

Turncoat

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On line at Rite-Aid where a woman cuts in front of me, says: He was saving my place. There's no saving places, I say. She says to him, Did I not ask you to save my place? He says nothing. She prods. She goads. He relents: There's no saving places. Then I'll just leave, she says, you two *asshole* gentlemen to yourselves. She gets behind me. He shakes his head, shoots a look my way, laughing. There's a term, she says, for people like you: Turncoat. The smell of a snuffed taper burnishes the air. The smile slips off his face. Don't call me an asshole, he says, for *your* problems. That's just what you are, she says, a coward! His laugh now resumes. Ma'am, he says, enjoy your place in line. Caught as we were between the actual and the real. A woman cutting in line. A cockroach scuttling across linoleum where the traps were sold. Things that happened in the corners of our eyes. A jar of blue Gatorade. A bed perfectly made. Unseen paratroopers overhead diving out of planes smoldering in flak as we stumbled out of our clothes. The TV on. The sound off. A coward! she said. Little monuments piled up on a desert floor.