

5 Pieces from Rochelle Ratner

THANKSGIVING 2004: TALKING TURKEY

Splat! Through the windshield. She didn't even see the turkey coming. Just like she didn't see the wild turkeys near the farm. Her father pointed them out to her. Twenty-two pounds. It was always exactly twenty-two pounds. Purchased with her mother's stolen credit card. This time at least she's wide awake as the car thrusts forward. For once in her life she's in control.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

April showers bring May flowers. With wild iris twined in her hair, he falls in love with her. They wed in June and she carries a wildflower bouquet. It's over a month since she's showered now, but the flowers mask that. Baby follows baby follows baby and she smells of milk and he, too, wants to suck her breasts. Until the children grow. Until the milk smells sour. Until they all have odors and he's unable to smell himself. April showers, at least, wash off some surface dirt. They summer in a beach town. They take a bar of soap down to the ocean, but it quickly sinks away from them. Outside their guesthouse the shower says only three minutes. After that they turn the cold water on. As soon as they scream he abandons them.

SAFE HOME

So she calls from Bally's to say she got home safe and the echo of slots in the background she attributes to the ice maker in the Hotpoint door – cheap old machine, eats up electricity. Really it will be after two a.m. before they get home, another hour looking for a parking space, the garages all closed or full by then, she ends up on the wrong side with an \$80 ticket and it serves her right, she supposes. Her mother's still alive but no longer drives. There's the house with its own garage they seldom have the depth perception to park in, why does she have to leave, or if she must then best set out early and beat the traffic. The next time they gamble will be when he's in the hospital, unconscious; once he's home it doesn't cross their minds.

HIS DEATH

She doesn't want to hear it, not now, not in the summer when she's staying focused, so she goes off in the car somewhere, anywhere, for dinner, shopping for food, shopping for poison, and she gets back and of course the message waits. She goes back to work, writes about him this time, sleeps on it, and in the morning it's pouring rain and she sees from her study window that she left the car window open, the window nearest the house, of course on the passenger side.

ARRIVING HOME

Goldfish arriving home in a plastic bag have lost their crispness. She doesn't even bother frying them. Give them to the frogs, for god's sake, toss them at those croaking tongues that keep her up all night now that the new refrigerator's silent and standing before her empty-handed. I bought fish for you, she whispers. Alright already, how about frogs' legs? But she cooks nothing. She tosses the empty bag into the trash of the garbage can just moments before her bubble bursts.

Rochelle Ratner's books include two novels: *Bobby's Girl* (Coffee House Press, 1986) and *The Lion's Share* (Coffee House Press, 1991) and sixteen poetry books, including *House and Home* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2003) and *Beggars at the Wall* (Ikon, October 2005). An anthology she edited, *Bearing Life: Women's Writings on Childlessness*, was published in January 2000 by The Feminist Press. She lives in New York City, where she is Executive Editor of *American Book Review* and reviews regularly for *Library Journal*. More information and links to her writing on the Internet can be found on her homepage: www.rochelleratner.com.