

5-1-2015

A Drop Left

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Recommended Citation

Diaz, Oliver (2015) "A Drop Left," *Gandy Dancer Archives*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/gandy-dancer/vol3/iss2/12>

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OLIVER DIAZ

A Drop Left

There are two kinds of people who wear bathrobes to pick up the paper in the morning, and Mark was the kind that got laid off.

Upstairs in his three-room apartment, a faulty ceiling fan hummed. He poured coffee into the mug his mother had left him. He got cream from the fridge—a drop left. When his mother visited she used to clean up and clear things out. Now, the cream nearly empty, Mark decided to take a walk.

On his way out, he passed his neighbor, an older gentleman, who was gathering his morning paper.

“Morning, Mark,” he said. “Figured out how you’ll pay the rent yet? Don’t forget, Roger’s coming around later.”

“I know.”

“Well, best figure something out.”

The corner deli was empty except for the man behind the counter reading the paper. Mark walked to the back and got a half carton of cream. A small TV glowed on a shelf behind the counter. The news anchor spoke, “Young man found dead in apartment fire—more at two.”

The man behind the counter said, “\$2.29,” without looking up.

Mark looked at the carton. He returned it to the cooler and approached the counter again, this time pointing at the lottery tickets.

He walked back down the street, up the stairs to his apartment. Mark reheated his coffee and the crooked fan idled above him. He thumbed the scratched card in his free hand and drank his coffee black. There was a knock on the door.