

What I Deserve

By Anne Jackson

Children across the street scream in delight on the merry-go-round. A light wind frisks the trees. I exhale, stub out my cigarette in a well-groomed flowerbox and trudge back inside.

The clapboard facade of this house is a lie. In my sister's house, magazines fill every square inch of closet space. Not crammed in, but meticulously placed on top of the pile. Stacked sets of china line the walls of the dining room. It is tidy, but insane, like my sister was at the end.

Clothes fill the guest room. I shake out a garbage bag and fill it with pristine Anne Klein and Le Suit. Had she been my size I wouldn't need to shop ever again, but no tailor can whittle her size fourteens to an eight. I have windows open, hoping the breeze will clear the stale air.

If she were alive I could have that tv show come do the work, but they don't help dead people, so it's on me. I stuff another bag and glare at a picture on the wall above a heap. Her graduation from Yale, of course. Mom and Dad oozing adoration as she cheeses for the camera. I wasn't there. I had a conflict.

Something flutters to the ground and I jerk my foot back certain it's roaches. I see what looks like, what *is* a hundred-dollar bill. I pick it up, turn it over, and shove it in my pocket with a grin. I grab the next stack of clothes and cram them in the bag. My sister left the house to me and I wanted to sell it with all her crap in it, but the realtor said she wouldn't show it without a cleanup. So that worked out.

I feel more paper in the clothes. I flip over the stack of pants I'm holding and there, right in front of me are a few more hundreds. No way. No freakin way. I cram them in my pocket and eye the clothing stacks still covering at least half the queen-sized bed. I flail at them, knocking things everywhere. Stirring them around I see more and more money.

A barking laugh escapes my lips. I shake my head. Fumbling I go for my pack of Marlboros. I light up, noticing it's my last one. I ash on the floor with satisfaction and walk to my car for my spare pack. Finding none, I jump in and drive to the gas station up the block. Fantasizing about what I'll buy I nearly pull out in front of a firetruck. They wail their siren and I flip them off and turn onto the road.

Half an hour later I sit on the curb smoking while the fireman explains the fire seems to have started in the bedroom, but they will have to wait for the report to be sure. He pats my shoulder and asks if it is insured. Damn.