

ONLY SEVENTEEN

by Natalie McNabb

When they pick me up, Mother
won't come
get me.

This lifts my runaway status,
sets me
free.

I find a job tidying shelves,
sweeping, dusting,
wiping
the toilet in a thrift shop. But, I need
a place to sleep.

I am tired
of The Y. And, I need
a place to eat.

I am sick
of McD's. And, my searching ends
something like this...

"Have a job?"
and I nod.

"How old?"
and, though
I tell him—twice—
"I'm seventeen,"

he says, "If you're eighteen and

 "have a job, just

 "sign here."

So, that's how you get into a studio—

where your neighbor on your right

 mugs your neighbor on your left,

and no one cares

 when three guys rob your place

 while you're there,

where you find needles

 in the ashtrays

and smell a dead guy

in a storage locker

while you're washing, drying,

 folding laundry

 in the basement

—when you're only seventeen.

~ The Stone Hobo, June 2011