

Summer 2008

The Summerset Review



# The Somerset Review

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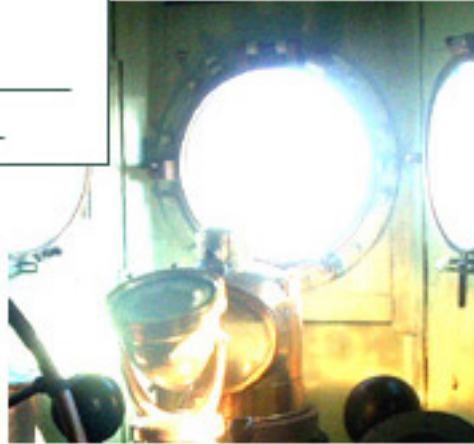
# The Somerset Review

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## Editors' Notes

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We're ceaselessly amazed at some of the pieces we receive for consideration in *The Somerset Review*. Although we can't publish everything we fall in love with, we take pride in the fact that writers continually submit beautiful work to us, unsolicited.

Time and again, after reading an emotionally moving piece, we feel there is no greater praise that could be bestowed upon us than the simple decision of the writer to send that particular story or essay. Often, it's clearly evident that the author admires the work in our journal—this strange, inexplicable but undeniable correlation of a submitted piece and material we have already published.

In our previous issue, we spoke of the overwhelming skew of submissions-to-reader comments, a ratio on the order of several hundred-to-one. We've received proportionally more comments this quarter, perhaps as a result of increasing the reading incentive to \$150, and though we still feel this ratio is indicative of discouraging conditions, we want to express heartfelt gratitude to those who sent us their wonderful work. We take their initiative as a compliment of the highest magnitude.

To add a little humor, and with hope of conveying more quirky affection and appreciation to submitters than disrespect, we include a few cover notes recently received which have accompanied stories. Here's one -

*"Please consider this short piece for publication. The New Yorker hasn't gotten back to me yet on it, but it's been over a year. WTF?"*

Several weeks after receiving the submission, the author withdrew the story. Congratulations are in order, apparently. Here's another -

*"Attached is a short fictional piece for your rejection."*

We are sorry, but the piece did not meet our needs. And here's one more -

*"I have a lot of time on my hands now to write, thanks in part to you I guess. Got fired from my job because I surfed too much, incl[uding] literary sites among other things."*

We don't have any job openings at the moment, but if something frees up, we'll reach out.

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Our Lit Pick of the Quarter is from the literary magazine *Sou'wester*. In the Fall 2007 issue, a story by John Vanderslice titled, "A Study of Morning," brings to us a painter and his struggle to find his muse, to create the right painting. Wrestling with colors and pulling inspiration from a young girl, he buys tubes of lapis lazuli, aquamarine, verdigris, burnt ochre. Here is an excerpt -

He's given up on yellow. He tried and retried it in his sketchpad, then on nearly a dozen miniature sections of canvas: higher, lower, whiter, more citrine, more mustardy. But it never provided the background he needed, it never almost broke through. Either it did or it didn't. And when it did it was not the daylight he wanted. It was daylight from some other hour: ten a.m., or two p.m. That fat and that hot. Yellow is not what he needs.

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If you are like us and have concerns about the 2007 report "To Read or Not To Read," released by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), why not join us at the national conference held by the Association for Literary Scholars and Critics and express your opinion? We feel that this important report provides genuine and alarming facts on the state of reading in this country, but at the same time has missed several critical data collection points and attention to all facets of the matter. The debate kicks off in Philadelphia, October 24-26, and more information is available on the ALSC web site at [www.bu.edu/literary/conferences/](http://www.bu.edu/literary/conferences/). The writers of the report will be there to take critique.

*The Summerset Review* has been honored to have a paper accepted and scheduled for discussion at this conference. But we, and the literary community, need your help in setting clear paths for the future, bringing literature into a more prominent place in our lives. If you have suggestions on this topic, please register and attend. Or at the very least, let us know, and we will do our best to carry your thoughts forward.

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*The Summerset Review*

Joseph Levens - Editor  
Amy Leigh Owen – Assistant Editor

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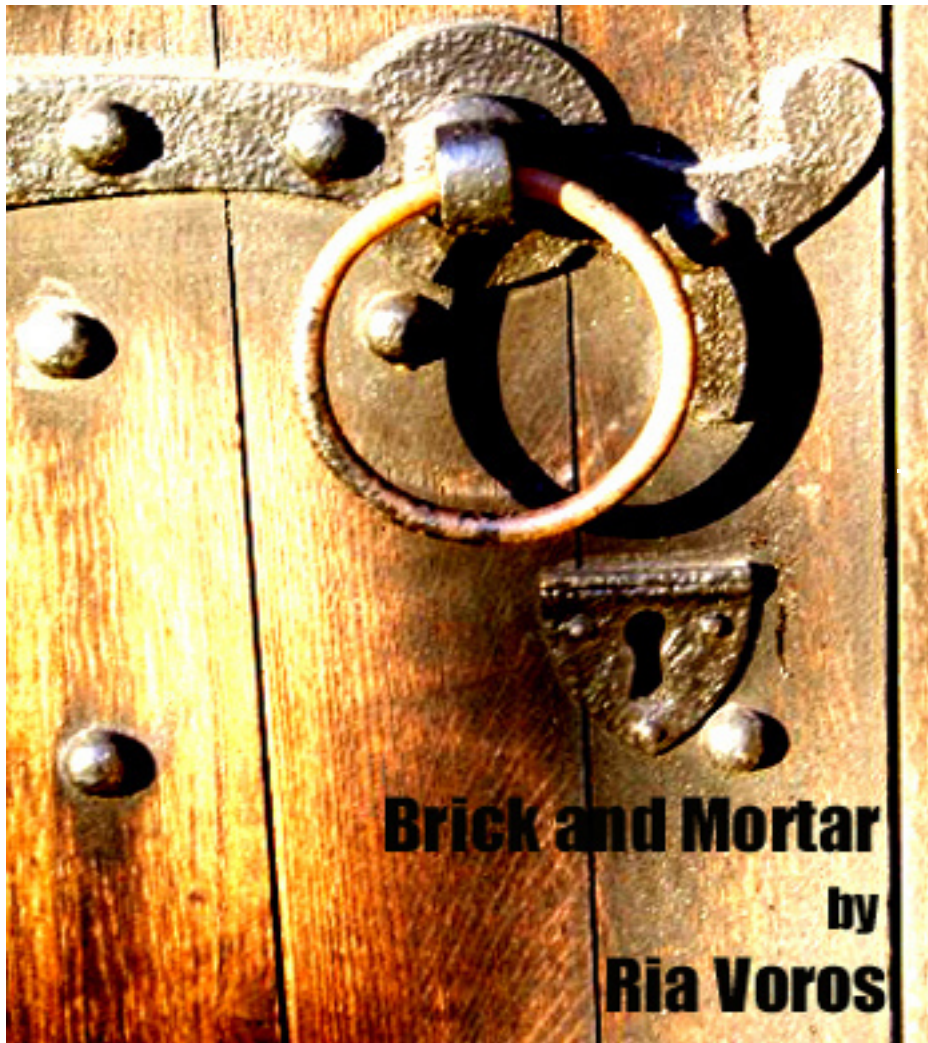
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# The Summerset Review

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If you want me to talk then I'll choose the story. It seems right that the last words you hear are pushed from my mouth, just as the first ones were mine as you lay in the angle of my elbow. Your own little girl sleeps in the next room, her breath slow in dream—I watched her, curled under the blanket like the sweetest cashew. This reversal is so unnatural; the ground they've dug up ready for you, when it should be me, the old woman, whom they take.

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There were fish that season, in '45. Remember the trout in the stream that April? They ran like sportsmen in the shallow water, over the algae-thickened stones. Your brothers caught so many we were sick of fish for months after. You used the supple bones to make a fairy broom, tied them to a twig with twine and left it for the sprites to find. Your father had just returned from Vienna, a trip that cost him three fingers on his left hand, two on his right, the driver of the cart that ploughed him down as blind as he was Hungarian. We coped that spring with one sack of flour from the mill because your father's broken hands wouldn't let him turn the crank to grind our grain. Your brothers insisted they were big enough to do it, but neither of them could pull down the handle.

You could. I remember you at daybreak walking for Klaus' mill, a bucket of grain swinging from your white hand. Gerhard pleaded to go with you—he was barely seven—and you pinched his ear and turned him back inside. You strode easily up the hill and out of sight, the innocence of girlhood flying like the tails of your apron behind you.

May came silently that year. If there had been no calendar to note the date it might have been April for twice the time. A sparrow hawk that nested in our oak all winter suddenly died that first morning. I found its cold body on the woodpile, maggots already creeping under the feathers. It was also your first menses—how happy you were at the sight of that blood. You waited anxiously for it to arrive, wondering if you might be barren.

You were not. Every day I absorbed your fruitfulness. The thyme you grew from seeds and nursed through the winter on the windowsill, the sugar beets in the garden that had never grown so large and bulbous. I can still taste their sweet tang on my tongue, their fiber against my teeth. And you did become a woman, though that May we all wished you had been born a boy.

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It was the twelfth when the first warning came. You sat at the window, nursing hole-riddled socks your father had thrown out in frustration. Your hands dipped with the needle so smoothly, like the flash of field mice at harvest. Gerhard fought with the dog on the floor, wrestling it into easy submission with shouts of supremacy.

"The larch looks sick this year," you called to me. "Perhaps Papa should trim off some bark." Then you looked away because you knew his hands wouldn't let him.

"Can we play with Maynard and Angie, Mama?" asked Gerhard from under the dog's front paws.

"They're away in Eisenstadt," I said. "You can help me with the scrubbing if you want to be useful."

He didn't like that and crawled into our bedroom to keep away from unwanted suggestions.

The crunch of Christian's footfall came through the open window a minute before he shouldered the door. He had taken the grown-up tasks your father set him so seriously, the cleaning of saddles and hay bailing. But now there was a stiffness in his walk and as the door came open I remember thinking: this is it. He has come home to change everything.

"Katy," he called, unable to see at first in the dark house, and you so well-fitted against the curtains. He turned to me then, his hazel eyes momentarily devoured by black pupils. "They have come across the border," he said. "Herr Leinsing heard they will be in Sennorsdorf tomorrow."

"Who? Who is coming?" Gerhard rushed to grab his brother by the legs and pull him down, but Christian stood like a bear to his efforts.

Christian glanced at you, at the sock you had dropped to your lap. He chewed his lip. "It's as bad as they said."

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I can't recall the small events of that afternoon. I'm sure you went out for water and brought back a few yellow daisies from the field for me. Perhaps we finished the kneading and second rise of bread together, your hands so skilled even at sixteen. Perhaps nothing much happened, the calm of common chores an easy breath that day.

What I do remember is you at ten years old, your golden hair light as cobwebs as you ran after the wagon that carried your older brother away for the last time. You had such a sweet face which later grew longer and finer, into the imagining of itself. But as a child your nose lifted just enough to be slightly tipped up, the cleft above your lips deep and round. You smiled as soon as frowned in those days, so easily squeezed, Karl would say.

It was this, your last moment with him. He was preparing to ride to the village and then take the train to Eisenstadt for work. Those lean years were hard on farmers especially and Karl wanted so keenly to help. You wanted one more day, one last smile from him, and kicked over the coal bucket when he shouldered his satchel.

"Katy," he said. "Don't make more work for Mother. I'll be home before the frost."

"It's no more work for me," I said from the kitchen table. "She can clean it herself."

"I won't!" you said. "Why does he have to leave now? Why not tomorrow?"

"The train leaves today," said Karl.

"You haven't seen my cabbages," you said desperately. "I've been watering them every day. Mother says they're the best she's ever seen."

"It's true," I said. "They are the best. Katy, let your brother go."

And he did. You followed at a run behind the wagon that rocked along the track. Karl looked over his shoulder once, at the junction with the road, and waved. This last sight of him for both of us, his dark head disappearing as the track dipped. I watched from the doorway, your shaking frame, hands to cheeks. I watched and cried, that you might not forgive me for taking his side, letting him go. You did forgive me. I did not forgive myself.

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That evening after Christian came with the warning, I remember all of us by the fire. The wind forced itself into the eaves of the roof, whistled through the cracks. It was the undoing of your father that he could never tighten the house enough to keep the wind out.

"I'll get some caulking tomorrow," he said, Gerhard heavy on his legs. "I need to see Ludwig in the village anyway."

"I can do it for you, Papa," said Christian. "The caulking, I mean."

"I want to help too," said Gerhard.

"You're too young," Christian laughed.

"You are both too young," said your father. "And Christian, you should help your mother with the meat I brought home."

"I don't mind helping you, Papa," Christian protested.

"No!" Your father's bandaged hands quivered as he pushed Gerhard off his legs and strode out of the house.

In the aftermath of that storm, you offered to put your little brother to bed, and Christian and I sat alone by the flames, watching.

It had only taken his father's lost fingers for him to grow into a man, a slippery transformation that was still incomplete, and it took all his bravery not to try and reverse. I sometimes saw his thirteen-year-old shoulders sag with the weight, but he never cried. He said only one thing to me then: "We'll have to hide her."

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Three days before, you had found the only photograph in the house. It was your father and I, fresh from our honeymoon, squint-eyed in the sun as someone took the picture of us arm-in-arm. I wore a green dirndl with a white blouse and my hair was pinned on my head in a crown, still blonde. Your father laughed at something I'd said, his brown face pulled tight with humor.

You examined the photograph carefully, fingertips on the corners, as if you might smudge the image away from the paper.

"Why is this the only one?" you asked.

"Photographs aren't cheap," I said. "That one was a gift from friends. Why do we need pictures when we see each other every day?"

You sat down at the table as I washed carrots in a bowl. "But if I go away

to the city you might like to have one of me."

"And when would you go there?" I asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps next year."

"And which suitable young man will be accompanying you as your husband?" My cold knuckles hit the sides of the bowl.

"Mama! Boys go to Eisenstadt all the time without chaperones."

"They are boys, older than you, and I would even question their mothers in letting them go so young."

You crossed your arms. "It's what they have between their legs that helps them."

"Katy!"

"It's true. I hate being a girl."

"You don't. I would have gone mad if you were a boy too."

"I don't believe you."

"What?" I caught the blade in your voice and stopped working.

"I'd be fine as Karl's replacement," you muttered. "But I have to be on the farm, help in the kitchen and stay out of the dirt. Karl wasn't even my age when he went to Eisenstadt!" Your brows ruttled together like your father's.

I lifted the bowl and let it hit the table hard. "That is not the same."

"Why? Because he died? Is that what you're afraid of?" You got up so quickly the chair wobbled.

"Katy! Don't talk about your brother like that!"

"What have I said that isn't true?" you shouted. "What happened to Karl will not happen to me, or Christian or Gerhard!"

I slapped you without knowing I did it. It happened so quickly, and afterward the sound of my hand on your cheek ran through me, a haunting I can still hear.

---

In Sennorsdorf, they hid their girls in trees. I heard about it in the village the next day, where a few mothers had gathered to talk about prices we might get for our corn and potatoes. A rash of quiet had spread around the village; even the moulting dogs lay still.

"My Emile has seen them," whispered Gertrude Kuiper, her small fat hands wringing themselves under her chin. "He was over the border for a few days last month—they cleared a whole village of girls! Just like geese they herded them out, back to their camps, and none were spared what they did."

"And Anni is with child again," said Judith Lösen. "They wouldn't take her, would they?"

I shifted the sack of potatoes on my hip. "Perhaps they'll have had their fill

by the time they get here."

"You know what they did in my cousin's village? They bundled them into the oak trees. Gave them bread and cheese and green dresses to hide in." Helga Mueller had come round the corner from the street, her brown shoes shuffling in the dirt.

"And it worked?"

"Some of them were saved. My cousin's girl was. The bastards sniffed around for them, but thank God they're mostly as stupid as cockroaches." Helga dropped her sack on the scale.

"We don't have a tree big enough," said Gertrude. "Do you, Judith?"

"My husband's sister does."

"Listen to us," I said. "We're crazy, talking of big trees!"

"Not that crazy! Will you leave Katye in the house when the Russians come through?" asked Gertrude. "Not your precious daughter, Maria!"

"No more precious than mine," said Helga. "Anja wants to marry Hans Grober next spring and she won't be tainted if I have to tie her to the roof!"

"You speak as if it's your virginity, not hers," laughed Judith.

Helga picked up her sack quickly, setting the scales to swing. "There is nothing to laugh about. Those bastards will not have my daughter. Even if I have to give them all the food in my house, everything in my garden, even myself, she will be spared." Helga turned on her heel and clipped around the corner.

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Then it was the terrible day we saw their smoke. It rose from behind the hill where the boys liked to watch for foxes. Gerhard was spinning stones in the yard and saw it first. He slapped the door open and ran into my stomach, blind with the message.

"The Russian smoke is over the hill," he said to my apron.

We went outside, you, Gerhard and I, and listened for the booms we knew would come. They were detonating things they no longer needed to carry in our barley fields and turnip patches, probably would all the way to Vienna.

Though it sounds strange, you never looked more lovely than those few moments as we waited for the gruesome thunder of exploding crops on the other side of the hill. The morning bath had left your cornsilk hair wavy down your back, wisping into your blue eyes. The line that folded itself into your skin when you smiled was furrowed as you squinted to the horizon, thought and listened. Those perfect lips, the best I ever made.

Before we heard anything, Christian galloped down the track on your father's grey gelding, the reins flying on the horse's rump.

"They're here!" he shouted, jumping off in a whirl of wool sweater and leather boots. "They'll be marching down the road by tomorrow morning!"

---

You thought of it yourself. It wasn't my long-thinking hours in bed that birthed the plan, nor the hours with your father at the midnight kitchen table, candle-less. At three years old, you came to me with a broken-legged sparrow and suggested we fasten a stick to support it. At sixteen, you asked me to make you a room out of bricks. A room with no windows and no doors. You asked me to wall you up inside our house, so when the Russians came, I would have no daughter. And I said no.

"It's the only way," you said, limpid eyes shining with the idea, so newly formed.

I shook my head and threw the bread dough against the table.

"Mama, they'll know the trick in the trees now. There is no other choice."

You put your hands on my busy ones, my trembling ones.

"But if they realize what we've done they will take you, it will be worse. There isn't time to set the mortar. They will smell it. They'll know."

"If we start now it will dry. It's a warm day. Christian will help," you said, so calm and resolute.

"And me too, Mama," said Gerhard, bouncing on tiptoe.

"Christian has gone to get the bricks," you called, already in search of the tools.

---

In remembering all this, I think of other things. Funny how the mind slips to something so different. Though not completely, I suppose: every moment is the same moment living new. I think of your father and me on Verdner Hill, beside the brook that wavered down the slope and into the sharp cut valley our little town was sheltered in. I think of his fine skin—how in love with that skin I was. In so many ways I fell in love with him, but first was his coppery, salty skin. It gloved his hands so perfectly, his long fingers, left just the right amount of nail exposed, the right thickness over the blue whisper of veins. His touch was always warm, always smooth on my arm or cheek, lit from within.

The sky had emptied the night before and that day was so fresh everything looked scrubbed clean. Across the valley, we watched a cart laden with yellow hay trundle along the track. Your father swore it would be him next year, when he had his own farm and fields. The itch to prove himself a farmer was evident every time I looked at him. All he wanted was to use those hands.

"You better have a wife by then," I poked.

"Can you recommend one?"

"What about Liesl, Krauss's daughter?"

"Too fat."

"Muriel from the cobbler's?"

"Have you smelled her on a hot day?"

I slapped his thigh. "And you've been that close?"

He tumbled me over backward and I pinched his nose until he yelled.

"Say it," I cried. "Say it!"

"All right!" He rolled onto his back on the grass. A corn flower bobbed between us where we'd lain on it. "All right," he laughed. "You'll do."

I reached for his nose again. "And?"

"Will you marry me?"

I put a finger to my chin and pretended to study his feet.

"Don't make me wait, Maria!"

"No, I think the question is wrong."

"It's the right question."

"Not for me. Not for you."

"What else can I ask?"

"This is what you, Franz Eschner, say to me: Will you have me, Maria the Lovely?"

"That's what I say?"

"Say it."

"What will the answer be?"

"The right one."

He blinked those long eyelashes. "Am I something to be had? A piece of furniture? A cow?"

"A bull."

"And you the heifer?"

"Say it. Your door is closing."

"Will you, Maria the Lovely, woman of my bewitchment, keeper of my manhood, have me to be your husband, your bull in all things?"

The breeze lifted the fair hair off his gleaming forehead. He never looked so much like home.

---

It was your father who brought the bricks in the end. Christian had intercepted him in the village and together they returned with almost a full cart load, the horses so sweaty when they got to the house we had to swim them in the pond. I remember the crease between your father's eyes as he piled brick after brick from the cart, brought them pile on pile into the house, to the wall upon which you had decided to build the room. Gerhard stood in the doorway, staring, shuffling aside as each armload came through.

You worked in the kitchen, mixed mortar in a feed bucket. How easily you

could have been making breakfast for us, porridge or fruit bread, wiping down the table with your apron, perhaps humming to yourself, hair awry under a kerchief. But we had eaten hours before as the sun crept up the grey poplars; I cleared the kitchen of all food, so when the dust from the mortar filled the house nothing would be spoiled. It was the light from the strengthening sun I remember, shafted through the window on your young, working shoulders. You with a bucket of sloppy mortar, stirring as if it were edible.

By noon the base of the wall had been erected, your father and Christian kneeling on the wood floor with their hands caked in mortar, fingernails cracked from rough bricks. You took the far end of the kitchen to make us lunch: hunks of bread and cheese with early spinach you'd grown in the garden. Gerhard played on the floor with the dog, trying not to look put out that he was too little to help.

"Come. Stand here," your father called to you, the wall up to his waist. "You must see what you think, soon you'll be in there."

All through this he had not once flinched because of his fingers, not once did he look like a man with so many missing. This task was so different, so crucial, I think he knew if he couldn't do it he would be useful for nothing.

You hopped into the new room with the help of the ladder and we all watched you from the other side.

"It's like a farm wall," said Gerhard. "Like Uncle Klaus has."

"But this isn't really a wall," said Christian, taking his brother's shoulder. "It's going to be a room for Katie."

"I want to go in with her," said Gerhard.

"It's just for me," you said, white hands resting on the top bricks. "You can come in when this is all over."

"When will that be?"

"A few days," said your father, "maybe less. Go and help your mother, Gerhard."

He came to me without wanting to and I put him to work wrapping bread and smoked ham in linen and then canvas. I counted sixteen bundles, enough for four days, plus water and apples, a bit of cake I'd saved. It wouldn't be four days. They would pass through quickly and get to Vienna, where whores abounded to slake their thirst for anything. I pounded this conviction into the floor with every step, so sure if I wanted it enough it would happen.

Soon the wall was too high for you to jump down into. Together you and I went into the yard, a last chance to use the outhouse before all you had was a lidded chamber pot. The sky had cleared and swallows swooped out of the blue after mosquitoes. You walked so maturely, with swinging arms down the path. I thought: here is my grown daughter. There is my little girl. A cuckoo made its low call among the oaks and a horse nickered behind the barn. Beyond the hill, smoke that had risen early in the morning still blew steadily upward. There was an echo of rifle shot, then another. I stood in the yard, hands clenched, for you to return so we could walk inside and barricade you into a fictional room.

"They will smell the fresh mortar," your father said.

He handed me a bar of soap as we scrubbed the floor where all the bricks had shed dust like paprika.

"Franz. They aren't here yet, it might be hours. By then it will be dry."

"It was a foolish thing to do. They will not be kind to us all if they realize."

"And you'd sooner have her here in the open for them to take?"

He rested his forehead in a crippled hand. "How much worse might it be for all of us, Maria?"

I threw the brush to the floor as I rose, my face hot and tight. "You've lost one child. Would you knowingly put your daughter in their path to save us all a little discomfort?"

"It wouldn't be discomfort, stupid woman!" He stood too now, bent at the waist as he spat the words. "They can be monsters!"

"And Karl's dying wasn't enough discomfort for you to go through?"

"Don't speak of it, Maria!"

I saw the hand coming; he didn't intend to hit me, knew I'd duck the blow. We stared at each other frozen and unaware of who the other was.

From behind the new wall, in the silence that ate my insides, came your half-voice, cut by the inches of brick that divided us. I've never asked you what you sang that night, though I always wondered. Perhaps if I recognized the melody it would have lessened how your father and I reached for each other, held on crushingly, as we had when the telegram announcing Karl's death reached our hands. It did not occur to me then that you may have heard our argument and were trying to stop it. It seems impossible to think you were singing for joy.

---

The Russian boy had broken teeth. This is what I remember when he first stooped to come through the door. That and his breath of parsley, like he'd eaten someone's garden. Gerhard and Christian had been walking the track and seen them march up the hill, a troop of dark-uniformed, tired men.

Three turned up at the door a few minutes after your brothers flew in panting. Two blond men, years of fighting etched into their faces, and the young man, perhaps twenty, a light beard threatening to age his smooth face.

I sat at the fire with Gerhard, who wouldn't be put in the bedroom but clung to my skirt, wide-eyed. Christian stood beside me and I smelled sweat coming off his skin with a tang. It seemed strange to think you were there too—somehow another part of the house. Your father pulled the door open too fast; the soldiers' faces held looks of surprise. Perhaps no one else had answered their knocks so easily.

"Do you have wine?" asked the young Russian. He stood squarely on the doormat, hands clasped. The other two flanked him, said nothing.

"No," your father answered. "We have some bread and a little ale."

The young Russian turned to the others and murmured a translation. They nodded together.

Christian tensed beside me; I could feel the muscle of his arm tighten.

"Is it just you, your family?" asked the young Russian.

Your father looked straight at them, his mouth a thin flat line. "This is our family. Our eldest son is away in the city."

"But Papa," Gerhard began. Christian quickly squeezed his shoulder and he fell silent.

One of the older Russians grunted something to the young one, who said haltingly "There are no young women here?"

"No."

"Do you know where my friends can find young ladies to visit with?" The young Russian shifted from foot to foot.

"Eisenstadt. Vienna." Your father gripped the doorknob with white knuckles.

"Fine. We will take the bread please." The young Russian muttered something to the other men, who backed out of the light and into the yard. Christian fetched the bread from the kitchen and gave it to the young man. Crickets chirped in the grass; their song came through the open door. I smoothed Gerhard's hair, watched my trembling fingers part it again and again.

The young Russian spoke with a rough accent that garbled his words. "My mother has your eyes."

I looked up, saw his hands still clenched together in front of him, his face pale under his cap.

"She looked like you, in her rocking chair," he said. "I have not seen her for three years."

"That's a long time," said Gerhard, who got up and shuffled to your father, taking his hand.

"Very long," said the young Russian. "Thank you for the bread."



There is only one more thing to tell, and this I will say as we cover your oak box with soil. I cannot say it aloud; there are too many here to see you off.

The air is cold for September and your little daughter wears two sweaters. Her warm hand is in mine as we watch them lower you on careful ropes. Your brothers are here: Christian with his wife and son, and Gerhard with Amelia—they will be married next year. A robin sings in the hawthorn and your daughter turns her head to find it. She squeezes my fingers and I squeeze hers in return.

I was seven hours in labor with you. Not like Karl, who took more than two days to arrive, bloody and small, a screaming creature so beautiful and breathing. You were thick-white and thoughtful, or so I imagined from the bed as the midwife wrapped you. The room must have held such

fascination for your new nose, the hot smell of your journey bright on the bedclothes, the herbs my mother had sprinkled on the floor before you came. The sounds of little Karl scratching at the door, the thrush in the tree by the window.

The night we pulled you from the brick room, your father and I took two hours to break a hole big enough for you to crawl out on your stomach. Christian and Gerhard slept off the exhaustion in their bedroom, finally convinced they could not be of help. It was strangely like the early days—your father and I alone, working side-by-side in the quiet. But this time it wasn't the wheat harvest or a potato crop. Each chip with the chisel and hammer was a heartbeat, each new crack the possibility of the whole thing crashing down, on you, on us.

"We aren't masons," your father muttered, his hair slicked back with sweat. "We don't know what we're doing."

"It can't be that difficult." I sponged water onto his forehead.

"Not so simple either. Any strike could crush us if it all falls." He grunted, flexed his shortened fingers.

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A cool wind picks up as I walk with your daughter to our house, where friends have gathered. She is brave in her steps, quietly humming a tune she wouldn't be able to repeat if I asked her. Her hair, incarnation of yours, swings in the breeze about her shoulders. She is still oblivious to her beauty, still young enough to imagine herself invisible. Christian and Gerhard have gone ahead with their families, those grown men of mine stooped with the weight of you in the ground. At the gate I pick a dandelion and give it to your daughter; her pink fingertips cradle the yellow head.

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With one last blow, your father opened a hole at the floor. I put my hand through and found your foot, damp leather, the toes clenched inside. A moment later there was your hand, smooth in mine, squeezing as if we were merely sharing a secret knowledge of something.

I helped him with the next blows, calculated to bring down just enough brick to let you escape. The dust filled our lungs and dulled our hair and skin, but it was the smell of your freedom and I couldn't get enough.

Just as your father recoiled to strike the last blow, your sudden laughter spilled out of the hole—then your shiny pink face peered between the broken bricks. "Mama, you look so frightened! I'm almost there!"

Your father shouted for you to move away, struck the wall and even before the dust settled you were crawling out, inching across the floor until your legs wriggled free and you were in my lap, laughing, crying, and clutching me like you were a child again.

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In the house, your daughter walks among the mourners as if in a forest, her bright head a beacon in the dark clothing. I take a moment from the crowd and follow her into the kitchen, where she sneaks a piece of cake from a cloth-covered plate. I stand in the doorway and watch her examine the room. She knows the house as well as you did, knows the corners of the table from the bruises they've left on her head, the mysterious dip in the floor that's the perfect size for her feet. She knows about the lone brick in its place by the far wall, as if a child played with it and forgot to put it outside again. She has asked about it and I've told her the story, though not the one I've just told you.

She walks over to it, the last remnant of the wall that housed you for three days as the dregs of the Russian army drained its way into Vienna. Your daughter picks up the brick and weighs it in her small hands. She looks up to the ceiling, breathes a sigh into the quiet kitchen. There is no hint of that wall left, no specks of dried mortar anywhere. You and I scrubbed it clean together.

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# The Sunnerset Review

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## The Art of Waiting by Joe Ponepinto

Otto Mueller studied and sneered, pacing slowly, wordlessly, along a stage one step above the floor, evaluating his new group of students. It was clear he regarded us with distaste. Maybe he felt it necessary to intimidate. He stopped, his angled jaw thrust out like a commandant's. I imagined him wearing, in place of wire-rim glasses, a monocle.

There were seven of us, and we sat, expectantly, at two folding tables parallel to the stage. Mueller stopped at a table with settings for two. He paused, as though waiting for one of us to run up and hold the chair for him, then took a seat. His linen was spotless, an arctic plateau lain with enough china, silver and crystal for four or five courses. He plucked his serviette and unfurled it with a single flick, then placed it, with practiced discipline, on his lap. He looked at us and spoke. "I am Otto Mueller. You are here to learn the proper way to serve." His inflection was pure Gestapo. He raised his chin and looked down at us through the bottoms of his bifocals. "I see you have noticed my accent," he said. "Make a note. I am not German. I am Austrian."

Jenna leaned over and whispered, "So was Hitler."

"We will begin," Mueller said, "with a brief test of your present abilities. You there," he motioned to a young woman sitting at the end of the row. "Please join me for dinner." She did as she was told, walking tentatively to the front of the room and taking the chair opposite the teacher. "And you," he said to the next woman in line, "will serve us."

The girl he chose as waiter looked to be all of twenty-two. Mueller bade her to begin. She teased her hair with her fingers and pondered what was expected, almost as though she had never waited tables. Then she remembered. "Welcome to our restaurant," she said, nearly making the statement into a question by raising the pitch of the last two syllables. "My name's Erica and I'm your waiter. How are you guys today?"

Mueller stopped the proceedings with a raised palm. "Exactly as I had feared." He signaled for Erica to move away from the table. "Your dinner guests are not guys," he said, stretching the pronunciation of the word until it hissed with derision. "They are ladies and gentlemen. I do not understand why everyone in this country is 'guys.'" Eyes widened at the folding tables.

"Do not speak to your guests as though you work in a McDonald's. Treat them with respect. Assume they are intelligent. They know they are in a restaurant. They know you are their waiter. And they do not care about your name. You do not need to tell them any of this."

"Well," said the confused Erica, "what should I say?"

"Return to your seat," Mueller said. "I will try to select someone with better manners." He pointed at me. "Care to give it a try?"

I admit, I've dropped "you guys" on my customers as often as the next server. But in ten years of waiting tables, I've also learned to read the people who come in to dine. Some find an affable waiter as important as a good meal. For them I spend the time – not for tips, but because I want them to enjoy the experience. Couples on dates are fun. They're usually in a good mood and appreciate a waiter who takes a minute or two to get to know them. I'll bring them a taste of a new appetizer the chef is preparing – that makes them feel a little special. Others want you to take their orders, bring the food and keep out of the way as they have their own discussion. I recognize these people before they even sit down, so there's no offense taken if they seem unfriendly.

Mueller's exercise wasn't so much about server etiquette as about playing to the audience, and I had him pegged. I stood up, threw my shoulders back and walked smartly to the stage. I bowed slightly. "Good evening sir; madame," I said in my most cultured tone. "Allow me to serve you."

Mueller seemed unimpressed. I mimed a pair of menus into their hands, and produced, with a flourish, an imaginary wine list. Just to show him I was in on his game, I asked, "Shall I have the sommelier suggest a special vintage this evening?"

Again the palm. "Presumptuous and ostentatious." Mueller said. "Do not rush. Ask me if I would care to see the wine list. And not so elaborate. We are not here to notice you. You may sit down." I rolled my eyes at Jenna on my way back to the table.

"Clearly we have much work to do if you people are to be allowed to work in the finest restaurants. Thank God your employers have seen fit to send you to me . . . before it is too late." Mueller smirked slightly, assuming his insults were lost on this latest class of incompetents. He picked up his chardonnay glass to toast himself and accidentally tapped it against another, producing the melodic ting of fine crystal. Jenna couldn't help herself. "O.K., not Hitler," she whispered. "Colonel Klink."

I was glad to have Jenna as a classmate, and appreciated her more as a coworker. "You ever think of doing standup?" I asked her during a shift at Enrico's, after watching her trade quips with customers and other waiters. But then, she didn't have to be funny to get attention. "What a body!" said Moe, the owner, after her interview. "I want it." I admit, on first look, she brought every traditional, chauvinist, Hefner-esque adjective to mind: blond, blue, busty, pink, perky. The first time I saw her perfect backside, when she bent slightly to place a glass on a table, I uttered an unconscious but audible "Oh." I wanted it too, but unlike Moe, I was more realistic about my chances.

After I got past obsessing about sex and accepted her as a coworker, it was actually fun to watch Jenna shoot down the single men who tried their best pickup lines, and smile at the married ones who sneaked peeks while pretending to peruse the menus. Her humor made her accessible. I've known women as attractive as her before; around them I usually feel like an Untouchable. She was so open – willing to talk to anyone. She would even joke with the busboys.

Jenna didn't have experience at a restaurant as elite as Enrico's; she was more of the Olive Garden type. But it hadn't mattered to Moe. He hired her on the spot and since then had taken every opportunity to admire, praise and proposition her. "I will get her in bed, you wait and see," he said to me in his remnant of an Egyptian accent a couple of weeks after she started working here. He bought her flowers, offered champagne and invited her to a weekend in Cancun (which she gracefully refused). Hey Moe, that would be one expensive lay.

These classes, she said, would get in the way of her acting lessons, but she was willing to attend because she believed it would be the best way to keep her job and keep Moe off her back, or as she more aptly described it, keep her off her back and Moe off her. Me? I had to take two weeks off from my art for this, which was fine because I was pretty tired of the grind of exhibitions and weekend shows in the park, trying to explain what the canvasses meant to middle aged couples whose appreciation of art was limited to "Thomas Kinkade, painter of light."

I haven't sold anything lately, and each unsuccessful show has been like a BB of doubt shot into my artist's soul. At least Moe was paying us for the time we spent with Mueller. Honestly, I was a little flattered when he asked me to go to the classes. At least I'm getting somewhere in this career.

As we prepped for the dinner crowd that evening, I saw Moe at the bar with his daily martini. "I have to know," I said. "What's with this School for Service?"

He smiled like a man about to lay down a royal flush. "Enrico's is the best," he said. "We already have the best food. Now we will have the best service."

The best. The biggest. The most expensive. Mohammed Shabbani had the valets park his Bentley in front of the restaurant to make sure everyone knew just how successful the place had made him. To his credit, he spent much of the profit on improvements. He augmented the soaring, intricately tiled ceilings by springing to have the walls inlaid with deep-hued Central American mahogany. Marble floors and polished brass served as accents. He expanded the bar so it sprawled over nearly one full side of the restaurant – it featured more than one thousand varieties of spirits – so many spirits, joked Jenna to Moe, that the place must be haunted. He laughed at that, then, in his tiring style, invited her to come home with him to see his personal bar.

Never mind the food – image and self-promotion were the keys. I should copy his attitude the next time I'm sucking cheap white wine with potential art lovers.

Today Moe was thinking business, not sex. "If you two learn something from Mueller, I'll send the rest of the waiters," he said.

I could see his logic. Add "classically trained wait staff" at the bottom of his advertising, and traffic would increase simply from people wanting to see what that meant. "I get it," I said. "But why Mueller? It's Stalag 17 in that classroom. There must be other schools you could have sent us to."

Moe smiled again, less deviously. "I talked to a few. They were all the same – get you in and out and make sure the check is good. He's different. He has passion."

"He's a crazy old man."

"Crazy enough that you should listen. He's been doing it for fifty years. He knows everything."

He might know everything, but at least half of it would be lost on our clientele. Even at Enrico's, hardly anyone would complain if their food was delivered to the wrong side or the silver wasn't perfectly aligned. I'd attend the class, but would keep Mueller's lessons in perspective. The trick would be to incorporate his knowledge into my own technique. And what about Jenna? She wasn't as practiced as I, but her personality and attractiveness more than made up for any waitering deficiencies. Surely Moe didn't intend to turn her into a robotic order taker.

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The second day and the class was down to six. Mueller didn't seem to notice, or was so used to this occurrence he didn't care. That even this many remained was a surprise to me, but I eventually learned that the other four students would receive incentives from their employers for seeing the class through. "I have two words for you to remember," Mueller began. "Preparation and anticipation. These are two of the three concepts you must understand to be a waiter of excellence."

Erica, confounded by Mueller's apparent lapse, asked the begged question. "The third attribute," answered Mueller, "some of you may realize in time. And some will never comprehend." The answer didn't help her. I predicted Erica would not share in the coming epiphany.

He summoned two classmates, Nicole and Rico, to his table. They stood and waited for his command. "What do I want?"

"How should we know?" Nicole asked.

"What do I need?"

She shrugged.

Mueller looked at the rest of us. "Help them."

"Napkin."

"Water."

"Menus!"

"Wine list."

I thought I might have it. "Attention."

"Good. I know you will bring me those other things. What I need, as the gentleman has said, is your consideration. You do not simply thrust a menu under my nose. You wait until I am ready to receive it. Perhaps I desire your assistance in adjusting my chair before you begin. As your guest, I must become the singular object of your concentration."

Jenna leaned and whispered. "This is insanity."

Mueller heard her. "And why is that, miss?"

She gave him her sexiest smile – mouth slightly open, head tilted, hair falling over one eye – the smile, had she graced Moe with it, that would have knocked him to his knees in surprise and delight, and which, of course, is why she would never let him see it. Mueller, however, did not flinch. She straightened. She would try to be serious. "You make it sound like we're slaves."

"Clearly, you are not. You are being paid for your work. And that is why you must perform it correctly."

"Does that mean we have to fawn all over our customers?"

"Quite the opposite. Fawning is the last thing you must do. Instead, you should be nearly invisible to them."

"Well, my customers like to see me." Male and female students all appreciated her remark. "They want an experience, not just food and service."

"What you must understand is that in a fine restaurant, food and service are the experience. That is the difference."

I wished I could have stopped the class to explain to Jenna and the others what I'd realized about Mueller's lessons. They didn't need to fight him, just listen. Whatever they could take out of this class might make them a little more attentive, and that wouldn't be a bad thing in their case.

Jenna wasn't done, though. "What if they want to talk to me? A lot of my customers do, you know."

"Yes, I have noticed how many people are interested in the trivial details of each other's lives," Mueller said. "If they insist on indulging in this practice, you may engage them. But true ladies and gentlemen converse about more important matters." Even when he agreed with people he was able to insult them. Jenna realized she couldn't win this debate. Mueller moved on to a discussion of the differences among spoons.

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Monday, and I had a day off from both Mueller and Enrico's. Time to get in some work on my art. A half hour into the session, Paul, from the gallery, called, apologetic. They're struggling too, and like to promote local artists, so they've been showing my paintings for a year now. "Hey, don't worry," I said. "You know you can call me anytime."

"I didn't call just to touch base," he said. "We have to let you go."

"You have to?"

"We can't sell you."

"What? After a year you just dump me like that?"

"Rick, that's the point. A year. We've tried. We can't get anyone interested in your work. Frankly, you should be tired of waiting for us to come through for you. I'm surprised you haven't dumped us."

I didn't know what to say. After a few seconds, I replied. "You led me to believe we were getting very close."

"I thought we were too, for a while. But the interest just isn't there. And to be honest, we have a couple of other artists who show promise, and we have to clear your work out to make room for them."

I imagined that while he was speaking another artist hung over his shoulder, massaging his neck, and that when he finished they embraced and jumped into bed together.

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Despite Mueller's insistence on our attention, I had a difficult time staying focused on the lessons the following few days. I knew he'd catch me the moment my gaze drifted from his sermons, so I watched, but vacantly.

He called on Rico to set his little table. What this shaved head, pierced nose kid was doing in the class was beyond me, and, apparently, beyond him as well. He acted as though he'd just walked into class for the first time this morning, creating a display that would have any diner groping for the proper glass or utensil. Others tried, even Jenna, and I realized I wasn't the only one not paying full attention. But when he directed me to set the table, I surprised myself. Something must have been getting through. I was the only student who could tell a pinot noir glass from a cabernet, a demitasse spoon from a teaspoon. I set his table perfectly. I was the nerd in a class for waiters.

But what still confused me was Mueller's philosophy – the contradiction of taking pride in being someone who was supposed to remain anonymous – becoming something by being nothing. He returned to the theme of the noble waiter several times a day, and it was obvious he had no hope that any of us could grasp the concept, tainted as we were by a lifetime of self-indulgence and self-importance. We might eventually learn the intricacies of crystal and cutlery, timing and courtesy, but if that was all would the art of waiting be lost?

At five minutes of three on Thursday, during the penultimate lesson, my five classmates began closing notebooks and storing pens, like high school algebra students anxious for the bell to release them from the purgatory of a dull subject and duller teacher. Mueller played his part in this drama, refusing to let them go until the last second. Exactly at three he said, "You may go," and the quintet broke from their prison into the parking lot. I had daydreamed a bit towards the end and was left alone to pack my things. Mueller brought out a stack of small boxes and began to meticulously store the settings from the practice table. I recalled what Moe had said about Mueller's fifty years of experience, and shuffled closer to the stage. "What was it like, back then?" I heard myself ask.

He began without looking up. "A very different world. People knew what was expected of them. You had a job to do and you did it, and if you were very good and had patience, you would move up. I was headwaiter then;

in charge of fifteen staff, and I was working at the finest restaurants in the country, Steirereck and Drei Husaren among them."

I sat back down. He had been waiting for someone to turn this spigot. He said, "This was a world you will never know. We served the most influential business leaders, performers, political people. Many times we hosted royalty: princes and princesses, dukes, counts, when they were in the city. Two thousand; five thousand dollars for dinner or a fine Pomerol was nothing to them. Of course, everything had to be perfect. Your customers must not be allowed to want for anything. I saw to it. The service was without flaw, and the guests did not even realize all the work we did."

I felt I had to stand up for a more democratic principle. "But for most of these people, wealth and prestige are just an accident of birth. How do they deserve such service?"

"Again you miss the point," Mueller said. "It is not who is being served, it is the service itself that is the object of your efforts. Do you understand? You must stop believing the work is beneath you, as the others do. Only then will you be able to achieve the highest level."

He was crazy, but it was an interesting story and that evening I waited for a break to relate it to Jenna. I thought she might be able to make a joke or two out of it. "I have to tell you what happened after class," I said.

"That class," she said. "I'll be so glad when it's over. Did I tell you? I've got a part. I have to get out of there early tomorrow so I can make rehearsal."

"How? When? You've either been in class, or here."

She hit me with the smile that had bounced off Mueller. It went to my core. "I had one night off. My girlfriends and I went to a little playhouse. After, this producer guy said he remembered seeing me in an improv show I did a few months ago. We started talking, and he invited me to audition last weekend."

"Are you sure he's legit?"

She touched my forearm. "Don't play big brother," she said. "I know what I'm getting into."

Back on the floor, Moe pulled me aside. "I'm glad to see the class has done you some good," he said.

I hadn't noticed any real difference in my service.

"You're developing quite an eye for detail," he said. Every table is perfect. Every aspect is timed perfectly. This is what I was hoping for. I'll have to call Mueller and thank him, and set up the rest of the staff to attend."

Maybe Mueller's lessons had helped me become a better waiter, but that didn't mean I was going to make waiting tables my life's work. I'm a painter, after all, not a waiter. There may only be two letters difference in the words, but there is a galaxy of difference in the pursuits. As an artist I create, I comment on the world. I stand for something. A waiter is a tool. A servant. The vocation requires no thought. Let's just say nearly anyone can do it, Otto Mueller be damned. I thought about Erica, Nicole and Rico from our class. They were made for waiting tables.

What I had noticed, though, was the seriousness with which I now approached my job as a waiter. I was incredibly focused. I suppose I had redirected my energies from those usually employed in painting. I hadn't

been on my canvas for several days, and didn't, thanks to Paul's phone call, have the urge to express my art.

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Friday was our last class with Mueller. I was expecting some sort of ceremony or at least a certificate noting our achievement. He directed the five of us (Jenna had decided to bail) to organize ourselves and serve him "to the best of your abilities." The others chose me as headwaiter and I assigned them roles as maitre d', sommelier, waiter and server. Mueller then became a one-man party of dissatisfaction. "This knife is dirty. I did not ask for lemon in my water." From the moment he was seated until the final cup of espresso, he criticized, condemned and sent back everything we pretended to serve. Our final exam, I realized. Could we take it?

"No matter what he says or does, just keep quiet and comply with his demands," I told the others. "This will all be over soon and we can go back to our jobs."

"I want to kick him," Erica said.

"Save it for later," I instructed. "We'll have a drink and get it all out then." It struck me that Mueller had combined every rudeness he had suffered at the hands of his beloved royals into a single episode of abuse. If we kept quiet, as he had, we would pass the test.

Jenna's absence from class should have been a clue to her departure from Enrico's. The note Moe found on his desk that evening made it official. "Bye, Moe," it said. No explanation included. Moe knew I was friendly with Jenna and grilled me. "She could at least have given me notice," he said. "What did I ever do to offend her?"

"We're friends," I replied, "but only at work." I figured she'd had enough of Moe's advances and an abrupt exit was her method of payback. It probably had something to do with that "producer."

Without her there to brighten us, Enrico's became a somber, darker place. Mueller would probably appreciate it. My customers, I wasn't so sure. Some of them still wanted clever banter before their dinners, or at least a friendlier approach from their server, but I was no longer in the mood for repartee. Instead I calculated the distances between pieces of silverware and the angles from the knife tip to the wine glasses. I wanted them right.

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Within another two weeks, every aspect of my service was approaching perfection. Nothing, apart from menu items, had to be requested. I anticipated every need. I managed my tables like a choreographer. Each course was precise in its timing, temperature and consistency. No order proved impossible. When a guest requested a half order of crab Louie – not even on the menu – I worked with the chef and the man was obliged.

At a large table in the restaurant's private library, an extended family celebrated a golden anniversary. Their banquet was my exclusive domain for the two hours or so they would occupy the room. At one point, when I started to go back to the kitchen and check on their orders, I noticed the level of wine in the patriarch's glass was low. I instantly turned to refill it. He had ordered a bottle of 2002 Chateau Petrus Bordeaux, a glorious vintage, for his wife and himself, and their adult children. He was engaged

in a discussion to his left, his hand extended from a monogrammed sleeve to gently clasp his granddaughter's. I swung noiselessly around the table to his right and lifted the bottle to pour – not the ostentatious stunt of pinching the bottom rim and letting the precious liquid fly from high as a bartender at a night club might perform, but a simple, unobtrusive replenishment.

A dozen conversations buzzed simultaneously from within the room and the main dining area, obliterating thought as I served. I focused on the wine, a velvety red that slithered into the bottom of the large glass, like mercury released from a vial. A slight rotation of the bottleneck at the precise moment completed this simple, yet engrossing task. I set the bottle down. The old man instinctively placed his index and middle fingers astride the stem of the glass and began to swirl in contact with the tablecloth, without ever realizing I had been present. Perhaps I was not. I watched the scene, removed, as though I were outside a larger glass examining my own performance, being watched from outside still another – a microcosm of perfection, repeated like mirrors held up to one another, reflecting into infinity.

I thought about that old man for several days. He did not ask me for my name, as so many other diners did, and I did not offer it, yet we knew each other intimately, diner and waiter, exactly as Otto Mueller had inculcated. And at the end of that contemplation I was refreshed. I had lost all need to know the individual identities of my customers, their status, the amounts they spent at dinner. The chatter and jokes were no longer necessary. My role was simplicity – to observe and provide. I had become the perfect waiter, ubiquitous yet invisible, and the realization was liberating. It was as though the pieces of my life had finally fallen into place.

A few days later, as I dressed for another shift at the restaurant, I passed the door to my studio, slightly opened, and saw the canvas I had been working on when I stopped painting. The cloth covering it was uneven, revealing the corner of a lush vista of my imagination. A surge of adrenaline shot through me, like the first time I had been inspired to paint. I walked into the room, picked up a brush, rolled it between my fingers. I was ready to go back to my art. And I would – soon. But first I went to the mirror and finished knotting my tie. I slipped on my waiter's jacket and headed for the door. It was time to get to Enrico's.

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# The Summerset Review

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Julie's dad touches her and she can cry on cue. Kristi's mom hits her, so every angry song on the radio she'll claw her hands through her hair and sing real loud. Like it's all about her. Just Kristi, Kristi, Kristi.

My dad, he's never laid a finger on me. I'm so out of the loop.

Seriously, it's like a part of my life is missing. My mother, she died when I was two, but that's like, eleven years ago. To use that, to be all, *I miss my mommy*, I'd only look like a baby. Attention's only wanted if it builds your rep. I need something current. Something ongoing.

So one night at dinner, I say to my dad, I say, "Dad?"

"Daughter?"

"Do you think maybe you could slap me in the mouth?"

"Would I slap you in the mouth?"

"Maybe make it bleed?"

"Make it bleed?"

"Any swelling, that'd just be a bonus."

"And why would I do this?"

I tell him because he loves me.

"That's why I *won't* hit you."

"Please? Julie and Kristi's parents hit them."

"Well," he says, "if Julie and Kristi jumped off a cliff, would you?"

"*Hello?* Duh. They're like, the most popular girls in school. Anybody who's anybody knows that."

He wipes his mouth and says, "I'm sure they earned their popularity through exercise and good dental hygiene." He says, "Why don't we try aerobics and braces first?"

My dad, he's always just, "*a better future*," completely ignoring the shitty now.

"Please, please, please? Just one good slap?"

"Eat your dinner," he says.

"It's not fair!" I tell him. I say, "I hate you! I'm never speaking to you again!" He keeps eating and I jump up and show my disgust with equal parts spitting, screaming, and stomping about.

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So, I skipped the bus and I'm like, walking to school or whatever and trying to think about the perfect messy childhood when I get this flash—poof!—like a charm-ringed backhand to the face. If my father won't abuse me like any normal abnormal father would, I'll do it myself. Like what we learned in social studies, when the government or whatever starts a war to boost the economy, I'll beat myself to boost my popularity.

So what I do is, I step over behind the Wallaces' hedgerows and crouch down. I slip all my rings onto my right hand and turn my fist toward me, like I'm talking to a sock puppet or something. Then, I swing hard but stop just short of my chapped lips.

This is harder than I thought.

I close my eyes, real hard, and imagine us all in third period. Everyone watching the teacher and suddenly, the door opens and the school counselor peeks her head in and says, "I need to see Kristi Strode, please." Thinking about this, about Kristi sliding out of her desk, head all down, and walking out, soaking up all those stares, my jaw is twitching. I mean, she's my best friend and all, but she can be a real bitch sometimes.

I clinch my fist tighter and get it into position. I'm ready. I mean, people do worse for attention.

I count to three, then slam my fist into my mouth. The first thing I taste is lip skin, and when I touch it with my fingertips there's just a smear of pink. God. Not even enough for an arm around your shoulder.

Outside the hedgerows, cars zip down the street. A bus squeals and hisses in front of the houses.

I ball my fist again and turn my face slightly sideways, where one of my crooked teeth is making my lip knot. I swing again, the sound like slamming your palms together inside your head. Again. Then again.

No one said being popular was easy.

After a few more licks, I stop. Test it with my fingertips. This time, we've got something to build on. There's some funny feeling in my lip and, looking down I can see the blurry bulge under my nose. I even taste a little tooth, or what tooth tastes like when you chip a sliver off.

Smiling, I stand and step out from behind the bush wall, headed toward school. For the stage and spotlight. *Break a leg*, I think, and wonder how much sympathy something like *that* would get.

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This thing I did, I just keep doing. Behind the Wallace's hedgerows, before school, I'm creating my very own childhood trauma. If I want a black eye, I black my eye. If I want an earring ripped out, I just hook my finger through the loop and pull. A fractured elbow, I smack my arm against the Wallace's brick wall until it cracks and dangles.

No one said being popular was painless.

As of two weeks ago Tuesday, I only do it on Mondays, and there are two reasons why: One, one might assume my dad went on a drinking binge over the weekend and my face is the result. And two or whatever—healing time. Swiping my dad's old senior ring, I knocked out one of my front teeth and put a hole through my lower lip. After that, sympathy became strange looks became being avoided and I knew I had to pace myself.

Seriously, I'd be in the hall talking to Julie and Kristi, going: "And I told Laurie, I go, 'Alli needs to chill with all the drama,' and she goes, 'Wouldn't you just, like, know it? I mean, wouldn't you just?' and I go, 'She is such a snobby bitch.'" Picture me telling them this and they're all glancing down at a trail of bloody drool seeping through my lip, the whole time trying to like, smile or whatever.

So now, it's once a week. At school, I get teachers asking about a bruise on my wrist. A split lip or eye laceration. Asking is there anything I'd like to talk about. All loud, I lower my eyes real slow like and say, "No ma'am. I just fell."

Or: "I ran into a door."

Or: "I rolled off my bed's all."

At home, when Dad asks what's happened to my face, asks if I'm O.K., I'm all, "Duff." Duff as in Hilary Duff. Duff being "cool." Duff being "fine." Or, I'll just say I got into it with Emily, that bitch of a bully. I caught an elbow in gym class. Tripped in the hall. Just back-and-forth, soaking up the spotlight. Not just part of the in-crowd, but the whole bitching thing.

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This Monday, I burned my forearm with a cigarette lighter. I stapled the palms of my hands. Last week, I popped a few ribs falling sideways on the Wallace's water spigot. Two Mondays before March, I like, rubbed off a patch of hair on a brick edge.

And as soon as I get to school, I have them lining up, asking me if I'm all right. Asking me what happened. After the first two weeks, I learned how to cry, even though I'm not sad. With all this attention, how could I be? I even claw my hands through my hair when angry songs come on the radio. Now I'm the tortured soul. The hard-luck princess. I bought the book, *Family Abuse: You Can Live With It, But God Does It Suck* and read it front-to-back. I took notes. I'm so ready for anything.

And one day in third period, the school counselor slips her head through the door and says, "May I see Lindsey Doyle, please?" To keep from screaming, Yes! I bite my tongue so hard I taste blood. All eyes like, turn toward me, and I slip out of my desk. Head down, I peek at Kristi and Julie, at everyone's head following me toward the counselor. Wishing they were me. Wishing their lives were tragic. At the door I shoot a shy smile at the class, letting a little blood slide over my chin and hit the floor.

In her office the counselor, Mrs. Tate, says, "Let's just get to the point, O.K.? Does your father hit you, Lindsey?"

When a counselor says, "Let's get to the point," they like, get to the point.

But I know how to play it, though. I tell her my dad's a good man.

"Does he touch you in any way that makes you feel uncomfortable?"

"He's only doing the best he can without Mom." Here, you keep your eyes down. Feet flat on the floor. Act all bored or whatever.

She asks if I'm ever afraid to go home? And low, I say, "Home is where the hurt is?"

"The *hurt?*" she says.

"I said *'heart,'* not hurt."

So it goes on like this for like, ever, and I work it perfectly. Giving a sip when she's wanting a gulp. Parceling out fragments of my own constructed nightmare. Mrs. Tate's practically eating out of my hand and, though I'm not sure she's crying, I pretend she is. She says a bunch of junk about Family Services and having a meeting with my father and on and on. Just blah, blah, blah.

At lunch, I sit down by Julie and Kristi, and they're acting all bitchy and whatever. They should be happy I'm even talking to them. I mean, seriously, they're no me. Sure, they did it first, but I do it better. The early bird gets the worm, but the early worm gets eaten.

Kristi goes, "Look, it's counselor girl," and Julie's like, "Ooh! Isn't she special."

And I'm all, "Oh, Mrs. Tate wanted me to give you a message: She said she would've called you to her office but you're like, so five minutes ago."

Kristi says, "You're such a little bitch."

"And you're so ugly now," Julie says.

"Like she was ever pretty, anyway," Kristi tells her, smiling.

And I go, "I guess I'll just eat with the popular people," and Kristi says, "Duff," and Julie's like, "Duff with me," and I'm all, "So totally Duff."

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Tonight's the night. Like Cinderella's Ball, I'll be glowing when the night's over. It's parent/teacher conferences, when all these lies will play off each other. Making me even more the victim. Making this tragedy take a turn. Maybe a big scene will play out. Julie and Kristi and all the students with their parents circled around as I break down, saying I can't take it anymore. Yelling, "I'm just a kid!" Screaming, "I just want to be loved!" Everyone with their hands over their mouths. Some even crying. I mean, it's child abuse; you'd cry too.

And I'm prepared. This morning, I made a special trip behind the hedgerow. My body shaking with excitement, I got down on my hands and knees, closed my eyes, and slammed my face into the brick wall three times. The first, my cheeks went numb. The second, blood slimed away from my face in strings like stretched bubble gum. The third I guess knocked me unconscious, because I missed first period and some of second.

So, we're in the car and Dad's feeding Kleenex up my nose to staunch the blood still oozing. I'm a little dizzy from blood loss and I've been passing out off and on like, all day. The surface of my nose looks like Manwich meat.

"Just how," he says, tossing tissue into the back seat, "are we going to explain this?"

All goose nasal, my head thrown back, I say, "Just tell 'em you are only human."

"I mean, you don't even look like you."

"Look them straight in the eye and tell them you are not a monster."

"I'm not a what?"

"They'll understand."

"What would your mother think about this?"

"Yeah, bring Mom up. Say how I endured her death or whatever, then throw in something about how strong I am."

"Jesus."

"That I've endured so much in the last few months. Tell 'em I've had to grow up before my time. That'll look great."

"Are you kidding me?" he yells. "Are we completely out of Kleenex?"

We get to the school and he walks me in, arm around my shoulder. I keep my head down, passing everyone in the halls. Out of the corner of my eye I see people stop in their steps and stare. One lady says, "Oh God!"

People do worse to be the center of attention.

Kristi and Julie are all hand on hip and curled lip. Shaking their heads in that bitchy way only second best does.

We go into the classroom, and instead of my teacher, Mrs. Tate sits behind the desk. It takes me a minute to figure out we are in the counselor's office. Her mouth is wide and dark, her eyes wide and white. She stares at me. My dad, he says, "She, uh, she tripped outside in the parking lot."

Mrs. Tate says, "She trips a lot, doesn't she?"

"Yeah, actually," Dad tells her. "Especially on Mondays."

I keep my head down, eyes up. After a minute, I look back and see several of my classmates and their parents lingering around the open doorway. Clawing their way to see Miss Most Popular. See how the story ends, how the hero wins the day.

I throw my head back, clench my eyes, and fake sneeze as hard as I can. My head goes like, really light, and blood sprays the papers on Mrs. Tate's desk. My dad, his face is as red as the blood and, still smiling, he wipes my nose with his shirtsleeve.

Mrs. Tate sighs.

We sit sort of still a second, Dad and Mrs. Tate not breaking their stare. I can see in his eyes, he knows she knows my nose is broken.

"Sir, may I speak with you," Mrs. Tate says. "Privately."

"Sure thing," Dad says, and tells me he'll be right back.

But I know he won't. I've done my homework. He'll be arrested and I'll get some serious attention. It's all right there in the book I read. Step by step, you learn everything you need to know. And it's sad. Really, it is. Someday I may even come to like, regret all this. This living a better now. No one said being popular's without sacrifice. Jesus gave his life or whatever, and look how popular he got.

Kristi and Julie step in behind me, bitchy looks and all.

"My dad's getting arrested," I tell them, a blood bubble swelling and popping from my mouth. "Jealous?"

They look at each other and everything. Smiling, her eyes squinted, Kristi says, "*Whatever*. Abuse is like, so yesterday."

And Julie says, "Besides, our parents *love* us, now."

"Yeah." Kristi says, her palm held out in front of me. "Family love's in. God," she says, "how lame are you?" She twirls a curl of hair with her finger and walks away. What a bitch. Like it's always about her. Just Kristi, Kristi, Kristi.

Julie, she slips a mascara mirror from her purse, pops it open, and holds it up in front of me. "Besides, we told you. We don't hang with *ugly* people," she says, and clicks the mirror shut before I ever see me staring back at myself.

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# The Summerset Review

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I Love You  
in Farsi



by  
J. M. Patrick

In Iran, Asad was charming, but in America, he is graceless. Shirin remembers a time when they were teenagers, crouched behind a building in Tehran, his arm draped around her shoulder. He was smoking, exhaling away from her face. She was thinking "*Doostet daaram.*" She was thinking "I love you."

Asad is asleep in the rocking chair, though every few minutes he uses his toes to propel the rocker into a lazy, squeaking arc. Shirin hates the squeaking and debates waking him up just to make him stop. She doesn't.

Sundays are always the same, and she is determined to stay awake on the couch. Her children are with her mother in a smaller apartment across town, and she wonders if she should pick them up early. At least it would give her something to do.

"Asad?" she whispers because she still has not decided whether or not she wants him to wake up.

"Mmm?"

"Asad, do you still love me?"

Asad opens his eyes, looks at her, nods, and falls back to sleep. There is no reason to answer questions like those. His toes touch the carpet, the rocking chair moans.

Shirin is not a stupid woman. In Iran, as a child, she excelled at many things. She threw the farthest ball, read the longest books, used the biggest words, and solved the longest algebraic equations. Asad did not know any of this. By the time he met her, she was lithe and lean, hair shining brilliantly in the glow of a high Tehran sun. She spoke little of her childhood because he never asked. He loved her for who she was at seventeen, not who she was at seven. That is what she told herself. At seventeen, she had kind eyes, big eyes, eyes that begged Asad to take her away, and so he did.

Asad's eyes are closing like moth wings, flickering, popping open, drifting down again until he catches himself and adjusts his position.

"Asad, will you do *Asr* with me?" she asks.

"What, do you think you are the *adhan*, now Shirin?" He does not look up.

"Oh, don't be this way."

Shirin knew that Asad didn't do his prayers anymore. The truth was, she didn't either. Five times a day for two years, they'd go into separate rooms and shut the door, but neither of them washed their faces, neither of them got to their knees to whisper *Allahu Akbar*. What was so great about a god that left her hopeless?

"Come on, Asad. It's time."

Asad lifts himself from the chair, exhaling through his nose at the doorway. He turns to her.

"I prefer to be alone while I pray," he says.

"We cannot always afford what we prefer." Shirin brushes past him into their tiny bedroom.

Last week, when he had come out after *Fajir* and was gone for the afternoon, Shirin made the bed and found a *Hustler* on the floor. She lifted its wrinkled edges with the tips of her fingers. She spread it out on the comforter. She ran her hand over the colored, glossy pages and she stared into the gaping vaginas of white women with hairless bodies and mouths contorted in pleasure. She flipped through its pages. A dominatrix, a cheerleader, a nurse with high heels and high breasts, they stared back at her. They looked at her with lilying, bedroom eyes and told her, "You are too old."

Shirin sits now on the edge of the bed to watch her husband pray. He raises his hands to his face and mumbles *Allahu Akbar*. Shirin closes her eyes. When he kneels, she lays back on the bed. *Bismil laahir Rahmaahir raheem*. Asad's voice rises and falls and reminds her of melting chocolate, of rich coffee, of deep water. *Maaliki yawmid deen*, he says. She closes her eyes. *Eh'denas siraatal mustageem*. She spreads her legs like the girls in *Hustler*.

Asad, with his back to her, with his eyes closed, with his heart open to Allah, does not see his wife run her fingers up her leg. He does not see his wife remove her shirt and her skirt. He does not see her open her eyes to watch him, but he hears the rustling of her limbs on his sheets, and he exhales, loudly, through his nose.

When he is finished he stands and, still facing southeast, he rubs his hands over his face. It is not until he hears Shirin's heavy breathing that he turns. Shirin opens her eyes and watches him watching her.

A car drives by, the *whish* of the tires the only noise for a very long moment.

"What?" she asks, "Isn't this what you usually do during prayers?"

Asad doesn't move.

"Oh, Asad," she says. An exhale.

She stops and sits up, puts her arms out to him. He is unsure, but moves toward her. He sits beside her on the bed.

"Asad. *Delam barat tang,*" she says.

She waits for him to tell her that he misses her too. In this pause, an airplane flies low outside. It is deafening, and neither can tell if it is coming or going.

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## SHOES, FALLING

BY  
MELANIE  
HANEY



You don't realize just how trusting you are, until you fall. Until you're walking through the door of your apartment complex and you place one foot in front of the other, without thinking for a moment that the very ground might fail you, until it does. Until you're reaching for your mailbox and you feel yourself sink, no, *fall* into the basement. And you look up, at the hole over your head, at your mailbox key dangling from the lock, at the ceiling far above.

Your ankle is twisted, possibly broken, so you're on the couch where you can sit with it propped up on two overstuffed throw pillows. Your daughter brings you grilled cheese, cut diagonally, while you watch *Jeopardy!* *These people aren't so smart*, you think as the three contestants clutch their buzzers and answer questions in the form of questions, and they can't even get one of them right. Like this one—a video question of a woman in the midst of ancient rubble; she's standing beside a column and asking about its style. *It's Corinthian*, you snort into your ginger ale. You remember that and you didn't even finish high school.

Your daughter offers to bring you more to drink, but you don't want to have to get up and hobble to the bathroom, so you tell her you don't want anymore, don't want to fill your bladder. She turns back to the kitchen and you think about what a good girl she is, better than some people thought she'd turn out. "You know, Mom," she tells you when she comes back in to the living room, "you could probably sue them for this."

"For what? For not looking down?" you ask.

"No, really," she explains. "Especially since you'll have to take time off work. And what if it's broken?"

You hadn't thought of that. That you won't be able to work like this, with your ankle heavy and throbbing and bulging beneath your purple skin, swelled up like a softball. You can't serve coffee like this, let alone wait on tables during the lunch rush. "It's not broken," you assure her. You don't want to sue anyone, not for your own silly mistake. For not looking down. For trusting the ground to always hold your weight. Besides, it's a small building, a friendly building, and you know the landlord and his family. They seem like good, honest people. They've never raised your rent in the ten years you've lived here. Never left a toilet running or a hot water heater busted for more than a day or two.

It's not their fault, really. You saw for yourself when you climbed up from the pit and stood back and wondered how on earth you hadn't seen that before. How had you missed such an obvious thing, such a gaping hole?

"Even so." Theresa bends down over the swollen knot of your ankle for a closer look. "They should have made sure that that door had been closed while they weren't around." She winces and stands up straight, shaking her head.

"Well, yes," you concede, "that would've been nice."

"Let's see how this thing heals," she says and picks up your plate. "You should give them a call, and then see how things go. I mean, really, it could be broken."

You watch her brown ponytail swish over her back, bobbing between her narrow shoulders as she walks and think of when you first found out you were pregnant with her—how everyone told you what a terrible idea it was to keep her. Like she was some mangy puppy that had followed you home and you had a choice whether or not to take her in. Like she wasn't already *in*, even though the tests were all positive and your pants were starting to pinch at the waist.

*Biggest mistake of your life*, your mother had warned you. But then, what did she know? Her whole life was sunk into a never-ending bottle of Kahlua and most of her advice came out in slurred tirades while you were walking away.

*If she could only see my mistake now*, you think. If only she could see that things had worked out pretty well for you and Theresa. You named her that after the nun, the saint. She would've made a nice mother, you thought, if she'd only ever had children. So you named your own after her—and look at her now, propping your pillows and fixing your dinner while you're unable to do for yourself. A good girl.

She's never been one to give grief, unlike you—born to keep your mother up at night, worrying sick over all the things you must've been up to. She had only nodded when you told her about the pregnancy. You were sixteen and the boy was gone before your period was even late. "Knocked up," your mom said, sucking on a cube of ice. She crunched it between her brown teeth and then spit it back out, sliding down the side of her glass in watery bits. "Saw that one comin'."

She was always waiting for the worst, for the shoe to drop. And sure, you aren't rich and you still haven't finished high school and all that, but you have food on the table and a nice enough place to live, when you aren't falling through the floor. If this is the worst, if this is where the other shoe fell, then you'll take it.

The credits for *Jeopardy!* are running down the screen now, with the new champion shaking hands awkwardly with Alex Trebek. You ask Theresa to bring you more Percocet, but with only a sip of water.

When she takes the cup back and turns to the kitchen, you thank her and shake your head. She's the same age as you were when you found out she was coming.

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The landlord's name is Gary, but everyone calls him Larry. It's because his last name is Lawrence, he explained back when you first moved in. You smiled when he told you, but still weren't quite sure what to think of it. Why not just stick with Gary?

It's a week after the fall and Larry and his wife, Mindy, are coming up to bring dinner for you and Theresa. *A long overdue visit*, he had explained when he called to invite himself over.

*How nice*, you thought and knew for sure that you wouldn't sue. Even though your ankle is now officially broken and is in an air cast that requires pumping, and then needs to be packed with ice, and then pumped again. Most of your day is spent either cold or squeezed.

"He's doing it out of guilt, Mom," Theresa tells you when you ask her to sweep beneath the coffee table. Still, she pulls the yellow broom from the closet and you don't say anything else.

It's noon and you wonder how the diner's doing without you. How the regulars must be wondering if you're in the hospital, or dead.

They must be thinking of you. It's the first time you've missed work in nearly five years, since the time you had that stomach flu and they asked you to stay home. But that doesn't count, really, because you still offered to go in.

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From the window over the sink you can see clear down to the rusted fence at the edge of the parking lot, and beyond it to the train tracks. It's raining today and you're leaning over the counter to watch the fat drops splatter in the puddles along the tracks. You're not supposed to be standing; you're supposed to be taking it easy, keeping that ankle propped, cold or squeezed. But it's been a week now and you're tired of it. Gerald, the manager of the diner, just called to ask when you're coming back.

"You know I can't keep you on the schedule if you don't plan to be here," he said.

"Oh, I'll be back, Gerald," you said. "You can count on that. I'll be back just as soon as I can take this stupid air cast off, you wouldn't believe this thing." You would've continued, but he butted back in.

"Well, I'll give you 'til Monday," he said. "Otherwise, we'll be forced to take you off the schedule, Daisy." He didn't say sorry or anything, just "Rules are rules."

You watch the rain come down and imagine the complaints of the regulars

when they hear that you won't be coming back, that you were let go or fired, or quit, however they're going to explain you away.

There's Chuck who drinks his coffee black and eats pie with whipped cream for breakfast, like everyday is the day after Thanksgiving when people eat leftovers in their slippers and housecoats. He loves the way you tease him every morning, hand on your hip and finger wagging, before putting the dish down in front of him.

And there's Sadie, the thin girl with dark green hair, or at least it was dark green last time you saw her. Could be purple now, or red. She always curls herself in the corner booth, taking up an entire table with her laptop and music and notebooks. She's an art student at the community college down the street. Bad home life. She hasn't told you, but you can just tell by the vacant look in her eye. Because of this, you sometimes give her coffee for free, or sometimes even add berries and whipped cream to her waffles when all she ordered was a plain. There's a bond there, between women with bad home lives. You're pretty sure she knows it too.

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Larry is short and heavysset. He's wearing a short-sleeved, plaid, button-down shirt, very Sunday-go-to-meeting. You wonder for a moment if he's here to evangelize you, looking so casually un-casual. Mindy is small beside him, tucked away like a turtle in a sleeveless black shirt. She's all bones and sharp edges. Her elbows jut outward as she peels the skin back from her chicken thigh.

Chicken and rice is what they brought. Theresa is on her second helping, eating like it's her last meal.

"Mrs. Fitzpatrick is moving," Larry tells you and you nod; raise your eyebrows to show interest. "New job out of state," he adds, as though answering a question posed by your brows. You're not even sure who Mrs. Fitzpatrick is, exactly, but these are the conversations you have with a landlord. You learn about the hot water heaters and the hissing radiators and about the people in 10B who leave their trash out on the fire escape until he goes and warns them to move it; every week he tells them. "It's a fire hazard, you know," he says.

Theresa clears the plates soon after you're done eating. While she's in the kitchen, you see Mindy jab Larry in his soft side and he clears his throat. "Um, Ms. Holloway," he says, but you stop him, tell him to call you Daisy. "Of course, Daisy," he says. "I was hoping you might be willing to take care of something for me." His eyes bounce over your head to Theresa as she returns from the kitchen. Mindy stands quickly and begins to gather salt and pepper shakers, napkins, serving spoons, anything she can fit in her bony little fists.

"Here, I'll help you," she says to Theresa and they both scuttle back to the kitchen, hands full.

"Listen, Daisy." Larry leans in toward you, his voice lowered. "It's not me, I trust you," he says. "It's my wife. She's convinced that we need this." You don't follow him. You're confused and he notices. "Here," he says and reaches down into his wife's wide black purse. He pulls out a single piece of clean white paper, with neat black type.

He slides it in front of you, careful to avoid bits of rice or chicken grease. You blink and look down at the page. It's small type, legal jargon. Without

reading it, you know what it says. It says it's not their fault.

"Like I said, it's not me," he says again. "Mindy is just so nervous about these things." He's rubbing his chin now, pinching the stubbled nub between his chubby fingertips. "Look, you and I both know it was only an accident. And we're all so very sorry it happened." He moves toward you, placing a fleshy palm on your forearm. "This will just get Mindy off my case, you know?" He rolls his eyes, as though you're sharing a common understanding—*Mindy is a horrible woman*. "Do you mind?" he asks, pleading with his eyes.

He's such a nice man, you think, such a shame he's with that cruel stick insect. You shake your head. "You know this whole thing is just silly," you say and ask for a pen just as the kitchen door swings open.

"Mom," Theresa says and leans over your shoulder. She grabs the paper from your hand and demands to know what you're signing.

She skims it quickly and then tears it in two, a clean rip down the middle of the paper, the motion of which sends a chill through the room.

After Larry and Mindy leave and you prop yourself on the couch, ankle boot off, foot raised. You watch *Wheel of Fortune* instead of talking to Theresa. First company you've had in years and she had to go and do that.

---

The lawyer's office isn't impressive—brown paneled walls with hollow brown doors and dust in the corners. The carpet is dark green and matted down flat beneath your feet. Dean Murdoch, his name, is written on a gold nameplate sitting on his desk beside a plastic tier of papers labeled "In" and "Out."

Theresa found him on television and told you he seemed good, that he doesn't collect until you do. You thought that sounded about right. Why pay him if he doesn't win?

He may have looked great on television, but he doesn't look so hot today. His hair is greased down over his pink scalp, slicked over the shiny skin in black waves. It looks like it's wet, and maybe it is, because you can see he's sweating; little beads dot his hairline. It is warm and you wonder if maybe he should invest some of his winnings in an air conditioner.

And then it dawns on you that perhaps he doesn't win.

"Ms. Holloway, is there any evidence at all to prove that the area had not been properly labeled with warning signs?"

You stare at him blankly. "I'm not sure."

"Uh huh," he says. "You're not sure if you have any evidence to corroborate your story?"

You blink, wonder why you came empty-handed, why you came at all.

He turns to Theresa and asks her the same question. She looks just as dumbstruck.

"So, it's he-said, she-said," he says, tapping his pencil on the desktop. You and Theresa nod. "Then, I'm sorry ladies, but I just don't see enough of a case here. It's a minor injury."

"It's minor for some people, but my mom can't work," Theresa says. "She's going to lose her job over this."

"I'm sorry," Dean Murdoch says, "I truly am."

Theresa takes a fistful of hard candies from the bowl on his receptionist's desk as you walk out. "Here, Mom," she says and tucks them into your purse in the car. "At least you got something from it."

---

When there's a knock on the door at eight in the morning, you can be pretty sure it's not good news. And then, when you hobble out to the living room and no one's there, just an envelope slid beneath the crack of your door, you're certain.

It's from Larry and Mrs. Larry, citing various reasons for your impending eviction from their building, the most notable of all being that your rent is late. You have three days to either pay the rent or gather your crutches and get out.

You show the letter to Theresa over breakfast and tell her, "I guess we can try calling my cousin Sue over in Pittsfield."

She looks at you blankly. "Mom, we're not moving."

"I know it's not ideal honey, but I can't come up with the money in three days," you explain, dragging your spoon over the milky bottom of your cereal bowl. "Not with all these hospital bills and what with being out of work."

Theresa stands and takes the dishes to the sink. "You can't just give up," she says and walks out.

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Half an hour later, she comes into the living room, stands between you and the television so that you have no choice but to look at her.

"You know, Mom, people are always taking advantage of you," she says.

"No they aren't, don't be ridiculous," you say, hoping that she'll step aside before the Showcase Showdown.

"Mom, it's true," she says and turns around, clicking off the television with her thumb. The apartment is silent now, save for the buzzing of the refrigerator. It's been loud for a few days, but you don't want to call Larry to come up and fix it. Not after the way you left things with him.

"You're too paranoid," you tell Theresa.

"And you're too trusting," she says. "And you just let everything happen to you, like you deserve it, even when you don't."

You blink at her for a minute, not sure where all this anger is coming from or how it came to be in front of you, your little Theresa standing there all pink-cheeked and hot, looking ready to spit nails if she could.

"Not all people are out to get us," you say calmly and try to meet her

stare.

"And not all people are out to help us either," she says sharply. And then you're both quiet. You sit silently, letting the swell of the moment roll over you, staring at one another until it feels right to talk again, though you don't know what to say.

She's right, isn't she?

How else did you wind up here? A knocked up teenager, single mother, falling through floors, getting kicked out of apartments, and losing your job. *Such a smart girl*, you think and shake your head in concession.

"We should do something," Theresa says.

"Like what?" you ask, jokingly. "Go bowling? Order a pizza?"

"No, wait," she turns and darts back to her bedroom. "Look at this," she says when she returns and puts a clean crème sheet of paper on your lap. You pick it up. Dean Murdoch's name and address is all neatly printed on the top. It's his letterhead, you realize.

The letter is addressed to Mr. Gary Lawrence. It's short and direct, explaining his liability and threatening legal action.

"What is this?" you ask, squinting over the top of the paper at Theresa. "Did he change his mind?"

Theresa lets loose a big hooting noise, a laugh from her gut like you haven't heard in years. She leans down and snatches the letter from your hand.

"I wrote it," she says and holds it up to admire her work. "It's pretty good, huh?"

"Very, you fooled me," you say, almost proud of your daughter's eloquence. The letter is so professional. "You have a real talent here, hon," you tell her. "You could really make something of yourself after you graduate next year, even a legal secretary or something. One of those online courses, maybe."

"Thanks, Mom," she says, "but you know I'm going to school after I graduate. To an actual school," she clarifies, making you feel small, you with your little dreams. Like she hasn't told you a thousand times already that she's going to go to the community college for nursing. "I only did these for you." She folds the letter back up.

"But why?"

"I just want to mess with them, that's all." She turns back to her bedroom and grins. "I've got one in there for the diner too."

"Oh, Theresa, you didn't," you say, but really you think it's so sweet that she wants to take care of you. And you can just imagine the looks on Larry and Gerald's faces when they read their letters. The shock and realization of the injustices they have committed.

"Don't worry, Mom. No one's going to get hurt." Theresa slides the letter into a crème-colored envelope.

"But, sweetheart, we don't have any legal recourse, you heard Mr. Murdoch." You clear your throat, then clarify, "The *real* Mr. Murdoch said we don't have much of a case."

"What are they going to do? Put us in jail, a cripple and her daughter,

over something as silly as impersonating a lawyer who does advertisements on his motorcycle during daytime television?"

You can see the commercial in your mind. Leather clad, with his helmet tucked beneath his arm, he points to the camera and says *I'm Dean Murdoch. I'll get you what's rightfully yours and that's that*. Such charisma and authority on television, nothing at all like what you get in person. That sweaty, greased up little man who doesn't see much of a case when there's one staring him down right across his desk.

"No one will even know that you were aware of it, Mom. I swear," Theresa says and pats the top of your head as though you're a cat or a toddler.

"Don't send them, Theresa. Please?" you ask her, but she's already walking out of the room. She didn't turn the television back on, so you just stare at your foot and try to wiggle your toes one at a time, wondering when you'll get to be the parent again.

---

When you were little and dreaming about your life, you always imagined more interesting things for yourself. A career, like a real one, not a waitress with a bad back and coins jingling around in the pockets of her apron. You dreamt of owning a house, nothing fancy, but you never thought of being a parent, living in an apartment paycheck to paycheck, listening to your Indian neighbors cook and smelling their food every time you stepped out into the hallway.

It's strange to smell someone else's cooking every day. Such an intimate thing to share—the scents, the seasonings, the time spent stirring and simmering, the preparation of a meal meant to be shared with loved ones, spilling out everywhere for any hungry nostril to suck up, walking to the elevator. *Thank goodness bedrooms aren't closer to the front door*, you think and imagine for a moment the awkward meetings of neighbors at the mailboxes, the lives lived one on top of the other on top of the other, the most intimate of acts all stacked and squeezed and seeping out into the hallways.

Theresa is working this afternoon at the diner. She'll bring home dinner and some pie for dessert too. Gerald agreed she could cover some of your shifts until you were able to go back. He called last week to apologize for his behavior, said he understood that the circumstances weren't your fault at all.

"The people have spoken," you told your daughter when you got off the phone. "My regulars have rallied for me."

"You think so?" she asked.

"Of course." You winked at her, knowing full well that she must've mailed those stupid letters and loving her despite it.

---

Mr. Lawrence came up alone on the day that the rent was due *or else*. He sat at your kitchen table and slid an envelope from his pocket, the official eviction notice, you thought. But when he opened it, it was a small stack of soft bills that feathered out from the white lip like wilting lettuce leaves.

"Take it, and give it back to me," he whispered. You just stared at him and then the bills and then back at him, round beads of sweat dotting the creases of his forehead.

"Take it," he said again, slower. "And then give it back to me." His voice was coarse and his brows rose conspiratorially.

And so you did it, you took the worn bills in your fingers, folded them against your palm and held them just long enough for them to warm in your hand. And then you gave them back to him.

"All set then," he said and stood and left you at the table wondering what had just happened and if you could stay in the apartment and what would his wife say about any of it.

---

"Look," you tell Theresa when she walks through the door. You're standing beside the couch without holding onto anything and only slightly favoring your healthy ankle. "I'll be back to work before you know it." *And you can go out and try being a normal, reckless kid for a change, for god sakes,* you think, feeling terrible that she's spending her summer waiting your tables.

"That's great, Mom," your daughter smiles warmly and lays down the plastic bags of diner food on the table.

"I can even help set the table," you say excitedly and hobble toward the kitchen, despite Theresa's wincing and lunging forward to assist you. "I can do it." You wave her away and push through the swinging door on your own.

In the kitchen, you pull open the utensil drawer and lean on the counter as you pick up the forks and knives and spoons. From beneath the plastic silverware caddy, you see the corner of a slip of paper, an envelope. You tug at it, and realize there's more. Two envelopes, blank, crème-colored, thick paper. You know them at once; they're the letters you thought Theresa had sent.

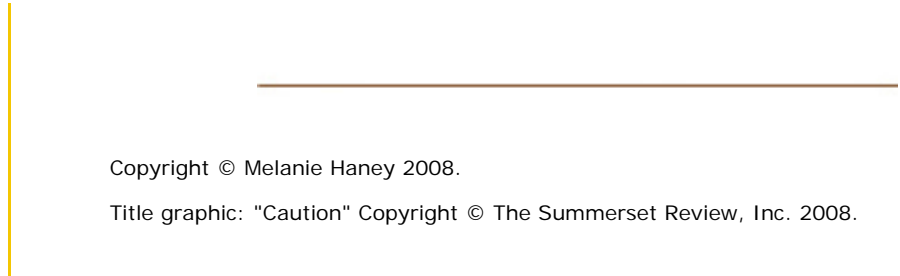
The door to your daughter's bedroom opens and closes and you hear music; she's turned on the radio. Looking down at the letters in your hand, they suddenly feel lighter, as though the paper is thin, tracing paper even—and not the official feeling, heavy bond that it is. You think for a moment that they're imaginary or at least flimsy enough to be crumpled in your palm. She hadn't sent them.

You put your full weight down on your ankle and it doesn't break. You walk to the table and it doesn't even hurt. You and your daughter share meatloaf and mashed potatoes and then split a slice of runny apple pie. The syrupy juice pools on your side of the plate and you joke that the floor is crooked and that you should write a letter to the landlord.

Theresa laughs, snorts a little milk through her nose and you're quick to dab her chin. You wad the warm, wet napkin in your fist and then stand up to clear the table.

Leaning on the edge of the sink, you run the water, warm over your hands. It fills the basin with tufts of bubbles and you tell Theresa without turning back to her, "You know, I think we're going to be all right."

"Of course we are, Mom," she says. "I trust you."



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# The Summerset Review

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## Contributors' Notes

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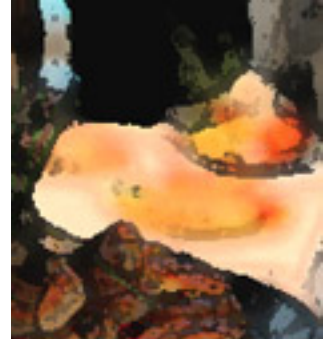
**Kevin Brown** recently won *Permafrost's* Midnight Sun Fiction Contest, the Touchstone Fiction Competition, and placed third in the *Cadenza* Fiction Contest. His work has appeared in *Space & Time*, *Alligator Juniper*, *sub-TERRAIN*, *Rosebud*, *New Delta Review*, *Outercast*, *Underground Voices*, *Shakespeare's Monkey*, *Vulcan*, *Neonbeam*, and *NANO Fiction*. He can be reached at [5ivelights@gmail.com](mailto:5ivelights@gmail.com).

**Melanie Haney** holds an MFA from Lesley University. She was the winner of the 2006 *Family Circle* fiction contest and the 2007 Ann Arbor Book Festival's short story competition. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Family Circle Magazine*, *Quality Women's Fiction*, *The Elm (Eureka Literary Magazine)*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, a *Writer's Digest* short story collection, and other venues. You may contact her at [melanie@lopnet.com](mailto:melanie@lopnet.com).



**J. M. Patrick's** short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *juked*, *Night Train*, *Amarillo Bay*, and *Noo Journal*, among others. For more information, visit [www.jmpatrick.org](http://www.jmpatrick.org).

**Joe Ponepinto** lives in Troy, Michigan. This is his first published story. He is a former newspaper editor and business owner who is working towards a Master's Degree in the Whidbey Writers Workshop, a low-residency program of the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts of the Whidbey Island Writers Association. Contact him at [jpon@thirdreader.com](mailto:jpon@thirdreader.com).



The work of **Ria Voros** has appeared in journals such as *Grain*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Other Voices*, and *The Tusculum Review*. She lives in British Columbia, Canada and can be reached at [rvoros@shaw.ca](mailto:rvoros@shaw.ca).

# The Somerset Review

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## Fifty-for-Fifty Contest Award

We are awarding a monetary prize and a complimentary copy of Volume One to the reader who submits the best feedback on a piece appearing in each issue of *The Somerset Review*. Runners-up receive complimentary copies. For information on how to submit your feedback, see our [Guidelines](#) page.

For the Spring 2008 issue, the prize money was set at \$150.

For the Summer 2008 issue – running now through September 1st – the prize money is set at \$100.

Award winner for the Spring 2008 issue:  
Robin Underdahl of Dallas, Texas

Runners-up:  
B.L. Gifford of Columbus, Ohio  
Thursday Bram of Laurel, Maryland  
Katherine Gustafson of Washington, DC

We want to thank all those of you who submitted entries. We recognize the investment you've made to read our publication and write to us. We sincerely appreciate the interest.

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Before giving the winning and runner-up entries, special mention goes to an anonymous reader who sent us the following regarding "Bathtub Mary" -

I had a bathtub Mary once. I don't now, but there are a lot of them in front of the houses where I live. I guess I think of them like Margie does in the story. She deserves my respect. I didn't grow up in a single parent home. I've been a single parent though. I've loved my neighbors for all the support they offered, and the encouragement they gave so freely to my children. I don't know anyone with a terminal illness. But I babysat my neighbor's kids when her mother died. We all went to the memorial and funeral. We were closer and more tolerant after that. I'd like to thank Allie Larkin for her beautiful provocative story. She reminded me the world can be a place of kindness and gentle reverence.

---

Robin writes -

Naomi Leinsider's story "Sea Change" was impossible to stop reading. I first thought of it as an interesting comment on place, namely, a revered American vacation spot. Initially, Miami Beach draws the suffering protagonist with its promise of the easy life, or of life boiled down to the simplest pleasures, air and sun. By the end, Molly is living like a resident of hell— isolated, in dread of what comes next, with no hope. The gorgeous waters can sprout the heads of drowning boat people, and even limbs leftover from shark takings. The scene in which Molly succumbs to the blond boy's advances works like a microcosm of this aspect of the story: what appears to be uncomplicated pleasure on the beach turns into an experience of unspeakable humiliation.

Molly, in her state of emotional paralysis, makes her situation worse and worse. Possibilities of relationship are undermined from the start by her lies. She rejects health care. In this way, the story speaks not only of vacation locales, but of anywhere in the U.S. She was isolated before, in her urban environment, and her mother pointed out that she was isolated in the place where she grew up. I wish I could understand why she allows the pregnancy to defeat her so completely. Her very real suffering was almost a relief to me after reading story after story about bored protagonists in other journals.

A day later, I was thinking about Molly some more, and I started saying *I'm not like that* furiously to myself. Experiences that cause anything on the scale from embarrassment to humiliation do cause social isolation, and one often chooses the isolation, even when sympathy is available. I remembered a time when a painful experience prepared me to embrace an opportunity to cut all ties and move our family across the country. My isolation was not as extreme as Molly's, but I loved it.

---

B.L. writes -

Allie Larkin's "Bathtub Mary" might be the best contemporary short story I've read during the last year. And I read a good number of them, including those appearing in the top literary journals. In fact, Larkin's story compares favorably to Jhumpa Lahiri's "This Blessed House," in which one protagonist also wanted to rid the house of a religious icon while the other cherished it and wanted to keep it. ("This Blessed House" is from Lahiri's collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000.) "Bathtub Mary," though, is different and stands on its own. It deserves a Pushcart Prize, at least.

Accolades aside, to the story. First, thanks to Larkin for educating the reader about the phenomenon of bathtub Marys. They apparently are not big in my part of Central Ohio but are quite the thing elsewhere. I appreciate stories that teach the reader something.

And then there are the beautifully-written lines. Some of my favorites: "I'd wash her with hose water to baptize her..." And this gem: "When I got to the part about Mary's womb, my belly always felt funny and my hands shook a little."

And then this line, in which the middle-school age protagonist says to her mother, "So, what I figure is that our religion is up for grabs." The mother's response: "No, it isn't." (Like the protagonists in "Blessed House," those in Bathtub Mary are ostensibly non-Christian—Hindu in Blessed House, Jewish in Bathtub Mary.)

The story manages to include in it two of my favorite things: religion (as already discussed) and pop music. Along the way, Larkin alludes to Duran Duran and references Stevie Nicks. Larkin's prose also has a musical feel to it.

Of course, no story is ultimately successful unless it has emotional resonance. This one has enough to fill a bathtub with the tears that might well be shed by those who read it.

---

Thursday writes about to "True Love and Paranoia in the Hermit Kingdom" -

It seems horrible to wish, in some tilted way, to break an arm, to suffer an injury.

But in Jack Cobb's words, I found a poignant connection to his surroundings. I've lived abroad and traveled extensively, but I've always felt the lack of that sort of connection.

I spent four painful months in Dublin, struggling to understand Irish accents that my American ear constantly misinterpreted. There was none of the connection that Cobb seemed to find with Korea, and I find myself jealous. I am jealous of that connection, that injury, that 'morning calm.'

---

Katherine writes -

#### **Further Than Just the Miles**

"The distance from my home is measured in so much more than miles," Jack Cobb writes in his essay, "True Love and Paranoia in the Hermit Kingdom." As an American in Asia—in my case, China—I also felt so distant from my old life that it seemed the only way back to familiarity was straight through the molten center of the Earth.

Jack feels intensely dislocated—his main drama is a broken leg, but his bone is not all that is severed from its root. "Most days any of us venture out of the university grounds," he writes, "we deal with The Look, the open-mouthed stare that we produce in the locals like we just stepped out of a pile of excrement." But, despite all this, he does not leave Korea. It is the right time for him to be traveling, living with the discomfort of dislocation, making sure not "to miss whatever takes place next." I, on the other hand, did not stay.

In my apartment at the university where I taught English, the picture window in the living room looked out over a three-lane traffic circle edged by makeshift barbeque stands. All evening, through clouds of meat-grilling smoke, I would sit at my table and watch the organized chaos unfurl. Buses and trucks jostled in the curves. Bicyclists pedaled undaunted into oncoming traffic. A man led a languorous brown cow across the circle while minibuses sailed past.

"What is different about China?" some of my students asked, curious when I told them that

their country confused me. I tried to explain that in America cars do not drive the wrong way down one-way streets. The students looked at me blankly; there, they can drive the wrong way on divided highways, as long as the road isn't too crowded. There, the rules of the road are open to interpretation.

And there, correspondingly, I felt that I had become unmoored. I had arrived in southwest China vaguely expecting an adventurous feeling of freedom and the thrill of wide-eyed discovery. But I found myself at first full of despair and panic-stricken, wondering why I ever left home. Culture shock, my mother advised me—be patient. The initial desolation, however, only gave way to melancholy resignation. One evening during my fourth week of classes, I watched a bicyclist leaning on his pedals in an oncoming lane, on a seeming crash course with a lumbering truck full of bricks. I felt that I, similarly, was heading into the face of something heavy, laborious, and daunting. The idea of my yearlong contract left me hopeless.

This was not because I was an inexperienced traveler overwhelmed by cultural difference. Having spent various periods in Nepal, Ecuador, Guatemala, and all over Europe, I felt I was primed for the challenge of living in China. And for months I had been longing to quit my office job and travel somewhere far away.

But living abroad at that moment in my life, it turned out, felt more like an obstacle to overcome than a satisfying challenge to confront. It is not, I realized with a jolt of surprise, always the right place and time for traveling. Sometimes travel is rife with the thrill of adventure and the impertinence of doing something wild. Sometimes, though, it feels like a big, tiring, overwhelming mistake.

I couldn't believe I didn't actually want to be traveling. But even so, I didn't feel that I was failing. I had met China courageously, becoming, within weeks, a decent teacher of fifty-student classes. I had learned quickly the tricks of the bus route and the language for buying eggs. I became a pro at bargaining at the shops and market stalls. I learned to play by China's rules. But traversing the roundabout of life there, I felt stumped and stunned.

Though it seemed absurd after all the time and energy I had spent planning my escape to a foreign land, the only place I wanted to be was home.

When I came to this understanding, watching the traffic spinning on its axis below my window, I felt the same curious wonderment expressed by Jack Cobb's Zen Master Hakuin. As he says: "Is that so?" It was so. I broke my contract and went home. And stepping off the plane into my family's arms, I knew I had come so much further than just the miles.

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We want to acknowledge all those who sent feedback on the photo essay. Your effort and comments mean a lot to us, but unfortunately fell victim to an oversight on our part in stipulating the guidelines of the contest. The scope of the Fifty-for-Fifty Reading Contest is intended to cover stories and essays in text only, as part of our initiative to inspire more reading and recognition of literary magazines. We regret not making this clear. We have revised the guidelines and appreciate your contribution.

# The *Summerset Review*

## Guidelines for Submissions

### Fiction and Essay Submissions

Writers are invited to submit literary stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, please read *The Summerset Review* or consult our [Recommended Reading List](#). We are currently not accepting poetry or book reviews.

Email submissions to [editor@summersetreview.org](mailto:editor@summersetreview.org) as an attachment in MS Word, or as plain text. We suggest you include the word "Submission" in the title of the email, so that we don't mistake it for junk mail. Be sure you specify whether your piece is fiction or nonfiction.

You may alternatively submit in hard-copy by sending to 25 Summerset Drive, Smithtown, New York 11787, USA. We prefer disposable copies of manuscripts. We can respond via email in lieu of a SASE if you so designate.

All submissions receive replies as quickly as possible. If we have not responded within three months, please hassle us. We read year-round and never go on hiatus.

Book excerpts will be considered if you believe the work stands alone. Reprints will be considered if the work has not appeared elsewhere within the last two years. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even so, a brief note accompanying the submission is preferred. We are not sure what we want to read in this note, but would appreciate the extra effort, rather than a blank email with an attachment. We are always interested in knowing how you've heard of us, and what you like about us.

Authors will see drafts of accepted pieces for review prior to release, and will receive twenty-five dollars at release time for their contribution.

Writers retain all rights to use their work elsewhere, however, we reserve the right to republish the material, without modification, in a nonprofit print volume. We also reserve the right to quote brief excerpts of text at literary events, with no connection to monetary gain, crediting the author in all cases.

We have nominated stories annually for various anthologies and awards, including *Pushcart Prize*, *New Stories from the South*, *Creative Nonfiction's Best Of anthology*, *storySouth's Million Writers Award*, *Sundress Publication's Best of the Net*, and others.

### Enter Our Free Fifty-for-Fifty Contest

Readers are invited to submit comments on stories and essays (excluding photo essays) appearing in the current issue of *The Summerset Review*. We award at least fifty dollars and a copy of Volume One to the person contributing the best entry over fifty words, and will include the comment in our next issue, along with the reader's name and home town. (For the exact amount we pay each quarter, see the Fifty-for-Fifty Contest for Readers page.)

Reader comments can be in any form and there is no fee. Only one entry is allowed per person, per quarter, and the entry must pertain to a piece appearing in the current issue. We are particularly interested in how the story or essay affected you; what impact it had, what memory it stirred, what idea it precipitated. Be honest and lucid.

Email your entry to [editor@summersetreview.org](mailto:editor@summersetreview.org). Include your name, town, state, and country (if outside the USA). Qualified entries will receive acknowledgement of receipt within a few days. The winner will be notified when the new issue is released. The deadline for comments is two weeks before release date. Issues are released on the 15th of March, June, September, and December. Entrants who have not won will not be individually notified of contest results.

Email addresses will not be published, circulated, or archived. Writers making content submissions are eligible to participate as long as they do not discuss their own work.

We may choose to publish more than just the winning comment. If we decide to do so, readers will be notified and although it is not likely monetary awards will be given, we may send complimentary copies of Volume One to runners up.

By offering this prize, we hope to increase the awareness and appreciation of literary magazines in our world and culture.

### Questions for Reader Groups

Readers and Reading Groups are invited to provide answers to questions we have posted on the material in our current issue. See "Questions for Reader Group Discussion" in the Table of Contents for details on how you can win a complimentary copy of *The Summerset Review* if you or your reading group provides meaningful answers to all questions.

# The Summerset Review

## Recommended Reading List

Author	Title	Source
Aciman, Andre	Cat's Cradle	From the November 3 Issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1997
Altschul, Andrew Foster	From A to Z	From Issue #1 of <i>Swink</i> , 2004
Anderson, Dale Gregory	The Girl in the Tree	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2003
Ashton, Edward	<a href="#">Night Swimmer</a>	Online at <i>The Blue Penny Quarterly</i> , Spring/Summer 1995
Baggott, Julianna	Five	From <i>Other Voices</i> #28, 1998
Bardi, Abby	My Wild Life	From <i>Quarterly West</i> #41, 1995
Baxter, Charles	Snow	From the collection <i>A Relative Stranger</i> , published in 1990
Benson, Amy	Vectors: Arrows of Discontent	A memoir excerpt in Issue 29.2 of <i>New Orleans Review</i> , 2004
Borders, Lisa	Temporary Help	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Bananafish</i> , 1998
Brooks, Ben	Wildflowers	From the Spring issue of <i>Georgetown Review</i> , 2005
Broyard, Bliss	Mr. Sweetly Indecent	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 1997
Burns, Carole	Honour's Daughter	From <i>Other Voices</i> #31, 1999
Cain, Chelsea	Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl	From the Spring issue of <i>Grand Tour</i> , 1997
Cheever, John	The Stories of John Cheever	A collection published in 1980
Christopher, Nicholas	Veronica	A novel published in 1996
Clark, Susan	Besides the Body	From the Spring issue of <i>Red Rock Review</i> , 2004
Coake, Christopher	Solos	A novella from Vol. 9, No. 1 of <i>Five Points</i> , 2005
Crane, Elizabeth	When the Messenger Is Hot	A collection published in 2003
Crowe, Thomas Rain	<a href="#">Firsts</a>	Online at <i>Oyster Boy Review</i> in January, 1997
Dancoff, Judith	Vermeer's Light	From <i>Alaska Quarterly Review's</i> Intimate Voices issue, 1997
Dormanen, Sue	<a href="#">Finishing First</a>	From the Summer issue of <i>Lynx Eye</i> , 1998.
Doyle, Larry	Life Without Leann	From an issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> in Fall, 1990
Hyde, Catherine Ryan	Dancing with Elinor	From the Summer issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 2006
Kennedy, Thomas E.	Kansas City	From Vol 62 No. 4 of <i>New Letters</i> , 1996
McInerney, Jay	Model Behavior	A novel published in 1998
Millhauser, Steven	Enchanted Night	A novella published in 1999
Moses, Jennifer	Circling	From the Spring issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 1995
Murakami, Haruki	South of the Border, West of the Sun	A novel published in 1998
Offill, Jenny	Last Things	A novel published in 1999
Orlean, Susan	The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup	A collection of essays published in 2001
Peelle, Lydia	Reasons for and Advantages of Breathing	From No. 87 of <i>One Story</i> , 2007
Perry, Rachael	Sullivan's Inventory	From No. 82/83 of <i>Confrontation</i> , Spring/Summer 2003
Pope, Mary Elizabeth	Divining Venus	From the Spring issue of <i>Florida Review</i> , 2007
Raboteur, Emily	The Eye of Horus	From <i>StoryQuarterly</i> #40, 2004
Robison, Mary	Why Did I Ever?	A novel published in 2001
Row, Jess	The Secrets of Bats	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 2000
Russell, Karen	Haunting Olivia	From the June 13 & 20 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 2005
Ryan, Jean	Paradise	From the <i>Massachusetts Review</i> , Autumn 2001
Salinger, J.D.	For Esme - With Love and Squalor	From the collection <i>Nine Stories</i> published in 1953
Sellers, Heather	Tell Me Again Who Are You?	An essay from Fall/Winter issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2006
Tilghman, Christopher	The Way People Run	From the September 9 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1991

# The Somerset Review

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## Questions for Discussion



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Readers and reading groups are invited to discuss the topics below relating to the material presented in this issue. Send answers to [editor@somersetreview.org](mailto:editor@somersetreview.org) and you will be eligible for a complimentary copy of Volume One of *The Somerset Review*. All questions must be answered and received by September 1, 2008.

Include your name, town, state, and country (if outside the USA) in your entry. The editors will decide the winner(s) and send out notification when the new issue is released. We plan to announce the names of those who are awarded free copies, so if you do not want your name to appear in the journal, please let us know. Postal and email addresses of all entrants will not be published, circulated, or archived.

- 
1. Explain what was running through your head in "Shoes, Falling," as Daisy was about to sign the paper absolving the landlord of his liability. Were you able to identify more with Daisy, or her daughter who comes into the room at this point and tears up the agreement?
  2. Do you think some of the specific incidents that occur in "Like, Popular" breach into the surreal? For example, there is a scene when blood splatters on Mrs. Tate's desk and her immediate reaction is simply a sigh. Discuss how realistic you believe all the events are in this story.
  3. Were any new or different aspects of life inside a restaurant revealed to you in "The Art of Waiting"? What in particular?
  4. In the end of "I Love You in Farsi," do you think the airplane is coming or going?
  5. Discuss one of the most emotionally moving parts of "Brick and Mortar," in your opinion.

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The Somerset Review

# The Summerset Review

## Previous Issues

Catherine Brown, Jack Cobb, Bill Cook, Allie Larkin, Naomi Leimsider, Didi Wood

Spring 2008

Winter 2008

Daniel DiStasio, Marko Fong, Sandra Maddux-Creech, Sandra Gail Teichmann-Hillesheim

Anne Corbitt, Julie Dearborn, John Hansen, Scott McCabe, Thaddeus Rutkowski

Fall 2007

Summer 2007

Renee Carter Hall, Sabine Maier, Jen Michalski, Michelle Panik, Brenda Whiteside

Olivia Kate Cerrone, Kelly Jameson, Saundra Mitchell, Ron Savage, Nathan S. Webster

Spring 2007

Winter 2007

E. P. Chiew, Andrew Coburn, LaTanya McQueen, Nancy Stebbins

Zane Kotker, Corbitt Nesta, Kevin Spaide, Philip Suggars, Steven Torres

Fall 2006

Summer 2006

Elizabeth Bernays, Penny Feeny, John Gooley, Jeffrey N. Johnson, Shellie Zacharia

Phoebe Kate Foster, Amy Greene, Dee Dobson Harper, John Riha, Robert Villanueva, D. W. Young

Spring 2006

Winter 2006

Steven Gillis, Barbara Jacksha, Mary Lynn Reed, Arthur Saltzman

Lisa Ohlen Harris, Michael Hartford, Tammy R. Kitchen, Jillian Schedneck, Sandi Sonnenfeld

Fall 2005

Summer 2005

Mariel Boyarsky, Michael J. Cunningham, Catherine B. Hamilton, Maxi Hellweger, B.J. Hollars

Erin Anderson, Carl R. Brush, Mark X. Cronin, Elise Davis, Shellie Zacharia

Spring 2005

Winter 2005

David McKinley Lowrey, Mark Mazer, Corey Mesler, Terry Thomas

Julie Ann Castro, Bill Glose, Graham Jeffery, William Starr Moake, Philippe Tarbouriech, Carolyn Thériault

Fall 2004

Summer 2004

Karen Kasaba, Chris Ludlow, Court Merrigan, Michael F. Smith, Mark Vender

Scott Carter, Alan M. Danzis, Gerard Marconi, Jordan Rosenfeld

Spring 2004

Winter 2004

Maura Madigan, Troy Morash, Pam Mosher, Paul Silverman

Aline Baggio, Susan H. Case, Zdravka Evtimova, Tony O'Brien, Tom Sheehan, Jennifer Spiegel

Fall 2003

Summer 2003

Linda Boroff, Thomas Brennan, Sue Dormanen, James Francis, Gina Frangello, Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz

Eric Bosse, Sarah Maria Gonzales, M.M.M. Hayes, Janice J. Heiss, Pia Wilson

Spring 2003

Winter 2003

Max Dunbar, Jenny de Groot, Soo J. Hong, Rachel Belinda Kidder, Michael Marisi, Ulf Wolf

Kit Chase, Diane E. Dees, Edison McDaniels, Regina Phelps, Jacob Fawcett

Fall 2002