

HOUDINI HEART

It's early afternoon when I awaken. With no shades, no curtains, no Venetian blinds, sunlight falls across my bed like a drunk. If there's one thing I know about, it's falling drunks.

Hot, headachy, shaky, slightly dizzy, I'll shower, then take my notebook, sit in the library for awhile. In the midst of all those books, all those words written by all those other writers, surely there's an idea going begging. The one I had in the middle of the night looks brassy by daylight.

I'm hungry. But it will pass. I can't eat. Food makes me sick. Like a squirrel or a rat, or a Margaret Atwood heroine, I'm learning to live on seeds. Bread and butter sometimes. A piece of fruit. But mostly seeds. And wine.

I'm just about to cross High Street on my way up Main to the Little Sokoki library; I'm waiting for the light to turn green, when, on a whim, I look back at River House. It's what I used to do—stand for as long as I could down on the street, my mother's bony impatient hand attached to my bony stubborn wrist, and gaze up at the five floors of red brick, the roof of rich purple tiles, the whimsical towers at each end of the building (but best is the tallest widest tower on the corner of River House rising above me), at all the tall windows running a third the length of Main, and half the length of High—and I do it now. There's someone in my room. I see someone or something pass across my window, the one innocent of covering on the third floor, and sited under the tallest tower at the angled corner of High Street and Main.

I bolt back through the large outer doors and

into the lobby, ignore the elevator which is at the top of the building anyway, and run up the enclosed stairs. If someone is in my room, they're looking at my things. I have nothing to steal, but I have everything to hide.

I locked my door. I know I did. I have my keys in my hand. Did I forget to lock my door? Damn it. Damn it.

My hand is shaking as I try my doorknob. It's locked. I was sure I'd locked it, and I was right—I did lock it. So I unlock it, push open my door. No one is there. Nothing is changed. I walk to the window, look through the wavy glass down onto the sidewalk where I stood looking up only minutes ago. I half expect to see myself there. (Hello, me!)

If someone has been in my room, they are not here now. There is only the one room, an open closet, and the bathroom. My bed is still mussed, the bottom half of my men's pajamas (his pajamas) still hangs from the bathroom knob, my empty glass is on the floor by my pillow, the empty bottle next to it. No one has been here.

I did not mistake what I saw in the window. So. What else? I must have mistaken the window.

Mine is apartment 3-6. It's the smallest of all the units in River House, fitted into the corner of the building. Having seen the floor plan posted on the wall near the manager's office, I've discovered my room is not a square or a rectangle, but a chevron. High Street does not meet Main at an exact right angle. This means that the left wing of River House does not meet the right wing of River House at an exact right angle.

Above or below, there is no other room quite like my room. How could I have mistaken the window?

