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Between

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Between

Author Bio

Carley Grow is a junior majoring in English with a Writing Concentration and minoring in Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. She is from Horsham, Pennsylvania and served as the fiction editor for *The Mercury* in 2015. After a semester abroad in Bath, England, she is headed for another semester abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark, where she will continue to lay down her roots all over the Earth.

Between

Carley Grow

So much of us existed between the rooms. We were there in the wall: the fractured wood, the paint that had yellowed over centuries like unbrushed teeth. The universe gifted us with its most obvious symbol: a dividing line, a separation. We were shoulder to shoulder, but we couldn't face each other. My bed shook when you opened drawers. I shook when you came home with boys. In the morning, I could hear your breathing, but I could never hear your lies. This was the beginning of my misunderstanding.

At first, the wall was a bridge. We'd make each other laugh in different rooms; on your side you'd start up, and on mine I couldn't stop. I'd fall over on my bed, head against the radiator, hand over my mouth. I didn't want you to know how funny I thought you were. My laughter felt like a confession. I only wanted to hear you confess a sin over and over again. Virgin Mary, Son of God, the saints and the angels. I whispered to all of them: let this be what I hope it is.

Then I woke up in the dark to find the door between our rooms open. My glasses were off, and your side was a mirage of light, and I thought if I crossed through I could reach you. The next day we tried to open the door and we couldn't. I brushed the night off as the dust motes of a dream, but I wondered what was more impossible: that I had been awake or asleep.

I thought we were possible, a task that could be accomplished with effort and optimism. Walls meant nothing to me; I imagined myself the heroine of a Dickinson poem, the girl they locked in a closet who couldn't be stopped or contained. To me you were an open roof. In you I could see beyond my four-cornered life. You bent the straightest lines, and I wanted every line in me snapped.

At night your hands roamed me like a wall. My body became the past tense of your touch. My hair, my neck, my feet: an elegy. With a look across the library you unfixed me. For once I wasn't static, I was becoming. I thought of all those times I had looked at myself straight-on and asked, Who are you trying to be? With you I happened without trying.

Through the wall I learned how much I didn't mean. The voice of a boy getting to know you. The hum of a movie through shared headphones. The creak of your bed I couldn't escape. When he left, your excitement over

what had passed and what was to come. I curled in like a stubbed toe on my sheets, listening and trying not to listen. I wrapped the wall around me hoping to blot you out, but you always found my hiding place. You climbed inside and laid your head by mine.

Soon your voice reached me from all sides. It wafted up like a kitchen smell through the floorboards and the vents. No matter where I was, you were almost next to me. Only in the attic bathroom could I be untouched. I sat on the bathtub's edge and thought about America, how I had put up the Atlantic as a wall to keep out my oldest agony. How a new agony had been born abroad, how I would have to put up the Arctic and the Pacific and the Indian by the time my life was through.

Between the rooms you destroyed the simplicity of I like you, you like me. One night your roommate struggled to put a condom on a stranger and we giggled in the next room. I paused and said, let's just be friends. You agreed without saying anything. This was the symbol coming to life: that you couldn't admit you had wedged a wall between us. That I could do nothing to reach you even with effort and optimism.

With you my hand was always raised to ask a question. Why you had to cover me up like a scuffmark behind the wallpaper. How you could pass the days crossing floorboards while making me hold still. What the boy would feel if he knew about the girl beyond the wall, the one you claimed was too important to lie to. The one you lied to with a smile.

During the day we don't speak. I can hear you talk about him as I fall asleep. I reach for my headphones, but they can't keep you out. The wall can't keep you out, but I have found a way. In America, I lie under an open roof. I can see heaven, and I can see the truth.