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The Desk

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The Desk

Abstract

The desk is an old spindle my mother and I bought at an antique store in Janesville, Wisconsin, the summer before I went away to college. The twin sleigh bed we bought that same day, which I owned and used as a bed, then a couch, then a guest bed, now stays in the lakehouse they'll retire to in two years. My nephew likes to trace the whorls on the headboard while listening to Good Night Construction Site again. The desk's spindle legs are removable by inverting the desk and twisting them, making it easy to move, which I have done between Des Plaines and Oxford, Ohio, between Cincinnati and Chicago, between Bronxville and the Bronx, between Brooklyn and Logan Square. When we removed the legs at the antique store in Janesville, one of the legs hit my mother in the leg and made a huge wobbling vein appear down the front of her calf. I didn't know if it would ever go away, and I was afraid of getting old...

Cover Page Footnote

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August 22, 2014

The Desk

Labor Practices by Marty McConnell

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I'm doing math now. My mother was twenty-two when she had me. That was in 1973. I'm forty now, so when I was eighteen, my mother was forty. Is that right? I haven't had caffeine yet today. It was 1991 when we bought the desk. Twenty-two plus eighteen is forty. When my mother was the age I am now, I was going off to college, and we bought me a bed and a desk in Janesville, Wisconsin. Is that a poem? It feels too tidy, like the fact that my Great-Aunt Spooky whose real name was Margaret was nicknamed Spooky because they killed the rooster, whose name was Spooky, the day she was born, and it became her family name, and she couldn't shake it through college, or marriage, or even at the retirement home where she moved after Ike died.

The desk has two side drawers with round, flat brass pulls that ring like chimes if you knock anything metal against them. When we bought it, we marveled at the fact that the drawers were the perfect size and shape to hold floppy disks, which by then were

no longer floppy but small and hard and square. There is a small drawer in the center where I keep my passport, which is six months expired and needs to be sent in for renewal. I'm writing a book about not being a mother and my year spent trying to become one. There is a shelf that pulls out to make the desktop larger, and a wide, shallow drawer underneath. The top never gets folded down because the back of the desk is arranged with a note from my love, an altar-sized framed photo of Frida Kahlo, a poorly framed postcard sent to my grandfather on May 23, 1913, a card from my best friend that says, "If we were in prison I'd watch your back. I would totally shiv someone if they dissed you." And a card from my mother, the front of which says, "You burn/so brightly," and inside says, among other things, that her newest favorite quote is by Francis Picabia: *Our heads are round so that thoughts can change direction*. I'm hungry now, and have to leave for work soon. Sometimes birds come and sit on the window ledge facing me and the desk. There's one here right now, chirping madly. It won't be here when I come home.

Marty McConnell lives in Chicago, where she works as a fundraiser for youth and family center. She received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, and her work has recently appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Indiana Review*, *Crab Orchard*, *Beloit Poetry Journal* and is forthcoming in *Southern Humanities Review* and *Best American Poetry 2014*. Her first full-length collection, "wine for a shotgun," was published in 2012 by EM Press. www.martyoutloud.com