

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/1

Christine Stark

Catherine

walks in with a woman behind her *Hi Catherine says they stand next to my bed this is Nicole I nod Nicole nods she has straight blonde hair past her shoulders a black blazer a pointed nose She's a social worker Catherine rolls up one of her sleeves she might be able to help you get insurance Catherine looks at Nicole Yes Nicole says nods quick like a bird pecking at grain I'll be back Catherine walks out Okay then Nicole says her voice is high and chirpy she produces a thin leather briefcase from the side of her leg if you can give me some background information I can process a welfare application for you my eyes widen Welfare I say Possibly she says is that okay Um I look out the door catch a glimpse of a bouquet with a pink Dumbo sized ribbon wrapped around the vase Health insurance is part of the package Nicole says I look at her she watches her hand click a white pen with green lettering Would it cover the hospital I ask Nicole waves the pen at me With a little bit of help from mister pen here she smiles clicks it once more bends over looks out the door then whispers I can back date the application Oh I say that would be good the words stick in my throat like peanut butter she perks up pulls out a clipboard from her briefcase attaches a piece of paper to it Okay then let's get hopping*

Are you employed

No

How long has it been since you worked

Fifteen sixteen days

Have you looked for work

No

On what terms did you leave your previous job

I was fired

Why

I don't know

Come up with a reason

Insubordination

How much did you make

Five dollars an hour

Oh

What did you do

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/1

Cooked

Oh

How much do you have in savings

Nothing

Oh

Any assets cars property etcetera

No

Nothing

None

Address

1412 Jennifer Street Madison 53704

Sign here

I sign in perfect cursive

Nicole puts the tip of the pen in her mouth then shuffles the papers I signed *Okay then* she says picks the pen out of her mouth cocks her head lifts one eyebrow *I just might have a case for you here it will take them a few weeks to process your application but if they approve it* she leans toward me points her pen at me *and I think they will you'll receive two hundred dollars per month with approximately one hundred dollars in food stamps plus Wisconsin Care and oh yes you'll be eligible for job training should you decide to pursue a new career* Great I say because I don't know what else to say *Excellent* she shuffles her papers again stands up puts them in her briefcase *The psychiatrist will be with you soon* she pauses *have a great day* she smiles at my feet under the blanket walks out