

ninepatch: A Creative Journal for Women and Gender Studies

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Awakening*

Article 15

7-10-2012

Impenitent

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Recommended Citation

Martin, Carolyn (2012) "Impenitent," *ninepatch: A Creative Journal for Women and Gender Studies*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 15.
Available at: <http://encompass.eku.edu/ninepatch/vol1/iss1/15>

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Impenitent

She leaves a note,
ballpoint black on unlined blue:
Gone for a drive. May not be back.

She knows she won't be missed
until evening finds the oven cold
and the meal he assumes
refrigerates in disarray.

Her cooler bag is packed—
apples, almonds, sandwiches
lined with last night's roast
and a thousand thawed regrets.

All she needs to seize the road,
she thinks, sweeping diffidence
off the cutting board, leaving
crumbs to grind into the tiled floor.

He won't care, she calms herself—
he, in his self-important suits,
flinging jokes across a whiskey glass,
flirting for applause that makes her blush.

The flower on their bedroom wall,
his gracious background noise,
has jaunted off to cool the day.
That's what he'll surmise.
He'll not unearth the *won't*
beneath her *may* until ice clinks
his glass and calling out her name
earns no reply.

She can't resist one last scan.
Gone for a drive. May not be back.
Eight syllables, she smiles—
impenitent, ambiguous—
a novel plotted in one line.

But, should she add grocery lists
and handymen? Birthday dates
and credit cards? That violets
detest direct sunlight?

Or should she write—
without malice or whim—
that a woman sometimes needs
to need for herself; needs to drive
away from smells of sadness
more persuasive than jasmine
in simmering heat?

No. She opts to keep the blank.
Let him fill it in with
whatever fiction suits.
He'll get his version right,
practice it for public show:
slight tilt of head, eyes moist,
lips trembling just so, sipping
courage against a feigned despair.
He'll craft his perfect words
and play them well, she knows.
Amused, she doesn't care.

She leaves the note
on the granite countertop—
proximate to bills unpaid
beside her empty coffee cup—
and gathers up her sustenance.
Without excuse or backward glance,
she locks the kitchen door,
unalarmed, unafraid.