

Nine
by Imani Gary

Jamie moved into 201 Riggs Hall two weeks ago. Her room was cool and the view was great but she hated it. We'd decided her neighbor was nuts. Every five seconds he yelled the word "Nine." All hours of the day, nine, nine, nine.

I rarely visited. I couldn't take it. Nine. Nine. Nine. It was insanity.

Last weekend was Jamie's birthday. She threw a small party in her room. No one came. Your neighbor's a freak, one text read. 202 scares me, said another. I have work at NINE, NINE, NINE, was mine. I thought it was clever.

A few days ago, I walked Jamie to her room. The Nines could be heard from the stairs. When we passed 202, Jamie kicked the door and screamed, "Stop," to which 202 replied, "Nine!" Jamie looked like she could cry.

Yesterday, Jamie missed breakfast.

Today, she missed it again. I walked to Riggs and took the stairs to the second floor. The hallway was quiet. I knocked on Jamie's door. No answer.

202's door was cracked open. I knocked.

"Have you seen the girl in 201? Jamie?" I asked.

The door swung open. 202 looked me up and down, smiled, and whispered, "Ten."