

Barbara Rosen makes an impressive entry into our pages with this notably thoughtful story.

Escape

by Barbara Rosen

No one will be here until Monday now. Only the Eucharistic minister Sunday afternoon and that hardly counts, she's gone so fast. Even if she does bring me Jesus...

Jeannie had left the place polished and gleaming, meals in the refrigerator clearly marked "DINNER—FRIDAY," "LUNCH—SATURDAY" and the rest. Television, radio—maybe the phone. But there would be no human presence, nobody with whom to share the small, daily unimportant things. Not today, not tomorrow, not the day after that. Not until Monday when Jeannie came back.

The pain... There's no part of me that doesn't hurt. If I could trust my legs to hold me I could go outside, sit on a bench, talk to people.

Oh God, the pain!

Rosalie leaned back and rearranged the pillows. She reached for the remote, laid her hand down again, and looked around the room. Jesus looked back at her from paintings, drawings, the postcards tucked into the edge of her mirror.

Sunlight streamed through the uncurtained windows, slanting to form bright pools on the patterned rug. Rosalie's eyes traced the never-quite-familiar arabesques, the fanciful flowers. The spreading medallion at the center, intricate as a kaleidoscope, trailed off to form vines and bowers, secret clumps of flowers growing from crannies too small to see.

In the intense light the colors seemed to pulse, quivering like the wings of a basking butterfly.

Rosalie dozed.

Nights were always the worst. The long hours

stretched endlessly ahead and the walls closed in. Tonight the pain drove her from her bed to walk back and forth, back and forth, like a caged animal.

Shadows pooled around her feet; in the dim light she imagined that she was walking over flowery grass.

She hobbled back to the bed and lay down, wincing. It wasn't even midnight yet; all those hours to go...

She picked up the remote and settled back against the pillows.

I must have been asleep. Ow! Oh, Jesus, it hurts. Bathroom... Where did I put my slippers?

What was I dreaming, anyhow? Grass, flowers... No, that wasn't it. Birds! Birds singing! I remember now...

Rosalie's eyes turned to the plastic tray on the windowsill where she set out the seed. No birds there...

But I heard them! That's what woke me up. Oh, the hell with the slippers.

She made her way rapidly to the bathroom, lowered herself carefully to the elevated seat.

"I don't care," she said aloud; "I heard them."

It was going to be another bright day. Rosalie wished she could go out, but it wasn't too bad now, by daylight. The walls moved back and stood firm; the polished surfaces glittered. The carpet glowed on the floor like spilled treasure.

It must be what the kids used to call psychedelic; funny I never noticed before. That vine there: it loops around, goes under itself, so you can't tell where it begins. No matter how many times you follow it... And look at that flower, beating like a heart...

There was a sudden burst of birdsong, but Rosalie didn't look up. Something had flashed across her field of vision—there!—and disappeared into the pattern. The woven leaves trembled and stilled.