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## Untitled Story

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## UNTITLED STORY

Pat Gowen

In Room 101 I sit down to study. Through the open window filters the grind of motors, the splash of tires on wet pavement--the darkness of night sounds--the slam of a car door, the laugh of a girl. I don't know want to be here. Dorm life is mere existence. Life is always outside. I want to be dancing with Kass at the Sweetheart Ball or sitting on the floor with him playing chess and drinking beer.

I try to study, but attention is like a rope in a tug-of-war, being pulled to the dark sounds outside, then to the light sounds in the room, which is cluttered with four years of college life. An LBJ-for-the USA button is stabbed into the bulletin board next to a dried-out corsage. I shouldn't look at the corsage, because I'll start thinking about all the fun I had at Homecoming. Squashed between a Nation of Sheep and The Beaches of Falesa by Dylan Thomas staringly sits The Brothers Karamazov. I can never remember whether you accent the -ra- or the -ma-. It begs to be read, and I really tried to read it once, but after the first twenty pages, the Russian names killed my enthusiasm.

I turn to look at the walls, but they depress me. Their nothing color sickens me. The harsh texture of the cement blocks looks like the moon's surface--scarred, scratched, and pitted. They start to close in, and I want to run into the hall and scream. But, I know I'd get late minutes.

The corridor is actually worse than the room. It looks cold and sterile as it stretches past fifty two lives. It looks best when wet umbrellas line the sides. The square lights down the ceiling are lit alternately after closing--to save money, I guess. I walk past the kitchenette where two girls in robes are trying to decide wheter to buy a popsicle or fudgesicle, a Nestle's Crunch or a Powerhouse. A small girl with dark, vague hair is washing it in the metal sink, and I know only her first name. The two girls finally decide what they want, and they feed money into the hungary machine monsters. The candy machine greedily eats a dime and spits out a Nestle's Crunch. The girl in the flowered

robe puts a quarter in the ice cream machine, but it won't return her change. She swears and kicks it, but it won't give up three nickels. They leave, and the girl mutters, "These damn machines never work."

Two girls are enclosed in the phone booths like insects in a bottle. One smiling girl is standing in the booth mixing words with laughter. The girl at the pay phone is clad in a sweatshirt and cutoffs. She is sitting on the floor with her feet crushed under her bottom. The door is open slightly for air. The booths get so hot that I sweat unless I open the door. That is actually against the rules, but I'd smother if I didn't.

The phone booths are contact with life, but usually I can't get an outside line. I waited once for half an hour, and when the girl on switch answered, she said, "I'm sorry; there are no outside lines." I thanked her, but I didn't really mean it.

The sounds of the jon strikes my ears. The flushing of a toilet sends noise into the hall. The sound of water brashly spraying in the shower is muffled by the doors. A cute blonde in a pink terry cloth robe pushes the entrance door open. She carries a small pail in her hand; the sort pale children load sand into at the beach. Her Lavoris bottle clanks against the side of the pail and accidentally nudges the toothpaste. The door swings silently shut, and the pink blonde disappears from the sterile corridor.

The jon itself is cold, staring place. Mirrors face each other above the two neat rows of basins. When I look into one, I can see what infinity must be like. I feel closer to people in there, because we're all involved in natural functions. I find it difficult to be pretentious when I'm climbing naked into a hot shower.

The bulletin board outside the jon is filled with notices. "Remember your fire drill numbers." Mine is easy to remember because ours is the first room on the hall. Another list tells me that I may have my hair in rollers for Friday dinner, that I may wear a robe to Sunday breakfast, and that I must wear heels to Sunday dinner. That's another rule I break, because I crawl out of bed at about noon and can't work up the energy to put on heels for a noisy crowd of eating girls that couldn't care less.

I turn back down the square tunnel and head for my cell. I'll try to study again, but when I want out of here, I can't think of anything else. The walls shout constraint, and what I want is freedom.

#### MID-MOURNING

Doug Van Hala

Rather evident,  
as a ton of garbage on the bed,  
or like my hair burning,  
the old lovable jukebox penetrates my forehead  
like a ten-penny nail.