

CRISTINA ADAMS

Mom's Locked Door

Ms. Smith is going through her boyfriend's emails. She doesn't think that she is; instead, she thinks, *Oh, I'm just looking for a certain document, which might be in his email.* She really believes this, can't admit to the gnawing need—the compulsion—beneath the excuse.

She doesn't find the document she expected. Instead, she finds an email with the subject heading "SlipCock Account Confirmation." Hmm. She wonders what that could be. *Probably a crude joke site.*

But when Ms. Smith clicks the link, it takes her to a website for closeted men who are in relationships with women and want to experiment with men on the side. She digs further into his email, finds correspondence between her boyfriend of ten years and multiple men. In one thread, they are having cybersex. In another, they plan to meet up. In the next, they are planning to meet again.

The kids—some of them hers, some of them his—arrive home from school. They knock on the door, yell, "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy! Today I painted a picture of us," and, "Mom!!! I need you to sign this permission slip for soccer!" They push the paperwork under the door. There is an insistent, repetitive knocking. Little fingers wiggle under the crack of the door and reach out, but Ms. Smith can't sign the permission slip, and she can't acknowledge those little fingers.

The cacophony swells, but Ms. Smith doesn't react. She knows that, with enough time, they will wander away. They will get hungry and go pick through the refrigerator, which she has left unlocked for them today, as there is nothing left inside. They will slip open the sliding glass door to the backyard and play in the plastic house, set up army men on the back porch, dig holes in the dirt and fill them with water from the hose so that their Barbie dolls can have a swim party. They will rifle through drawers and feel under couch cushions for coins; if they find any, they will ride bikes to the taco truck just outside the neighborhood. They will turn on the TV and zone out, walk barefoot to the park and play tag with the neighbor kids, jump on the trampoline and do flips, and maybe the oldest will go into their bedroom with their boyfriend and close the door.

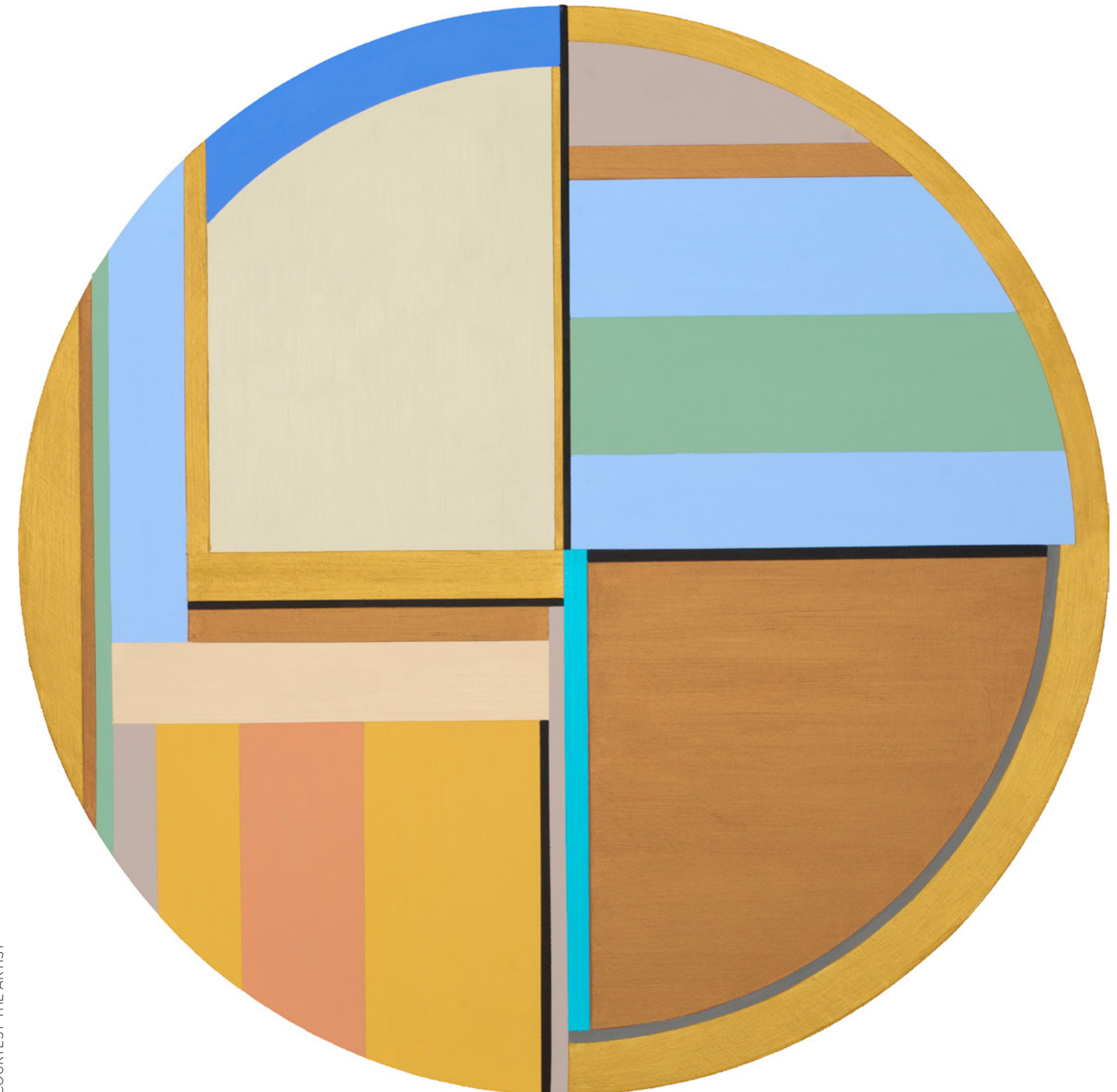
Meanwhile, Ms. Smith will be free to go into her ensuite bathroom, take off her clothes, and step into the shower. There, with the water hot and loud, she will begin to scrub away everywhere he ever touched, and, if she cries, no one will hear.

"Mom's Locked Door" is the winner of the **4th annual George Hitchcock Memorial Poetry Contest** for undergraduate students at the University of California, Santa Cruz

Cristina Adams grew up in Waterford and Galt, California, going back and forth between her parents. Cristina majored in literature at UCSC, and concentrated in poetry and fiction. She has recently self-published a collection of poetry, *Baby's First Cry*, and a short story, "Living Lush." Her poetry has also been published in issues 10 and 11 of *Matchbox Magazine*.

RALPH JOACHIM

Terra Firma #3, 2017
Acrylic on canvas, 24 in diameter



COURTESY THE ARTIST