Crossroads

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"A dog's toenails scratched the kitchen floor as the screen door slammed. Melanie held out her hand as the blonde cocker spaniel licked her fingers. She uncrossed her long shapely legs and shifted restlessly on the couch. "Cage;" a man's voice said sternly. Obediently, the dog followed the man's pointing fingers and settled into his white cage. The man grinned and closed the cage door. Melanie clutched a piece of paper in her hand and looked nervously at the man."

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A dog's toenails scratched the kitchen floor as the screen door slammed. Melanie held out her hand as the blonde cocker spaniel licked her fingers. She uncrossed her long shapely legs and shifted restlessly on the couch. "Cage," a man's voice said sternly. Obediently, the dog followed the man's pointing fingers and settled into his white cage. The man grinned and closed the cage door. Melanie clutched a piece of paper in her hand and looked nervously at the man. "Dreww," she began. "I got my acceptance to graduate school today:" "That's great," he said as he walked into the kitchen. "Do we have anything to drink?" "Are you listening, Dreww?" she asked. "Sure, dear," he replied absently. "I'm happy for you:" Melanie looked at the man's back as he searched the refrigerator. Frustrated, she stood and walked back to the kitchen. Standing in front of the man she said, "I am going to Boston for graduate school:" The refrigerator door shut with a slam and the man turned to face her. "Melanie, Boston is six hours away:" "I realize that," she replied coldly. "What do you expect me to do while you are gone for the next three years?" "I want you to come with me," she replied softly. The man stared at her in shock. "You are kidding, right?" he asked. "You don't really expect me to leave a job I have had for five years and move to another city?" "Why is that so unreasonable?" Melanie stormed. "If you got transferred I would be expected to move with you:" The man stared at the woman in front of him. Her eyes were dark with anger and he realized he was staring at a stranger. She had been his friend and eventually his girlfriend for the last three years. They had moved in together over Christmas and she had never once mentioned applying to graduate school in Boston. "Why didn't you tell me you applied to graduate school?" he asked. "I was scared," she replied. "Of what?" "That you would react the way you are now. If you had known I applied to Boston we would never have moved in together:" "You are right," he stormed angrily. "I waited for you to get your undergraduate degree. But, I am not waiting for you to get your graduate degree. What do you need it for anyway?" Melanie's thoughts rolled backwards as she calmly replied, "When I was a little girl, I used to tell my mom I was going to move to the East and live in Boston. I never knew how I was going to accomplish that dream, but I knew one day I would live on the East coast." Drew looked scornfully at Melanie, "That's a real nice dream, dear. But it's only a dream. Your life is here with me and there are plenty of jobs you can get with a bachelor's degree:" Melanie stared at Drew in disbelief and softly said, "You really don't understand, do you?" "There is nothing to understand," Drew replied. "Raising my kids and marrying me do not require the prerequisite of a Master's Degree." Melanie walked to the couch and sank into it as her thoughts whirled around her head. "Marriage and kids," she thought. "I am too young to be making these decisions. But he is already thirty and wants to settle down. What if I go to Boston? What if this is my only chance to get married? What if no one asks me again?" She looked at the man standing in front of her and then glanced at the dog in the cage. For a minute, her throat closed with tears as she looked at
the dog. The dog was always in the cage. Whenever the man couldn't deal with the way the dog was behaving, he went in the cage. Melanie stared at the dog and suddenly she was looking at herself. The man would cage her like he did the dog. He would never let her have her dreams. There would always be kids to take care of and a house to clean. Suddenly she looked at the man and said, "I am going to Boston."

"What will I do?" he asked.

"I guess you'll have to find someone else to put in the cage," she replied as she walked out the door.

CHRISTINE STROSSMAN  The Passage