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13 Things Your Mail Carrier Won't Tell You

Sarah Layden

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Abstract

Headline from Feb. 2011

1. It's not about the dogs, but control. That you should learn to tame the untamed. That to let your pit bull ride shotgun is one step removed from handing over the keys. Barking, fine. That can be controlled. As can you.

Cover Page Footnote

"13 Things Your Mail Carrier Won't Tell You" was originally published at *Booth*.



January 22, 2016

13 Things Your Mail Carrier Won't Tell You

Fiction by Sarah Layden

Headline from Feb. 2011

1. It's not about the dogs, but control. That you should learn to tame the untamed. That to let your pit bull ride shotgun is one step removed from handing over the keys. Barking, fine. That can be controlled. As can you.
2. If you invited me inside to meet your new baby, I would come in. I would tread lightly on the floorboards, I would ignore your unkempt hair and rustblood birthscents, and that your scraggly chicken infant in his carrier has just shat himself. I would murmur, Beautiful, lovely, beautiful.
3. Only once have I been invited inside a house on my route. Twenty years past and I still cannot talk about it.
4. Some children toddle down the sidewalk, impatient parents dragging them by one arm. These adults glower, eye-circled and minimally attentive, unwilling to accept the importance of even the junk mail. The life-saving products and offers such mail contains.
5. What you worried I saw through the parted curtains: I saw. I will not tell unless I need to. Who can say what need is?

6. Upon viewing tattoos on forearms and calves, I used to think, Wastrel, trash. Now I see cave pictures made flesh. Absence and sorrow.
7. A decrease in Book-of-the-Month selections lightens my load and weighs on my mind. I adored *The Brothers Karamazov*. I delighted in Nabokov. Daily I show my age, a trouble that does not cease.
8. The boots are comfortable enough to sleep in.
9. I make up stories about the shut-ins. Who among us has not wondered if the rumors about Dead Harry are true? That his plumbing broke and his knees didn't work so the bathtub became a toilet. I saw the man from the realtor's cleaning service, retching on the lawn.
10. All the gossips are lonely. Deep, deeper, deeply. A loneliness of the soul.
11. Planting flower beds here or there wouldn't kill you. Nothing too showy. This is my backdrop, my office.
12. It was not the war, not overseas, not in uniform. But I was part of two battles. They did not tell us where we were. We met the man we were instructed to terminate. We shook his hand, we smiled into his face. We gave him a two-hour head start. This was practice, they said. Brave faces, they said. Warrior hearts, we chanted.
13. When I put the third letter in your box upside-down:

this is my way of saying

I love you.

Sarah Layden is the author of *Trip Through Your Wires*, a novel. Her short fiction appears in *Boston Review*, *PANK*, *failbetter.com*, *Stone Canoe*, and elsewhere. She teaches writing at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and the Indiana Writers Center.