

Spring 1985

## The Stories We Know

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### Recommended Citation

Lewis, Lisa (1985) "The Stories We Know," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 24 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss24/11>

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## *The Stories We Know*

Sara, there's nothing here of my own.  
Until today, a bank of weeds masked  
The front of the house, and its rotting basements.  
A young woman worked, cutting the stalks.  
It's not because of her that I think of you,  
But because I'm alone; and weeds,  
Great felled forests of over-sized daisy  
And thistle, cover the yard.  
A lizard, quick as its own tongue,  
Hurries from shadow to shadow in hopes  
That somewhere shelter exists.  
I'm not quick or willing  
Enough to try to catch its neon tail,  
Which, I've learned, it would leave  
In my hand, barter for its escape.

The friendship of women is easy to understand.  
Whenever I go to my true home,  
The one I claim, I go to you,  
And the rank apartment stinking of catpiss;  
And the furniture draped with your uniforms;  
And your shoes like broken toys all over the floor;  
And the box of cereal open and stale  
On the radiator; and the Scrabble scores  
On envelopes, with yours forever highest  
Because you love to cheat;  
And the dozens of plants campaigning for water  
With an ominous dropping of leaves;  
And books on the shelves from classes  
That we took together, starved  
For the love of our desperate teachers;  
And the name of your brother,  
Which is everywhere but mostly unspoken  
Because he took his own life.  
Once I thought a photo of him

Was of you at an awkward age.  
Because I didn't know, I laughed.  
Because in my foolishness I hurt you,  
His story became my business,  
The details my duty to keep.

Stories are secrets that fell from grace,  
From the elegance of the heart's solitude.  
The older we grow, the less we work  
To find out things that once we wept to uncover—  
And we were a team, ransacking.  
We stayed out of each others' way.  
Now you say: *Let it be known what we found.*  
I'd like to have back our conspiracies,  
Our peerless confidence born of fear.  
But we faltered. We began to grow up.  
Now it's plain that the scratching we hear  
At the unlocked window is only an elm  
In need of pruning, or a sparrow come down  
From confusing heights and lost  
For a moment on earth. We're no longer  
At the center of things, and if we're now  
Less visible, we're warm with the jostling  
Of crowds around us. We're closer

To the unwashed heavens, yet we're still  
Ourselves, discrete, a thousand miles between us.  
That is what stars feel, pulsing strongly  
Against a deep black background. Sara,  
I've never wanted many friends.  
I've longed to be one of your blood kin,  
With your bad dental records  
And sturdy bones. And I've longed  
To stop aging or simply to die young,  
But painlessly, like a watch left outdoors  
On a damp night, or a canvas  
With the figure of a lovely girl

Blocked in, and set aside.  
On the phone you tell me that in the past weeks  
You've been moved to tears  
By in consequence—a story overheard  
While waiting in line, of a boy  
Questioned by police on crimes  
About which he knew nothing.  
I tell you all the stories I know.  
Most of them you've heard already.  
They sound like jokes in comparison  
To the one that flickered from a distant source  
Like a star burning out in sorrow.  
When the weeds take root again, I'll dream  
Of every acre on earth they claim,  
And then I'll come and tell you.  
I'll know how to make us both laugh.