

Ellen McKnight

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### The Achievement

You've managed not to kill anyone, and I know what a struggle that's been for you. Mornings in the grocery store with a sharp metal cart behind some old lady, hunched like your mother once was, a vague hospital stink about her, scraping her thin-soled shoes across the linoleum floor. I know how quick you are to sense the itchy need that lurks in frailty like a contagious rash. The impulse seizes you all at once, that urge to eradicate – could you act now, unseen, and be done? Your fists tighten on the black plastic bar of the cart, but your sweaty grip is just real enough to stop you; lifting your hands for a moment, you manage not to ram her down. The old lady hobbles on to the next aisle and your clenched teeth release a whistle of relief, streaked with regret, that is peculiarly your own. But the day doesn't end there. Still the errands must be run, restraining the car; dinner made in the kitchen, stopping the knives; the phone calls returned, controlling the deadly sting of your words. Then worst of all, *he* comes home from work. Over your shoulder, you ask how his day was, careful to avert your radar eyes. You wonder when you came to hate him so. But you hate them all now, the old friends who call, the kids who want favors, the brother who sends you a birthday card. All asking something of you in their insidious way. The main thing is not to act, not to let the rage take over. But each time it whispers to you, its voice liquid with seductive promise. What if for once you allowed yourself to let go? Scour fury through your veins, scream annihilation, vaporize the enemy out your hands, your feet, your eyes. Oh the release, the orgasmic rush of it. You'd be so empty at last, so free. But no. You rein in the cart. You contain the car. You hold tight to the knives. And you blink back your killing glare whenever someone might be in range. Blunting your power, saving the world again. This has been the achievement of your life.