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A Little Open Space Lori Baker

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Lori Baker

A LITTLE OPEN SPACE

You always expect to find it: "around this corner," you tell yourself, or "the next corner," or maybe "that corner, just over there." Day after day you've turned corners: one after another, corners in duplicate and triplicate, corners in photographs and negatives. You've turned memoirs of corners around and around in your mind, and still you haven't found it. You remember it so well: the shape of it, the size (very small, you think, and yet so large—that if only you could find it—you wouldn't be able to hold it in your hand, or even between both hands). You secreted your life around it, like a mollusk—building room after room of elaborate hallways, of cornices, of mantels dripping with fruit in gold leaf, vaulted ceilings, tapestries in deep blue or maroon, furniture that made you happy until the day you decided to seal the room up behind you and build another, newer room. One room after another you built, and lived in, and locked. Going back to them, now, you're amazed at your imagination: did I think of that? Some rooms are vast, some infinitesimally small. Some are smooth and white, luminous as the moon; others are damp, pearly, like the bottom of the sea. Each room is a threshold, another corner to turn, and beyond each corner (ornate or plain, Greek revival or Quaker functionalism) you expect to find it, the space you built your house around, silent and perfect, like a pearl.

You say that when you built your rooms, you thought only of the center. Yet for days, maybe even years, you built rooms only thinking of the room itself, and, finishing one, you already had an idea in mind for the next. Eventually you even forgot the rooms; now every door is a surprise. You don't know what you'll find; you only know that there's one room, a secret room, that contains the only door leading to the outside.

Each room, you think, contains a signal, a sign that points the way. You see the sign in scrolls of wallpaper, in the threads of a rug, in the frame of a dusty portrait. You follow your secret marks smugly from room to room, through one doorway, and the next, and the next, always searching for the one thing you now desire (having exhausted at last the infinite variety of interiors): the secret courtyard where you've hidden the tallest tree, the biggest sky, the whitest cloud.