

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 5 | Issue 1

Article 11

June 2005

At the Estate Sale

Mira Rosenthal

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

Rosenthal, Mira (2005) "At the Estate Sale," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 11.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol5/iss1/11>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

AT THE ESTATE SALE

Mira Rosenthal

I am thinking of Bishop's fishhouses
down by the sea with their peaked roofs and cleat
studded gangplanks when my eye notices

A yellow sign tacked to a stick of wood
that points me down Sacramento Street
and leads here, a middle-class neighborhood:

square patches of lawn, small lots, closed shutters,
sometimes a driveway of new laid concrete.
At the house of the deceased, red stone stairs

lead up to the door and you can walk right in
past a fat man smiling from his seat
at a table, money box before him.

*Through the kitchen you'll find the den downstairs,
all smiles and eagerness and conceit.
And out the back there's more. Also upstairs.*

In the kitchen every cupboard stands bare
for want of dishes, now tables replete
with stacks of plates, glasses and silverware.

At an open drawer, a young woman stands
head bent, hair mostly brown with one gray streak
hanging forward as she inspects the brand

on a silver serving spoon. *How 'bout this?*
Is this one antique? Her friend dismisses it
and she looks again, not wanting to miss

anything. A stairwell leads to the den—
dark, quiet, no one milling about,
a paneled bar and blackness at one end,

at the other a door that leads outside.
Between here and there, two male voices meet
in conversation, as if meant to chide:

It's a shame. It's such a shame—their words bear
knowledge that feeds on absence, burns through it—
I was her caretaker for 15 years.

And it's like they're reciting a script, just
what you would expect to hear, a receipt
for the deceased, these voices, whirling, hushed

in the tenor of self-absorbed tragedy.
Maybe she's still here, trying to retreat
but unable, so soon, to fade away.

In the bathroom, a woman at the sink
inspects a bottle of Aspirin, the sleek
pills in her palm each perfect and distinct.

She keeps it, as if this common bottle
held renewal for the living, a unique
blessing to take from a house she will

only step into once. In the tangle
of polyester clothes on the bed sheet
there's a loose crocheted vest of gray wool.

It's handmade. By the chair a canvas
bag spills full of yarn. This here is her seat.
If you were to sit down here in her place,

your back would ache immediately, ache
and begin to radiate a dull heat
as if the chair were a back-breaking stake

to mark the dead in her ground. If you stay,
her life wrapped around you in the quiet,
you might feel her hand on your shoulder: *stay*.

It's how we expect the spirit to come in:
knitting needles, blue yarn, stitching, a plate
drawn from a different life, taken home, scavenged

from the dead, a vest, a word, a ladder
to bring us further to the firmament
even if our hands grasp only matter.