

Naked

Lance Larsen

I was expecting ripened avocados, Michael,
or half-used spices—the usual throwaways before
a move. Not a grocery bag of garments, unopened,
each slippery package a skin you never tied on.
I found myself saying *Thank you* instead of *Why*?
Did it help that we shared surfaces—the same
middle name, a love of golf and cajun fajitas?
That I home taught alone? Standing in that chaos
of half-packed boxes, you parcelled out your plans
obliquely. And I asked no pinching questions.

Your philodendrons, I remember, were dying
leaf by leaf. In the corner, a bouquet
of smiling mylar balloons. A clean break, finally?
Maybe truest gifts are the ones we give ourselves:
in another week, you and your roommate waking
beside a deeper, warmer ocean. If hugs
are a ritual, Michael, then ours was a dry promise.
You never sent your new address. And I opened
your garments, though I told myself I wouldn't.
Was I giving up on you? The plastic tore easily.

I think of your Radisson nightshift story sometimes—
Christmas Eve, a pair of 15-year-olds
in an unpaid-for honeymoon suite. How they
dove for the covers when you cracked the door.
She, rouged up, hair teased back in a fin
of spray. He, indignant, or maybe just scared,
staring straight at your navy blue lapel.
And you—just checking the lock, as you'd been asked.
What was it he said, *Okay, so you've got us.*
Could you kindly hand me my pants?

We laughed, both of us, as if some punch line
smeared the air. Only later did I see

the story was about nakedness, not morality—
how all of us hate to be probed. Isn't laughter
our way of turning the stare outward instead
of in? And the garments you gave me, Michael?
Sorting laundry, I knew them right off—
full and unbleached, mesh fine as bed sheets.
Then graying, jumbled with the others,
folded away: I slip them on, yours and mine.