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## Life is What You Make of It

*by Jennifer Lynn Gumas*

It was early morning at the Woodland Apartment complex. Like every other morning, the sun rose over the hill, crept lazily across town, and finally cast its warmth on the furrowed, grumpy gray brick structures. The lumpy apartments tried their best to shrug off the warmth of the sun, emanating a haughty coldness from their peeling black shutters, barred windows, and bolted doors.

Margaret took her time on the slippery sidewalk as she made her way down to her mailbox. The landlord was supposed to hire somebody to shovel the snow off of the sidewalks, but he never did.

"Somebody is going to fall and break her hip," Margaret muttered. Her cane cast a crooked shadow on the muddied February snow. The cars from the highway had corrupted the innocent, sparkling snow on the lawn with carelessly spattered slush.

"How ugly," she scowled.

Meanwhile, Betsy was hobbling toward her mailbox from an adjacent apartment. Betsy paused on the sidewalk for a minute to take a deep breath of the fresh, crystalline air. She smiled warmly, noting the bird footprints scattered in the snow. She always told her grandchildren that they were fairy footprints when they came to visit her. Looking up, she saw her neighbor Margaret fumbling with her mailbox. "Why, hello, Margaret! What a pleasure to see you this time in the morning!"

Margaret mumbled a reply under her breath as she tried to jam the tiny key into its corresponding tiny keyhole with her wrinkled, clumsy fingers. "Yes, yes, Betsy. Nice to see you, too," she forced impatiently. Margaret's mind wandered to what she would fix for breakfast, whether or not her grandchildren had written her thank-you notes for their Christmas gifts, and

whether or not her languid landlord would ever fix her broken window, as she thumbed through her mail with trembling hands. She jumped as Betsy came up alongside of her and started talking again. Margaret tuned out her jovial ramblings. She envied the way that Betsy easily inserted her key into her mailbox, removed her mail, and effortlessly shut the door. Of all the nerve! Betsy was six years older than she was! "Well, it was nice seeing you again, Betsy," Margaret interrupted Betsy in mid-sentence. "Hope to see you again soon!"

"Yes, yes! Like I was saying, you can stop by for breakfast anytime, my dear!" Betsy continued, still smiling warmly. "Good day!"

Betsy ambled up the precarious sidewalk, up the rotting staircase, and back into her modest apartment. Her cat Peppermint greeted her with a friendly purr and a rub against her leg as she entered the room. Her apartment was nothing to brag about, but she had tried to ward off the cold atmosphere by hanging objects of warmth and comfort around the rooms. A picture of her three grandchildren, whom she loved dearly, hung over her living room sofa. Betsy paused to look out through the bars of her window. The snow-covered lawn, though polluted with brown, still enthralled her. She looked like a child captivated by a sparkling blanket of snow on Christmas morning.

Betsy sat down at her simple kitchen table and began to sort through her mail. After sorting through a few bills and a letter from her darling grandson, Betsy came across a strange envelope. She squinted and held the letter up to her crimson nose to read the return address. It was from the landlord. Holding the letter close to her face, Betsy read the contents of the letter:

*Dear Mrs. Betsy Bennette,*

*We regret to inform you that Woodland Apartments will be closing due to circumstances out of our control. All tenants must vacate their apartments by April 3, 2001. Any belongings left after this deadline will be considered the property of Woodland Apartments Management. We apologize for any inconvenience this has caused you, and we thank you for your patronage.*

*Sincerely,  
Woodland Apartments Management*

Betsy's hand shook with growing astonishment as she lowered the letter to the kitchen table, gently, as if it would break if she let it fall. "Imagine that!" she murmured. The same warm smile spread across her face. She was moving! What an adventure! "I must call the children at once to tell them the good news! This is fantastic!"

At precisely the same moment that Betsy was opening her letter from the landlord, Margaret was opening the same letter in the adjacent building. She read it a second, then a third time, just to make sure that she had perceived the message correctly. Her brow furrowed, and her mouth opened in horror. Margaret let out a sob of desperation. She felt very weak. Her white, pale countenance seemed to take on a shade of sooty gray, much like the ruined February snow on the lawn below, as she lowered her head into her arms and began to cry.