

Ashes  
By Dave Patterson

Maisie folds shirts from her closet and places them in a suitcase on her bed. She does the same with two pairs of jeans and the black and pinstriped pants she wears to work. She stops and takes sip of Pinot Grigio. In the bathroom, she collects her toothbrush, deodorant, contact solution, and a brush. She walks to the bedroom and places them in the suitcase. She watches the afternoon sunlight work through the sheer curtains. From the dresser, she picks up a picture of her and her parents at the Grand Canyon taken when she was in high school. Wiping dust from the glass, she places it on top of her clothes and works the zipper of the old suitcase. She picks up her glass of wine and sits on the end of the bed. There is a lot she's not taking, but she's fine with that, likes the idea of travelling light. Balancing the wine glass atop the suitcase, she lights a cigarette. The floor of the room is filled with Milo's dirty jeans and paperback books. When the ash at the end of her cigarette becomes too long, she uses her cupped hands as an ashtray; she doesn't yet want to leave. When her cigarette's finished, her hand full of ash, she walks over to the philodendron by the window, and puts the cigarette out in the soil, wiping the ash from her hand into the soil.

She picks up her glass of wine and finishes its contents. She breathes in hard, realizing that when she leaves the apartment, she'll have to have somewhere to go. No place comes to mind. In the kitchen, she refills her wine glass. Outside the window, a pigeon scours the lawn for any food it can find.

Back in the bedroom, she opens the suitcase, and returns the picture to the dresser, her toothbrush, deodorant, and contact solution to the bathroom, hangs her pants, then her shirts, and places the suitcase back under her and Milo's bed. She smokes another cigarette ashing in her hand again. She cries low sobs. Without thinking, she wipes her tears with the hand that's holding ashes. She feels the grainy ashes smear across her face. When she looks in the mirror above the dresser, she laughs at the sight of her face blackened as if to go into battle. She puts her cigarette out in the philodendron, and in the bathroom washes her face. She decides that tonight she will cook alfredo for Milo, but she needs heavy cream, so she'll call him and have him stop on his way home from work, never mentioning the suitcase or her crying or the funny way her face looked when it was covered in ash.

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Third Prize Winner of the 2011 Friends Baxter Memorial Library Writing Contest ~  
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