

Three Bedrooms in New Jersey

by Tina Barry

1.

My mother insists my bedroom was pink, but I recall the pale gray wallpaper printed with delicate ballerinas. I think I'm correct in my recollection; when I'm daydreaming I see my small finger tracing the outline of a dancer. One autumn, a neighbor removed the hanging seats from his daughter's swing set and trussed a deer he had shot to the top bar. I could smell it as I lay in bed.

2.

We abandoned the little ranch house for a charmless split-level in a new development. Divided into two tiers of clunky rooms, the foyer sported a marble floor and, whenever it rained the basement filled with water. My bedroom was painted lavender and I loved the furniture: a desk and bed edged in gold, its canopy draped with pink ruffles. I'd arrange toys atop the fabric, and when the lights were out, look up at the sky I'd fashioned: dark blobs of stuffed bears and tigers, the rectangular shapes of sanitary napkins, swiped from my mother's bathroom. Perfect mattresses for Barbie and Ken.

3.

After my father moved in with his girlfriend, my mother sold the split-level and rented a two-bedroom in an apartment complex rife with divorced mothers and the under-employed. I shared a small, dirty-white room with my sister. One closet held our clothes. At night, feral cats in the bushes wailed like the witches in Macbeth. I once opened the window and shouted, "Shut up!" They stopped humping and gnawing on birds to stare, eyes yellow-green in the streetlights.

