

Trash

Aura Sperling

Police took my father, finally, while I pretended to sleep in my room.

I heard him through the door, arguing with mom again.

They screamed. He had cashed her food stamps for beer, and she had picked at her face in the mirror for hours—when he wanted be making love.

Chairs smashed into windows. A guitar was broken over the desk. Sirens howled like wolves after a kill. Silence followed the footsteps up the stairs and remained.

Sometimes I would knock on strangers' doors, to talk and visit, but my favorite exploration was dumpster-diving in the alley by our apartment. There would always be treasures. I found a shoebox with pictures of a cat and single mismatched earrings. I was careful not to be seen.

My mother and I were warring nations. She would hide in her schoolwork and lie to me about a better future. I would cry and throw our dishes against the wall. She stood in a line for a food box at Christmas and gave me gifts donated by strangers. When it snowed we took a walk and saw garbage behind the specialty gift shop. We found bags of slightly irregular or broken ornaments with hundred dollar price tags, and a musical porcelain Santa Clause with it's broken pieces in a box. We took as much as we could carry and stayed on the lookout for witnesses. Later that night we sat on the floor and glued the small pieces back together, joyful that we had been so fortunate.