

Doing His Laundry for the First Time

AN I STORY

BY JAN ELLISON



Jan Ellison won an O. Henry Prize for her first published short story, and her second was short-listed for *Best American Short Stories* and the Pushcart Prize. She holds a BA from Stanford University and an MFA from San Francisco State University. Ellison lives with her husband and children in Portola Valley, California.

THE CHORES that in her marriage made her limbs ache have become a quiet pleasure. The new man, with sole custody of his children three days a week now, feels differently; he confessed to her that very morning that he's begun to send the laundry out.

So she feels a surge of domestic affection as she lifts off the floor of her bathroom an undershirt he's left behind and carries it downstairs to her laundry room. She stands and holds the T-shirt to her face and inhales. Then with a start she pulls the shirt away.

It smells nothing like him. Or else it smells exactly like him—this man she kidnapped and intended to hold without ransom, forever—and that scent of pine and earth she fell so hard for does not belong to him at all, but to the laundry detergent his wife had used to clean his clothes. **N**