

CHOICES

By Michele Venne

I can only be one page because I'm used on my other side. She, in an effort to conserve a miniscule amount of wood pulp, has chosen to write me, her TO DO LIST on the non-printed side of a printed-out email that she no longer needs; essentially, a piece of scrap paper, bent at one corner, another completely missing, with a coffee stain across the middle, a date, a place, a title scribbled here and there. She's used two different colored pens, and has even scribbled a phone number in pencil. If she doesn't call soon, I won't be able to hold it for her. She adds to what she has written on this scrap of modern papyrus, and thus creates her misery.

She started out feeling somewhat cheerful, giving me first "grocery shopping" (which she loves to do, finding that the colorful produce and imported cheeses fuel her creativity in the kitchen), followed by "set up lunch date with Jane" (a friend who also has one of me, and thus they don't see each other often). Once Her eyes started to look around the tiny apartment, and spotted the stacks of magazines on the floor (they were trade journals and she thought of them as studying instead of entertainment-even though she hadn't renewed her subscriptions, they continued to fill her mailbox with regularity) and the dust layered on the coffee table, well, those parts of the table that could be seen between pieces of paper, a book, the vase holding scummy water and brown-tinged flowers, the beer bottle from last night, and the TV remote. I knew what she was thinking and tried to grease the paper so the pen wouldn't write. It didn't help. She just wrote things down off to the side: dust, clean apartment, read magazines, do dishes, laundry. The excitement left her. She had a day off from work, and instead of going to the movies, setting a lunch date with Jane, finishing her mystery novel (and find out who the killer

was) so she could return it to the library, or taking Spike, her Siberian Husky for a walk, she'd fill the hours with useless, mundane activities.

Things that weren't liked and jobs she didn't want to do were being added to me. If I had a mouth, I would shout at her, "NO! Don't create me with things you despise. Give me life by giving yourself permission to live!" Teeth gnawed on her bottom lip as she wrote: finish assignment for accounting class, work on PowerPoint for lunch meeting on Wednesday, Jiffy Lube for an oil change, and call Grandma Bertie, at which her frown deepened. Bertie would ask what she was doing, if she had lost weight, if she found a boyfriend, when she was going to get the promotion, and could she come visit her on Tuesday evening for the Bingo tournament at Shady Meadows Retirement Community.

I was slammed down onto the coffee table and if I had a nose, I would have sneezed in the cloud of dust. She started on me by going into the kitchen to wash the dishes. A short time later, she was back, using the pen that lay on top of me, she marked off "do dishes". If I could feel, it would have tickled. On she went, skipping some things on me, writing down three other unpleasant, but she thought necessary, tasks. At the end of the day, many more remained to be done than those that had been accomplished. Walking past on her way to bed, exhausted and unfulfilled, a disturbance of air knocked me to the floor.

I would have cried, if I had eyes, at the incredible amount of time frittered away on activities, tasks, jobs, and business that made her day so unpleasant. Why does she choose to do things that fail to bring her joy? In the end, it isn't about how clean the apartment is, or the ability to live up to someone else's expectations, or staying locked inside and away from that which sustains living bodies. She will perish, not having

completed me, the guilt over her failed attempts to execute what she was taught was why she existed, blackening her experience. A wiser choice would be to recognize what is in her heart, and leave me lying, forgotten, face down, half under the couch, in the dark.