

“I’ve got to go.” Donna’s mother forces her cart ahead quickly, squeakily, racing a jagged path to aisle seven —pop and chips—the rattly squee scraping apart her brain. It’s a wall of Lay’s and Ruffles and Fritos, of Coke and Pepsi. She abandons the cart and hurries through the electric door into the cold, crawls into the car and speeds to Brookside Drive, blowing through the four-way stop at Court Street. There’s a vision in her head, such a real vision of Donna waiting at home, huddled against this January freeze, Donna leaning on the locked front door, Donna ringing the doorbell and stamping her feet to get them warm. “It was a blue coat,” Donna’s mother told the police. “Wool, with wooden toggles. She loved that coat. We gave it to her on her birthday. Her brother...” Well, no. Stop there because her brother sliced open the rope loops with a knife that was taken away from him.

But Donna’s not at the door.

Donna’s mother waits across the street in the car, eyeing her house as a stranger might, as Mary-Margaret might. The only sidewalk on the block no one’s shoveled. The stunted maple tree with the sad shreds where the limb crashed down after the boys and their friends jammed onto the rope swing, seeing if they could break the limb and yes, they could. (Explaining that to the other parents!) Drawn curtains, their yellowed lining like fallow skin. Dried chrysanthemum stalks someone should’ve cut back, jutting through the snow. Who’d believe how hard she works to keep this house properly, cleaning and cooking nutritious, four-basic-food-group-meals?

Of course Donna’s not here. What was she thinking?

She spins the key in the ignition and the car grinds angrily because it’s already running. Pay! Attention! Where’s she going? Not to Drug Fair. Not to the school. Not to the skating rink. Not to the police station to confess that she prays nightly her boys will get a high number in the draft but never once prayed anything for Donna because what would Donna need? Not going to the Press-Citizen newspaper office to talk to the lady reporter with