

LAURA B. GINSBERG

SHE DOES THINGS

A COLLECTION
OF MOMENTS

JUNE 21



SHE WALKS

into the abandoned farmhouse. Her distant cousin's grandmother had lived and died there. Footsteps echo with conviction. Floors groan of value. Lost paperwork. She awkwardly chats with an aunt she hasn't seen in decades, who warns of desolation out this far. Shards of disapproval nod toward the purpose of a moment. She smiles at this familiar conversation. The peel of the wallpaper stretches to shadows in the golden light of morning. Colored flowers suspend in bloom. She sees no bruises, just comfort and liquid potential. Magnetic direction. The house needs someone's attention, and she needs something to attend to. Decimals of questions swell within the calm of the wood. Tasks comfort her turbulent opinion that she might just be better off as a hermit. Complete electrical replacement. A compass of junctions. Restrictions of vibrations. Here, she will be able to answer the inquiry of grief's riddles. She won't need her voice as much as the effects of hammers and flatheads. An exchange of cash and a handshake rustle up the enchantment of seclusion.

JUNE 24



SHE FINDS HERSELF

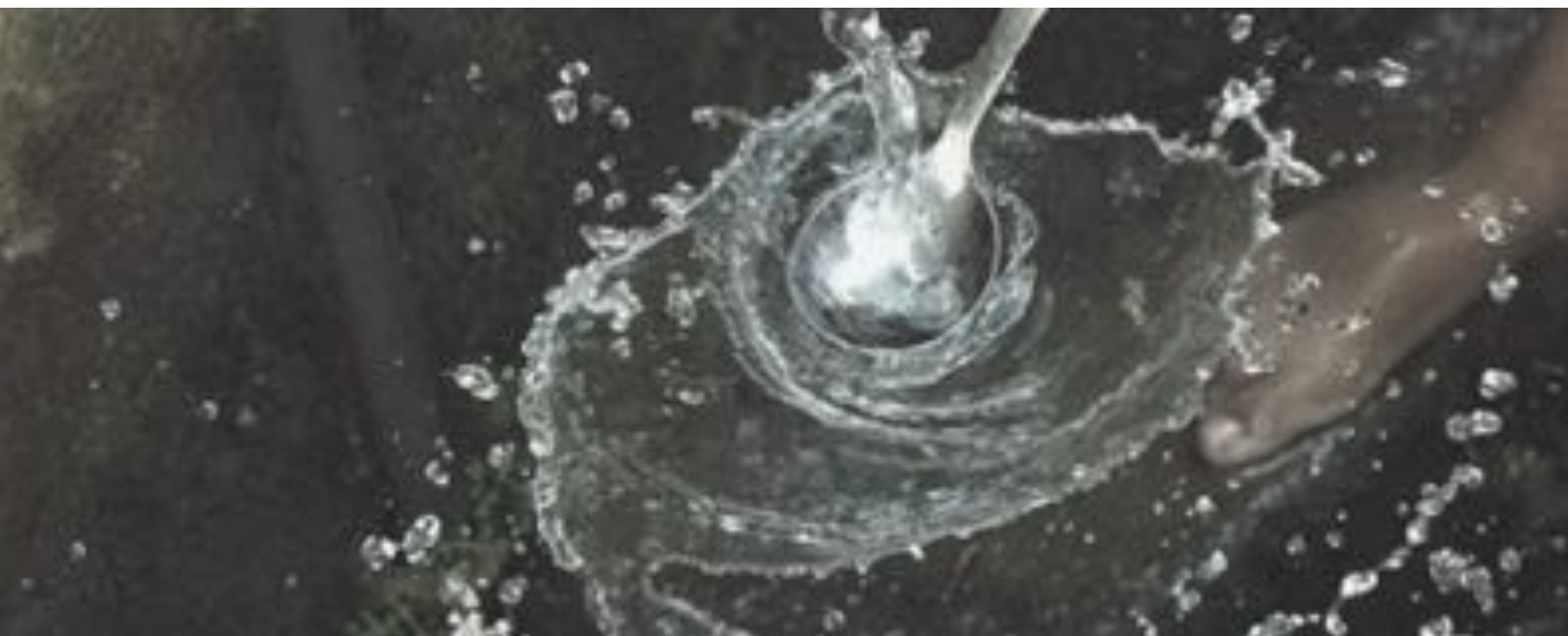
in her new solemn kitchen at dawn. After clanking through the ring of skeleton keys and twisting the loose doorknobs, she puts her hands on her hips. "This is where I'll start," she says out loud to no one. Permission flares in the parallels of her veins, distributing strength. Furniture and dishes scatter around, an intersection of inactivity. A smeared stove top greets her heavily with informal gravity. Imagined heat radiates in a medieval gnarl against her sorrow. Perhaps the grenades of memories will cease against the infantry of restorational tasks. Mismatched dishes crowd around the sink, all greedy for attention. Surely the work will engrave her curving sadness into something more delicate that she can appreciate.

JUNE 26

SHE STARTS CLEANING.

The romance of a soapy sponge against a counter. One gradual battle against a roost of grease and dust after another. Layers of progress revolve. Promising repetition. She uses cleaning as nourishment, especially when sadness seems more attractive than it really is. She rejoices in a hard scrub and a coat of paint Promising. The slosh of her own sudsy movement. Fresh bottles of chemical assistance.

She ventures into memories of going with her mom to clean the expensive houses on the beautiful side of town. The buckets of sweet-smelling and woodsy water against floors and banisters of recurring realism. Toys placed neatly in a language that her family could never speak: wealth. She had not dared to rummage in that sparkling reality. She had read quietly instead.





JULY 4

**SHE
MAKES
COFFEE.**

The sampling of flavors brew boldly. Salivating for an unknown flavor from a country of origin she will never visit. Her mugs are the containers of their travels and past encouragements. A day to enjoy the memories of beignets. They had whispered together through the cemeteries and laughed at voodoo trinkets. Shaking the carton of cream creates a cheap latte. Her days are all stirring together after naps and evaporating midnights. Time and sleep extract in patches. The spurting reaction of the pot and steamy hiss of completion. A daily clock of segments unusual to most people. Breakfast at 3 am and coffee at 10 pm. Permission to ignore common schedules. Protection from entire years lost sitting at a desk in uncomfortable shoes and skirts that stretched too tight around her grammatical proportions.



JULY 12

SHE GETS A NEW STOVE.

Temperatures run differently behind a new oven door. An unexpected expense, as most big purchases are. Complicated irritations. The occasional fire of separation from that which she knows. A possession fixed by some gentle old man — a reflection of heating surface, cleaned and polished after sitting outside in a graveyard of appliances. She chose this one. Repaired and brought back to life to heat the center of her kitchen. The pleasing smell of warmth. She can have biscuits again. Eyes burn more regularly with the same skillet. Unusual blue flame. Apple-smoked bacon. Scrambled eggs for the neighborhood dog that wanders up late at night.



**JULY
16**

**SHE
TALKS**

with the preacher's wife. They laugh together over Japanese jasmine tea. This faithful stranger from down the road rubs her belly where she hopes there is a little girl. Her two rambunctious boys love to shoot fireworks and sell vegetables from the garden. They softly imagine what it's like to have the freedom to do anything without judgment from God, men, or other women. Chats about quilting and painting seascapes on canvas. The afternoon light starts to blur into a spare but elongated space next to the stove, so the time for food preparation shadows the dreamy freedoms. Responsibility calls. Always occupying the profile of an evening. The nourishment of sacred bodies. Doing good work for others. For a few minutes, they extend the escape from loneliness and lavish in the eagerness of a budding but unlikely friendship. She watches as the woman ambles down the hill into the twilight. They both click on lamps in windows when doors solidly close and safely latch.

JULY 24

SHE PAYS BILLS.

To reconcile her accounts is to recover from an illness of relaxed spending. The recurrent need to tighten a belt that never quite fits. Struggles and slides on pants that aren't even hers. He had always handled these things. She has to be able to stare at numbers and not cry. Repeatedly. The cost of continuing to breathe as a recluse. Energetic saving simply leads to catastrophic losses while surface compensation allows for the blind eye against emergencies, like her husband's cancer treatments. Can tiredness be considered an illness? Radiating attention away from the things that really matter. Loose documents of mortgages, car payments, and the estimates for the new heater and air conditioner. She avoids glancing in the direction of the hot water heater for fear that it will spit out its last breath in a flood of boiling fury — the thunder that thing rolls out.



JULY 29

SHE PULLS OUT HER JEWELRY.

Should she sort it by category? Sentimental? Expensive? Never worn? Worn daily at some point? Is it possible to connect to the open soul of precious metals? Rose gold. White gold. Iok. Inexpensive. Performances of what one wears on the hand and ear. Impressions of warning. Real versus not real on her hand. Around her throat. Thin and delicate. Lost in its particulars. Severe and thorough. Reliably there. To adorn her. From her mother's collection. The sisters had taken turns choosing from the stack of expensive apologies from their father. Secure and solid. Handed down over generations. Lacking human feelings. Not all that glitters. And yet, what is the value but repetitive examination of fragmented emotions. Her husband had found that one pearl necklace, and then she had lost it. So she now wears only the fear that gems can't actually mean anything. Her wedding band remains her only loyal decoration. The rest of the sentimentality stored, overflowing in a drawer. How much can any of it really be worth anyway?

AUGUST 2



**SHE LOSES
DAYS IN
MOVIES.**

On the old TV left in the living room. Some VHS tapes and a VCR. The husband in the movie of the moment seemingly stares through a peephole with a mindset that eventually becomes casual and loving. But he remains a jerk — the man from a short story turned into a movie. He becomes a hermit watching his family through a closed window. And yet, she watches the fake world through the glass of a television box of technicolor. Distance of despair and romance. Always cheerful and backed by music. Her own husband had loved the strangest movies. How can real life compare? Is she visible at all to herself? Securely in the same place she was yesterday. But just sustained. Softened in tone against the reality dramas, openly scripted. Groups of the same approximate age and status. Fake dreams. Something to get lost in. But knowing the ending of a movie seen so many times brings a sense of how things can work in the world if only she can repeat what she has seen succeed for someone else. Isn't that how it works?

AUGUST

5

SHE READS AND WRITES.

With the grain or against? Constant sanding has dusted the arrangement of tender fibers in her arms. Instead of the sandpaper, she grasps a book, beloved and unopened. She grants herself permission to pour another expressive cup of coffee. Vivid caffeine and rasping sentences need to be her morning. Planting seeds of loveliness needs to be her particular purpose. She unleashes a barrier of music and simply ignores the slam of work to be done around her. Admittedly, it isn't going anywhere without her, so why stumble over her own feet to accomplish just another dragging claw across the conflict of projects — all secondary to her gratitude for the field of grasshoppers in her immediate rumor of vision. Hold tightly. Violins in granule. Criminal piano in structure, clustering together with the struggle of pages and dignified cream. Sketches of a story she doesn't know how to tell.



**AUGUST
12**

SHE REARRANGES FLOWERS.

Overwhelmed. She decides to walk out and gather more flowers. To arrange them. A compound within a metallic moment. The smell is influential anyway. Soft addiction. The water in the vase soars through the leaves and stems, heaps in altitudes. Drooping white snow drops. Friendly and welcoming. Social solitude to improve the harsh texture of her afternoon. Acceptable society. Revolving device. Absorbed sobbing. Noise of a partially blocked situation. Cut off the resemblance. Extremely extent. Strength of a given time. Soaking, and a particular mix of fizziness. Distortions of glass and liquid and sunlight and reflections of a table depth. Set for one.



AUGUST 18

**SHE
POURS
WATER.**

She splits open the tense of the tea. First. Person. Inclusive. A gathering of kindly kindreds. A woman she met at the grocery and her friends. A fate of writers. Like a flock of compulsives. Kinetic with the percussion of words, images, sentences, and characters. Like kindling ready to alight and collide in their sentimental minds. To talk of craft. To drink the flavors of dandelion and caramel. Peaches and persimmon. A cube of sugar, knowable in the cup she wrangled home from the thrift store. Amish honey the goldenrod kingpin of the mismatched settings. Steeping and stirring, they thump and rattle through the curling afternoon. Gardens of stories. Though specific diversions bolt a few stray remarks, affection is the most common of greetings. Green flesh of kiwi with a flirtatious crunch of seeds. Graying strands tucking frequently behind attentive ears. The knell of the knitted conversations come to a halt as a car horn interrupts. A ride from a husband eager to have his dinner on his table. Magic shatters, smoked and sleepy. Rustles of handbags and goodbyes. She captures what she can on paper.

AUGUST 19

SHE CRIES

while washing dishes. Once supported by a surface.
Function of work. Insignificant machine of opalescent
scalding and functional bubbles. Certain resentment and
tears mean more scrubbing. A lean. A sigh. More action.
Cleansing form of medicine. Inspection against sunlight,
operatic and exposing. Shifting and swooshing. Weight
on the other foot. Elbows on the counter. Cutting release
of pain in her lower back. Rinse.

Set off to the side. To dry. Not until. The oven her
neighboring spectator of the onerous and highly disguised
emotions. Frustration. Fear. Dread. Sorrow. Exhaustion.
Particular and now quite accessible. Swooping. Surgeries
of countryside damaged by enterprise and operation. No
way to control the achievement of ceremony of reference.
Duty of responsibility overwhelmingly identified as
alone but daring consideration. Disorder of the eyes.





**AUGUST
28**

SHE USES TELEVISION

as her company. Mechanical voices, full of saffron and familiarity, add a continuous current to the floorboards of her morning routines. The flourishes of high heels and perfect teeth fling casual intentions around her soapy flotations of breakfast dishes. Her husband would have changed the channel on the fanfare of makeovers and vampires, of catfish and canned laughter, of law and order. On the last half hour of a movie she's seen a dozen times. The glossy expressions make it easier to be awake at 4 am in her otherwise quiet existence. Expected congregations of drama and morning traffic help spark the stems of quilted loneliness. These men and their perfect beards make good company — casual and exaggeratedly complex. But so young. And not yet diminished. She clicks through channels to ignore the precipitation that will fall in the afternoon as a backdrop against the kitchen window and drape through the leaves of the swinging limbs that block her view of the preacher's house down the road.



SEPTEMBER 4

SHE CALLS SOMEONE,

anyone, dialing around to her useful circle of connections, before climbing the ladder. As though the fear could dissolve as her hands shake. Arms trembling. Disconnected screwdriver makes an aversion of putting the globe back on. She doesn't want the decorative glass to shatter at her feet. Or to lose her balance and fall on the shards. Scenarios abound her in mind. She can't dissect the fear of falling. She remembers picking up her own mother when she kept falling. And her mother-in-law had died on the floor waiting for someone to walk through the door to find her in the kitchen. The women left behind are so afraid of discarding their freedom and asking for help. The loneliness of doing things and of doing nothing. The bulb refuses to dislocate and dismantle into something she can handle on her own. Like when she choked on that potato chip the other day, so she dares not eat them anymore if no one is around. She misses potato chips. The dread of a lightbulb that pops. The distribution of her weight on the step stool ladder and even the need to go to the hardware store. So many options for light bulbs these days. She can barely read the boxes and decipher the terminology of the new technology that doesn't glow golden anymore. Not so expensive, she guesses, for something that says it will last for years. Can she trust those words? Will she be gone when that light bulb pops again? How does she feel about buying a light bulb that might outlive her? At the store, a handy man had offered to change it for her. She cannot afford to have him help her with a light bulb. She could bake him and his wife a cake as payment. Maybe they could arrange something for some of the other projects still unfinished, troubling to her. How many more decades or days can she go without changing her own bulbs? Without someone to steady her.



SEPTEMBER

**SHE SMELLS
DUST.**

12

Her mother had read her Bible every morning looking for peace. Preservative or preparation? Medicinal or cosmetic? As she sits in her own half-baked kitchen, she smells the dust. It has substance. The proof of the occasion of our existence. The impression toward prerequisite. A privilege of birth. Decaying in a period of time. A nearly completed device. She leans to flatten the broom against a corner. Her mother had also fought the preposterous battle against the dust. Pledge and a cloth on Saturday mornings, with the help of her as an uninterested child, sometimes. More appreciative of the oily encouragement of her father than the presentiment of lemon. Of that old radio in the corner that no longer speaks sounds but that reminds her of her father and his radio voice, far away. Laughter and songs scattered around a mechanic's engine-stained workshop. Advancing the lesson that controlling static involves prescriptive willingness. While Sugar. Salt. Vinegar. Meant alcohol. Preserve, pickle, and enjoy. Fulfilling the future rations. Gifts of incidence and a cycle of what remains. No amount of cleansing will heal her desperate elevation.

SEPTEMBER 22

SHE GETS DIZZY.

A soft crackling sound in her neck. That cylinder of access to her shoulders and brain. A spin of something important. A vehicle of uncontrollability. Symbol of slides. Magical significance. Messenger blade. Something is wrong. Roots along an edible alphabet operate against the access of the moment. Saccharine dismissal has put her here in a sealed and massive curve, traveling nondeliberately through action. Apples and biscuits.

Hands out for something sturdy and charming. A ruse of the recurring chance of success. Description of shooting flow and a strong demand of some substitution relating to determination. A routine, dull and hard to change. The flakiness will pass, unsophisticated in its methods to disrupt her happenings. Ancient rungs of support and level messengers. Supplied through pipes and taps. Traffic at its heaviest within a flexible structure. Relating to a dangerous game of change. She reaches out. She falls.





SEPTEMBER 23

She hears the front door crash open through the memory of her father's radio echo. Feminine footsteps hover over her and bend her toward conscious light and away from the shadowy comfort of a transitional distance.



SHE DOES THINGS.

LAURA B. GINSBERG

GOALS OF THE PIECE

Evolution of sadness.

She actually needs people, not solitude.

The husbands who show up derail her.

Her husband died.

She could be any woman, any widow.

Compelling narration, somewhat distant,
but close enough to evoke emotion.

Somewhat near the South, but vague.