



## *Canned Vegetables*

Kristin Blacker

“We’ve become ghosts of something greater tonight, you know. We’ll haunt these rooms, each other, for the rest of our lives.” The door shut behind him with the same delicate sadness of a book being placed back upon the shelf once it had been finished. I hadn’t spoken or moved an inch in the past hour and now all I wondered was where I should put my hands. There is nothing more disarming in this world than removing someone from

your life. Everything on my body felt alien, as if my soul had been transported to a place outside of me and I was looking in on this fragile girl with her back curved against the wall; unaware whether she could move or speak, but entirely lost in her being. The intricately marked boxes of my former roommate needed to be moved and were blocking all of the light that typically saturated the cracks in the wooden floorboards where my bare feet swept back and forth. The light would come back, incongruously enough, once his possessions were gone.

I am counting the minutes until the neighbors fall into their bed, touching the wall I'm facing from the other side and drinking in each other's scents and tastes like they've never spent a goddamn night in bed before. "It's always something new for us," the girl tells me when I see her in the grocery store. "He's a brilliant surprise that I keep unwrapping and discovering." I grab the canned vegetables and stare at her as if she's speaking German. Her face is absurd and shaped like a bedpan

that's been used by every patient in the psychiatric ward where she works. I touch her arm and tell her I have to get going, but that it was a pleasure seeing her. It's her routine to shout down the aisle something about meeting for a drink soon and mine to pretend I never heard a thing. At least we've got that in common.

I hear the clamor of the locks and know he's back to grab the rest of his things. The boxes are moving and the waves are swelling in my eyes, but I don't know how to move again. The ghosts are all around me, just like he said. He's in the other room and in this bed at the same time, brushing my hair out of my eyes and wiping away the tears while the boxes keep moving back and forth from the door. I know my ghost is in the room with him, sitting on the floor in his flannel shirt and sipping coffee while he tries to pretend she's not watching his departure. She'll weave her fingers into his and pull him down next to her, telling him all about the colors she's found to paint the mural in the bedroom. He's dealing with his own waves.