip of the wooden match flew off and into a dry spruce tree. It had taken only seconds for the tree to ignite; Scott grabbed it by the upper trunk and threw it into the shower to extinguish it. Looks of horror had come to their faces: somehow they'd overlooked the fire hazard in this forest. From that point on, and every year since, Scott ordered the smokers to smoke only in the tile bathroom adjoining the main room. Often a guest could be seen sitting safely past the bathroom threshold, on the floor or the edge of the tub, still a part of conversation. It never broke up a party, as the apartment wasn't large, and no one minded — it was a small sacrifice, made for the enjoyment of an indoor forest Scott, the most gracious of hosts, would fill bowls with water and the trees' fallen needles and place them on the radiators to enhance the aroma of pine. The trees came back down to the sidewalk sometime in February, after the phone calls begging invitations tapered off, or the trees lost their needles; whichever came first.



Thursday Afternoon

Mark is thinking, lying next to David:

The sun shines in *select beams* that heat the bed in certain places. Every ten minutes or so he wakes, turns over, groans, and rolls to a shaded part of *the* mattress; *eventually* the sun catches *up* and he must move *again*. He is sweating; *especially* his face. His *chest is* sticky under *my* hand. *There* is a world out there, outside, that we're *paying* little attention to in here. It is quiet. I want to *wake him, just* to tell him *how* much I enjoy this — him here, this silence,

the heat and the *light*, the bright mattress. But *waking* him would *spoil* the solitude of ~~the~~ world in here; *for* once it feels like mine. With David *asleep*, it feels like mine.



Henry is trying to compose a song, a song about houses. He lights a cigarette, cupping his hand around the match, and sings a simple *melody*, a few words:

I have seen the house that I will live in

Henry stares directly into the flame until it burns his fingers; with a smile he waves the match in the air to extinguish it. He is *walking* down lower Sixth Avenue, past Scott's building, and looking up to the second floor he sees candles in the window, and behind them, the heads of *people* and the tops of evergreens, and he sings:

I have seen the house that I will live in

It has *walls* of *wood* and a roof of thatch

Someday I'll live in that house in the *country*

and I'll never again have to *worry* about money.



The Red Room

After Jamie had lived in **Brooklyn** about four months she decided to paint the floor in the night room. Unlike the **day** room floor which was varnished wood, the night room floor was scratched and **unfinished**. She bought two gallons of a rust-red floor enamel and in one afternoon Jamie **painting** the night room **floor**. She'd found a small coffee table and hardwood chair on the street that she **kept** in that room, but they too were scratched, so she painted the chair and table that same afternoon with the leftover enamel.

The next day when the floor was **dry** she put her bed back, and also the newly-painted **chair** and table. Jamie