



# THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

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Year 2012

Article 38

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1-1-2012

## Broken Plate

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Class of 2012

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Plunkett, Michael J. (2012) "Broken Plate," *The Mercury*: Year 2012, Article 38.  
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## Broken Plate

### **Author Bio**

Michael is currently in his junior year at Gettysburg College. He writes fiction, and his work has been published in The Blue Route Online Literary Magazine and Dirty Laundry Lit.

# Broken Plate

Michael Plunkett

I broke a plate and decided not to tell anyone. I cleaned up the mess it made. It was easy enough only took a few minutes before it was gone and in the garbage with the rest of our used and broken things. I broke a plate and no one noticed. Not my mother, not my father, not my sister, or my dog, or my priest, or my teacher, or my girlfriend, or my doctor, or the waitress at the diner. None of the other plates seemed to notice either. They didn't seem scared of me when I walked into the kitchen the next day or the day after that. The sun kept shining, the moon kept glowing. I kept my secret.

And then I broke a cup. It was a tea cup, a tiny little thing. It was not really my fault—it was so thin, and I so thick. I didn't tell anyone about this tiny cup either. And once again, no one noticed. It was gone. The cup had been nicer than the plate and yet no one noticed either of the two were gone. All the pieces look the same when something breaks. It doesn't matter how nice the thing was when it was whole.

I broke a plate because I wanted to. Because I was sad, because I was lonely, because I was mad and wanted revenge. I broke a plate because I could. And no one ever knew. I broke them because it was easy and any guilt I had slipped from me into the garbage with the pieces of all those broken plates.

And then one afternoon I walked in on my mother breaking a plate. It was the most disturbing thing I ever saw. Maybe it was the jerking motion with which she dashed it all to pieces, maybe it was the sounds of a thousand tiny little explosions. Loud smacks of anger, or was it pain? Or was it... pleasure? Strange. From where I was standing, I could not tell the difference.

She said she was angry at my father. She had caught him breaking the fine china dishes we kept in the living room. Such smooth plates, so smooth they looked soft. Soft shiny pale surfaces. He was just throwing them in the garbage and loving the way they shattered. He told her he was tired of looking at them; they had been there in the living room so long. He was tired of them, sacred delicate little forgotten china dishes. Looking at them, he said he thought the dust that collected on them was the beginning fuzz of an old man's beard. He didn't want them anymore. So he broke them, dust and all, in the garbage pail in the kitchen where my mother

found him.

I had no idea what to say. I did not know how to clean up this broken plate. So I ran. I ran away to my sister's room. But when I burst through the door I saw that she had already heard. She was breaking cups and plates too, her little toy tea set, it flung from her window like a bird without wings and all I could think was how could such a young girl, my little sister, know how to break so much?

I heard my father come through the front door, and I heard my mother toss the garbage with all the broken plates out of the back door. I ran down the hall with its wood floors and descended the stairs quite recklessly with nothing on my feet but quick slippery socks. I met him in the parlor and told him everything. Every little plate and cup I had broken, the plates mother had broken, my little sister's tea set, I told him about all the broken things. But he didn't care. He just shrugged and said he knew, he had known for some time, but it was ok because we were all still living together, and we all still slept together, and we all still ate together, so therefore we were still a family and you know what? It's ok. Before I could answer my mother told us dinner was ready.

So we sat down to dinner. My sister across from me and my parents on either ends, but when I went to the cupboard to set the table, I realized there were no plates. There were no cups either. And strangely enough all the silverware was gone too. My father burped. What do we do? We sat around for maybe a moment but we couldn't go hungry. So we dug in, with our hands. We didn't mind the food in our teeth, or the mush in our fingernails, or the stains on our faces, the moist crumbs on our lips. We ate dinner as a family, with our hands, like the animals we really were.

Outside the kitchen window, a man rode a bike down the sidewalk weaving around all of the garbage left out for pickup in the morning.

Down the block and onto the next he passed by every house and their plastic cans and bags, finding a way to get around each one. He looked up and smiled—smiled at the thought of all the warm people sitting inside, eating dinner with their families. He kept riding down the street past all the yellow windows glowing like Christmas lights in the blue night.