

## Wilderness House Literary Review 17/4

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Company

I have started looking forward to the magazines I steal from Heather K. Dugan. To clarify, I think it's legally stealing, but it's not *really* stealing. Each month I receive an issue of *Martha Stewart Living* and *Bon Appetit* addressed to Heather K. Dugan at my apartment, and after the mailman ignored my sticky note that said "return to sender, no longer resides here" I've just started keeping them to flip through. The manslaughter of theft.

This issue of *Martha Stewart Living* tells Heather K. Dugan that she should plan to sow broccoli and cabbage seeds by February seventh, and prune fruit trees on the nineteenth. *Bon Appetit* suggests methods of cleaning cast-iron skillets. I imagine Heather K. Dugan's expensive cookware scraping against the burner grates on the stove just as my nonstick pans from Target do. I imagine her pruning potted herbs in the kitchen, the closest she could get to a garden on the second floor of a triplex. It is my first time living alone, and I imagine her teaching me her independent, mature ways. *Martha Stewart* and *Bon Appetit* are like hints: between the lines of each article, they say *this is how you can live, this is what adults do, let me help, let me show you.*

Heather K. Dugan gets a lot of mail. She gets twice as much as I do, even though she moved out a year ago and I have been living here for ten months. She gets catalogs from IKEA and Pottery Barn and offers from both to open store credit cards. A newsletter from a local nonprofit. At least one Bed Bath and Beyond coupon a week. A letter from the library. The ACLU asking for donations. Planned Parenthood asking for donations. An insurance deal from Geico.

I idly wonder if the dents in the walls of the stairwell are from Heather K. Dugan lugging in a piece of Pottery Barn or IKEA furniture. I wonder if she opened a credit card at a different store, like Home Depot, and if she used that Home Depot store card to buy the nicer showerhead for the bathroom, leaving the old one in the cabinet below the sink, where it still remains, and I agree with her: this new showerhead is much better. Or maybe she bought the showerhead from Bed Bath and Beyond, using one of her coupons.

Heather K. Dugan also has a print subscription to the *Sunday New York Times*. Every week it arrives on my doorstep, the plastic around it always a little wet and grimy. Sometimes I throw it straight into the recycling bin. Other times I want to feel sophisticated, so I bring it inside and pull out the crossword, then throw the rest into the recycling bin. I wonder if she does the crossword, and if she is any good at it. I'm not any good.

I feel kind of bad about using her *New York Times* subscription, so one day I text my landlord and ask if he would give me her contact information so I can tell her to change her account's address. He never responds, which is typical of him, and I feel like I have done my due diligence, so I continue to attempt the crosswords.

I like to think that Heather K. Dugan wouldn't mind anyway. If they could, the unpacked holes in the walls where she used to hang pictures

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and mirrors might whistle *don't worry, if it was really so important I would have changed the address on my subscription. Consider it a gift from me to you.* The water streaming from the showerhead might whisper as it strokes my hair, *shhhhh don't give it a second thought.*

In December three Christmas cards are delivered, one of them addressed to Heather Dugan, one to Ms. Dugan, and one to Heather Digan. I neatly stack them up with a note that says, "return to sender, no longer resides here" and bring them to the post office. I hand them to the employee after buying stamps that I don't actually need, saying something along the lines of "I imagine you know what to do with these," which feels a little clandestine and mysterious. Once I'm back at the apartment I imagine the Christmas cards journeying back to their senders, who realize their mistake, find Heather K. Dugan's new address, and send a new card to her, all because of me. *Thank you,* hums the dryer that once tumbled her clothes. I imagine Heather K. Dugan has excellent fashion sense, and that half her clothes have to be air dried or dry cleaned. She gets brochures from a nearby dry cleaner.

Heather K. Dugan gets a court-approved legal notice for customers at Marshalls who shopped there between May 2018 and September 2018; she may be entitled to claim benefits. Two Target brochures. A letter from the gas company about winter weather. Actually, that is addressed to Heather K. Dugan or current resident, so really it is for both of us. I take the liberty of throwing it in the trash on both of our behalf.

One day a big Amazon package arrives for her. I wonder what's inside. Maybe one of those air purifiers that people have now. Maybe she lives in a massive house now and she has ordered a nice showerhead for each bathroom. The Amazon delivery guy also ignores the "return to sender, no longer resides here" note I leave on it, so I again text my landlord. He does not respond for nine days, then one Saturday afternoon says, "Heather will stop by this evening to pick it up." His text makes my stomach drop. It feels wrong, suddenly, for her to be coming here. Like how time travelers aren't supposed to interact with their past selves, it feels dangerous for her and me to be in the same place at the same time. We are meant to be in the same place at different times.

I wonder what she will think of me, whether she will judge me as a good caretaker of her mail. Maybe she will say, "Hey, thanks for sending back those Christmas cards!" Or maybe she will say, "Keep an eye out for anything else addressed to me!" This is what I think as I sit around waiting for her to show up.

At 9 pm the doorbell rings, and I jump, startled. I always assumed the doorbell was broken. Standing out front is a woman wearing a black coat, fake fur around the hood. She is scowling at her phone, which illuminates a made-up face and yellow-blond hair.

"Hi," I say, and shiver since I didn't put on a coat. I try to hand her the package but it's too big and heavy for me to pick up, so I end up just pushing it a little. Before I can start to wonder how she will get it into her car a man steps out on the driver's side and walks up to me, lifting the box with

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ease. I never got any letters addressed to this man. This is not his apartment. It's mine, and it's a little bit Heather K. Dugan's. He tosses the box into the trunk of the car and gets back in.

The woman glances up briefly from her phone and mutters "Thanks," then starts to walk back to the car.

"You're getting subscriptions here," I blurt out. "*Martha Stewart* and *Bon Appetit* and the *New York Times*."

She stares at me blankly. "Oh. Okay."

The woman gets into the car and the man drives it away. I turn back into the apartment. The dents in the walls leer at me as I trudge up the stairs.

Walgreens sent Heather K. Dugan a letter this morning, and I forgot to pass it on when the woman showed up. I shove it in the trash and sit down in the middle of the kitchen floor. The apartment is silent, and it is empty.