

## Wilderness House Literary Review 5/3

Patricia Wild  
Welling Up

### CHAPTER ONE

**JEWELL TUGGED ON HER LONG JOHNS**, yanked on woolly socks, obscured her body with layer upon layer of itchy, reeky clothing. Colors, patterns, style, flair, attractiveness; it was March and she no longer cared. Brushing her teeth, she glanced out her bathroom's dormer window — another drear morning. Jewell swiped a sour washcloth across her face. More than likely there were dark pouches of yesterday's mascara beneath her eyes but to remove them meant actually looking at her thirty-four year old face in the bathroom mirror and this she could not bear. Doing anything with her wild, ropey, Venus on a half-shell hair was much too much trouble. She'd do the "Love Story" look, that's all.

Boots and backpack in hand, Jewell quietly crept down the attic apartment's creaky stairs. As she did every morning, she paused before an oil in its ornate, gilded frame hanging next to Lily's bedroom door. Barely glancing at the triple-masted ship tarrying in the background or the thickly-painted overcast sky, Jewell stared, as she did every morning, at the dory in the foreground and the white-faced boy bent low over his oar. Swimming in man-sized foul weather gear, the terrified youth clamped his eyes shut while the rest of the crew — four of them — wrestled with the crazed leviathan beside their frail boat. "Poor little kid," Jewell whispered every morning. When, beneath the eaves of a lonely, boulder-bound farmhouse, that lad had dreamt of going to sea, could he have imagined such terror?

Lily was a light sleeper so Jewell snuck past her landlady's room like a cat burglar. Ordinarily Jewell descended the Persian-carpeted stairs to the first floor as loudly as her sock-covered feet allowed but *this* morning she tiptoed down, scuttled through the living room and into the dining room where she stealthily opened the mahogany breakfront, grabbed an exquisite, sterling silver baby cup, the initials A. A. F. monogrammed on its side, and stuffed it into her backpack.

One less fucking thing to polish.

Seated on the built-in bench in the chilly foyer, Jewell laced up her boots and grabbed her knitted hat, a thick coat, and two nubbly scarves, one for herself, one to swaddle the baby cup. She slammed her heavy backpack beside the front door, slammed the door behind her, jabbed her keys into the multiple locks as if putting out eyes. Bam, bam, bam: each and every footstep a stomp down the front steps.

Jewell trudged down tony Brattle Street towards Harvard Square. Some mornings, just escaping Lily's house, the stomping and the slamming and the under-her-breath cursing, the vigorous kicking to the curb of whatever lay in her path and two or three doors from her landlady's house — a mansion, really — Jewell's equanimity returned. But not today.

So the male cardinal trilling from a top branch of a leafless sugar maple and the tiny buds on the lilac bushes in front of Longfellow's house and the hearty "Good morning!" from the elderly woman crossing her path went unnoticed.

"What a nasty scowl!" the bluestocking thought to herself as she strode across the street.

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In front of the American Repertory Theater and already cold, Jewell stopped, overcome by an inexplicable longing. Every day that week, just as she reached this spot, Jewell pictured a thick, white bowl filled with just-right oatmeal, a square of butter melting on top, real maple syrup artfully crisscrossed, a single strand of steam rising from the bowl, a vision she had perhaps seen long, long ago in an advertisement. And as she had been doing all week, she fought a powerful urge to turn around, to go back to Lily's house, and to fix herself a great, heaping bowl. But Jewell continued stomping towards the T.

Just before she crossed Church Street, Jewell saw her; she'd been there, next to the Unitarian church, all week. Hunched over her laden shopping cart, the woman wore a man's checked overcoat, much too large for her, its hem dragging in the slushy snow, its sleeves half-covering bony hands which gripped her cart as if terrified someone might grab her plastic bag collection. Clotted hanks of grey, stringy, shoulder-length hair hung from a faded Red Sox cap. Her browned, wrinkled face peered out from the upturned collar like a turtle's. The blind woman and her cart were poised at the very edge of the sidewalk as cars and commuters streamed past—just inches away.

Like everyone else rushing past Eunice, for that, indeed, was her name, Jewell thought *homeless*. But Eunice had a home; when she needed to dry out, she slept in the Cambridge public housing apartment she shared with her middle-aged, diabetic daughter. But when, as had happened that week, Eunice was "on a Bukowski," for that was what her daughter called her drinking bouts, she slept under a thicket on Cambridge Common.

Jewell decided to go right up to her, today. She'd show these heartless, much too busy Yankees how it's done.

"Need a little help crossing this street?" Jewell shouted above the rush-hour din.

Those were Jewell's words, intended to convey sisterly concern, compassion, looking out for the less fortunate, blah blah blah. But what really came out was: *C'mon c'mon c'mon*, Blind Lady. Let's get a move on. Both of them heard it.

Eunice, her boots planted firmly in the slush, swayed slightly backwards from Jewell, then addressed a space just a little to the left of Jewell's chin.

"Naw," she replied. "I'm just contemplatin'." And the blind woman continued to stand there, her useless eyes trained at the T entrance across the street.

So Jewell carefully moved just a little from her and silently shared that busy street corner for a few minutes. She allowed herself to listen to Harvard Square during morning rush hour, the honks, the fretful beeps, the whoosh of tires on wet pavement, the jarring sound of an oil truck when it abruptly downshifted, snippets of conversation, heavy boots on the brick sidewalk and very faintly, from underground, the ominously rhythmic comings and goings of the Red Line. Bored and cold, Jewell crossed the street and entered the T.

And of course she didn't get a seat and of course someone nearby was loudly humming off-key and of course someone else had to make a stupid remark about her hair and of course the seated ones read their paperbacks and didn't give the standing ones a thought. Someone had spilled coffee on the seat directly across from where she stood. Regular, extra milk, she guessed. Fellow commuters getting on at Central and Kendall spotted the empty seat and rushed over to claim the empty space as if they were the only smart ones on the train. As if they'd figured out something the rest of the people in the car hadn't. One by one, they

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noticed the spill and backed away. Jewell watched the taffy-colored liquid slosh around as the car broke out of the tunnel and scurried across the Charles. The river ice was beginning to break up although the sky above Boston's gap-toothed, snaggle-toothed skyline was a solid, oppressive grey. At Charles Street, a beef-fed businessman entered the car sporting one of those nasty, late-winter tans. Hateful man. The car pretty much emptied at Park, and Jewell was left to do some contemplatin' of her own.

At Andrew, a toothless, rank wino stumbled in. Although the car was by now almost empty, he practically sat in Jewell's lap. The Hispanic guy seated directly across from her caught her eye: Got your back, Red. Jewell smiled slightly, signaled with a small upturn of her chin, then headed for the end of the car.

"Ahhh, don't be like that," the drunk growled as she lurched past him. He continued ranting, loud enough for her to hear, more like "I'm so fucking tired of stuck-up bitches like you . . ." than "If I had me a gun right now I'd . . ." thank God, but nevertheless disturbing. If that Spanish guy hadn't been there? No point thinking about it.

Jewell pulled a book—any book—from her backpack and tried to read but the words just wriggled around the page. By the time she got off at JFK and onto the shuttle bus for John Adams Community College, Jewell was spitting mad; she stomped up the sprawling glass-and-steel monstrosity's front steps daring, just daring someone to say something. Go ahead. Jammed into the elevator, Jewell tensed her elbows, just in case. On the sixth floor she entered room 609 where she slammed her backpack on a desk towards the back, then stood by the plate-glass window to watch planes landing and taking off at Logan.

The ten-story building throbbed and crackled around and below and above her. She felt the building's miles and miles of wiring thread its cheerless walls, its massive boilers crank out way too much heat, its computers, its greenboards and chalky trays, overhead projectors and stacks of glossy textbooks, its ten floors of pedagogical *stuff* crushing her and, for a trembly instant, labored to breathe.

Easy there, Jewell-Girl.

It was altogether fitting and proper that on a day like this, her emotional setting stuck on "Pissed," that Jewell McCormick attended J.A.C.C, named for someone well-known for his cranky disposition. John Adams was decidedly *not* the only foul-humored person from this part of the world, then or now. Take Cotton Mather or Whitey Bulger or Louisa Day Hicks or most Greater-Bostonians behind the wheel of a car. Maybe there was something about Boston's longitude and latitude that bred contrariness. Maybe that's why the American Revolution started there. Maybe, Jewell speculated, watching a giant jet approach a wind-scoured runway, nasty moods blow in from Boston Harbor. Could be.

Even with my hair and accent I fit right in.

"Whatja get for numbah thirteen?" Jewell recognized Marla's yappy voice behind her. "Huh?" Jewell turned; her classmate, her terrier face much too close, shook a manila folder like a tambourine. "Huh?" Marla pressed.

Jewell stepped back.

Except for maybe that Haitian guy in the first row, Marla was the smartest person in their math class. So although Jewell swore her classmate made her pant like she'd just run the Marathon, Jewell needed her wired classmate's help. Often the two met over coffee while Marla corrected Jewell's homework.

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"Coffee? Girl, caffeine's exactly the opposite of what's good for you," Jewell had remarked once. But Marla claimed coffee soothed her: "So does coke," she added.

Older than Jewell, single mother of three dusky boys, in her light grey sweatshirt and matching sweatpants and sneakers so white they blazed, how she pulled fine, dun hair away from her pursed face with a ratty rubber band, those cheapo sneakers; Marla could easily pass for a gawky twelve-year old.

"Ask someone else," Jewell barked. Marla slunk back to her seat.

Ms. Sabatino strode in, wearing her usual brown suit, her dyed blonde hair in its usual pert, Mary Tyler Moore flip, her makeup carefully applied to a fifty-something face. Ceremoniously, the math instructor placed her leather briefcase on her desk while Jewell hastily took her seat. After a brief, nearsighted glance at her students, the adjunct rubbed her hands together, then turned toward the greenboard to fill it with symbols and numbers.

And Jewell's bad mood *cubed*. For although Ms. Sabatino was billed as a math instructor, she made no attempt to explain, to teach, to instruct. No. Her sole purpose being in that classroom at that particular time, apparently, was to race through the class's textbook — which she, herself, wrote — at breakneck speed, determined to establish some kind of personal best for how quickly she could complete the syllabus and how thoroughly she could befuddle her students. Within half an hour of the first class, everyone, even that Haitian guy in the first row, had stopped asking her to repeat that last part, please. Why bother? Worse yet, should the Marlas of the class, the lumpy, dumpy ones, the welfare moms with the bad teeth and the Somahvull, Chahllztown, Southie accents presume to raise their hands, Ms. Sabatino pointedly ignored them.

Did she think this was M.I.T.?

"Wanna go out for coffee?" Marla tried again after class.

"I'd be terrible company," Jewell replied, jamming her notebook into a side compartment. "Maybe Monday. How's that?"

"Sure. Fine. Whatever." As if shouldering a fifty-pound backpack, Marla trudged towards the door.

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Jewell exited the T into the very heart of Somerville's Davis Square. Little changed since streetcars shuttled its streets, Somerville's premier square boasted its own subway stop, upscale shops and restaurants, proximity to the leafy, classically New England Tufts campus, and some of the city's grandest homes.

Traffic on College Avenue was strangely absent that afternoon, so quiet Jewell heard the young, suited Chinese guy across the street whistling the theme song from "The Andy Griffith Show" as he confidently marched towards the T. "Dee dee DEE DEE dee dee dee DEE—" And for the first time that day, she laughed out loud.

Spirits lifted, Jewell gave the houses she stomped past her fleeting attention. Like the rest of dense, dense Somerville, the wood-frame homes along College Avenue, Victorians and Queen Annes and Italianates, had been built so glaringly close to one another that Jewell noticed only tiny yards threatened by unkempt shrubbery and porches, porches, and more porches, a couple of these porches

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occupied by muttering, chain-smoking half-way house residents. A graceful stained-glass window here, a three-story corner tower there, curved windows, gingerbread, artisanal shingling were unseen, unheralded.

Jewell turned onto treeless Summit Street and, passing three mansard cottages just like it, walked up the short sidewalk to a squat, tan, vinyl-sided mansard with a glassed-in front porch. Ignoring the buckling plywood ramp, she walked up the rotting steps and, using her key, let herself in, braced for the usual olfactory assault: cat piss, mildew, old man.

"You're late," Rocco announced to his homemaker without looking up. Hunched over a wobbly-looking card table, Rocco deftly sorted hundreds of jigsaw puzzle pieces by color. Blue. Mottled green. White with slashes of yellow. White with slashes of orange. An empty cardboard box at the wheel of his wheelchair illustrated the finished piece: one of Monet's water lily series.

"You just started it?" Jewell asked, taking off her coat and hat.

"Donna came by this morning." Rocco's daughter spent her weekends scouring yard sales for collectibles, decorative plates, mostly, and jigsaws for her father. "J'a bring it?"

Jewell unzipped her backpack; where the baby cup had nestled was a small, brown paper bag from which Jewell removed a pint of Jack Daniel's. "Ta *dah!*" Rocco looked up briefly. "You'd said a pint, right?"

"Right."

"Oh! Your change," she remembered, reaching into her pocket.

"That's okay." Sultan-like he waved his hand.

"Thanks!" Jewell replied carelessly as if those extra couple of bucks meant nothing.

"The Red Line was really slow, today," she told him, tidying the room. "Right after Porter Square, we just sat and sat for at least twenty minutes. There was some kind of announcement but you couldn't understand a single word. The guy sounded like this—" She held her nose, squawked, talked gibberish for two or three sentences. But Rocco, who could listen to Jewell all day, didn't laugh.

Sighing, Jewell gathered up sections of the *Herald*. A photo of Eddie O'Brien, the local kid who'd allegedly stabbed his pretty neighbor ninety-eight times, caught her eye. Was this former altar boy, this pudgy, Somerville teenager in that Charlie Brown sweater really "a sexual sadist"? He'd worked at a porn shop in Union Square, hadn't he? Jewell looked deep into his half-tone piggy eyes and found him guilty. Gleefully tossing Eddie in the trash, she yanked an ancient Electrolux upright from the front hall's musty closet and slowly unwound its worn cord.

"Let me know when's good time to do in here," she said, plugging in the vacuum. "I'll be quick." She always promised that. She always was.

Rocco kept sorting puzzle pieces.

"The snow's almost melted," she tried. "Do you think it'll snow again?"

He grunted but did not answer her question. Hmmm. Usually Rocco loved to talk about New England's weather; he took enormous delight in its unpredictability and inconstancy. In a little notebook, a new one each year, he recorded the day's highs and lows and, if asked, could you tell what the temperature had been on any day going back to 1970. Too awed and humbled by the ever-changing sea-

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sons to predict tomorrow, he'd crow when the so-called weather experts proved wrong: "Those morons!" Other morons included Somerville's current mayor no matter who, John Kerry and his "ketchup wife," Hillary Clinton and, of course, the Yankees. Something's wrong, Jewell realized.

She looked down at his almost-bald head as he sorted. Sometimes, when he was occupied with a puzzle, the smoothness of his skull, his lack of facial hair made it possible for his homemaker to see him as he must have looked when he was a little boy. Jewell studied the indentations—forceps marks—on either side of his broad, wrinkled forehead and mentally moved even farther back in time. Rocco Pellegrino as a newborn!

"Whataya staring at?"

"Your big, bald head."

"That what they hire you to do? Stare at my head?"

"Something bothering you today, Rocco?"

"Today's Marie's birthday," he said simply. His wife. She died four years ago.

"You must miss her," Jewell said just to keep this fledging conversation going. But Rocco returned to his puzzle.

"Can I start vacuuming?" Nothing.

Defeated, Jack Daniel's in hand, she abandoned the Electrolux and went into the kitchen.

Like always, she took a long, lingering look inside the glass-covered breakfront in one corner of the kitchen, right under the water-stained ceiling tiles. The white, wooden breakfront contained Marie's salt and pepper shaker collection. As she did every Tuesday and Thursday, Jewell resisted the temptation to open up the cabinet to play with the little Dutch boy and girl, the pair of geese, the mule and the cactus. And, as happened every time she peeked inside, she was overcome by a drowsiness so powerful, it was all she could do to resist curling up on Rocco's bed.

"Is the sun over the yardarm yet, Jewell?" Rocco called from the front room. He'd been in the Navy during the war. Best time of my life, he told Jewell more than once.

"Just about," she shouted back.

"Will you join me?"

Jewell looked down at the familiar amber bottle in her hand, she traced its black, well-remembered, scrolly lettering with her finger. Jack Daniel's. Her mother's favorite.

"Sure," she called from the kitchen, filling two jelly glasses with ice. Drinking with clients was strictly forbidden, of course. "Can't have you drinking alone. 'Specially not today."

Cracking open the Tennessee whiskey, she inhaled her childhood's Friday nights, fraught nights when her mother "kicked back." Before Jewell got smart and holed up in her room, she'd sat beside her mother on the horsehair couch pretending she'd never heard the breathless stories from her mother's graced childhood and when, after the second or third drink, her mother reckoned the countless ways Jewell failed to measure up, she pretended not to care.

"I'm reading," Jewell learned to call when summoned. "I'm right at a really

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good part.”

Thank you, Jesus; her mother would leave her alone.

*My mother drank alone.*

Clink, clink, clink clink, the ice rattled against the glasses as Jewell, still in her Jack Daniel’s reverie, walked slowly towards the front room. Just as she entered, the sun, nearly at the horizon, broke through the cloud cover and the tiny, frumpy room was briefly bathed in a forgiving, golden light. Rocco and Jewell ceremoniously sipped their drinks and after a while, Jewell flipped the radio on. Ella Fitzgerald’s girlish voice piped, “*You’re the top/You’re the tower of Pisa*—” Rocco grinned, the sun set, the room darkened.

“Time to get to work. I gotta vacuum in here, mop the kitchen floor, you know. Clean your bathroom?” Jewell snapped on the wrought iron floor lamp beside the card table. “The cat box?”

“Let ‘em go today. Everything’s just gonna get dirty again, anyway. Just sit with me a while longer, will ya?”

“Sure.”

“You know what I like about you, Jewell?” he said after a while.

“My warm personality? My wit? My charm?”

“Shut up, will ya? No, I’ll tell ya. What I like is how I can sit here with you and not say a word and that’s okay in your book. I like that. Marie, now, God rest her soul, she always had to be talkin’. *We* had to be talkin’. Ya know what I mean? Sometimes there ain’t nothin’ to say.”

Jewell pictured Marie sitting in the kitchen in front of her breakfront, lonely and seething, while Rocco happily worked on a jigsaw puzzle. “—*But if, baby, I’m the bottom, you’re the top!*”

“Don’t get me wrong, I miss her. Sure. Think about her. Talk to her, even. Ain’t that somethin’? I can just hear her: ‘All my life I wait for ya to sit down and talk to me for once and now, now when I’m gone, now you wanna talk!’” Rocco chuckled; it was a nice sound.

After a few more silent minutes, Rocco glanced towards the front window as if to make sure no one was standing on the porch taking notes. “You know what tomorrow is?” he whispered.

“Yeah,” she whispered. “Wednesday. March twelfth. Why are we whispering?”

“The name Teddy Deegan mean anything to you?” he murmured.

She made a stab at it: “He plays for the Red Sox?”

“No!” Rocco pounded his fist on the table sending pieces to the floor.

Jewell’s stricken expression as she stooped to pick up the pieces brought him up short.

Moron, he told himself. She don’t know nothin’. Keep it that way.

It was hard, very hard, for Rocco to admit that his homemaker’s brief, twice a week visits were pretty much the highlight of his week. It was hard, very hard for Rocco to admit that this lovely young woman with the soft, soothing voice only showed up because she was paid to do so. That she didn’t love the Red Sox?

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That was hard, too.

"Not important," he decreed.

"Fine." Quietly sipping, neither said anything for a while.

The banjo clock in the hallway chimed six times. Jewell let a few more minutes pass and then: "I gotta get going, Rocco. Anything you need before I go? Want me to fix you something to eat?"

"Nah. I'll be all right. Got Meals On Wheels. And Donna was here," he reminded her, inwardly chuckling. Since Jewell became his homemaker, he noticed, his daughter dropped off not only puzzles but clear-wrapped plates to be heated in the microwave.

On cue, his cat strolled through the French doors from the adjoining room, formerly the dining room, now Rocco's bedroom. The grey tiger tabby hopped onto his lap; Rocco absently stroked her head: "Cara, Cara, who's a good cat?" he whispered. Cara knew the answer. Her owner stared at his puzzle.

Jewell stood; she was a little tipsy from drinking on an empty stomach. "Listin' to starboard, Jewell," Rocco grinned at her. "You be careful out there." And he moved the wheelchair ever so slightly in the direction of his waiting puzzle to let her know she'd been dismissed.

Jewell retrieved her hat and coat from his bed. Stupidly, compulsively, she brushed off cat hairs again and again and stared at the large, framed photograph on his dresser of Rocco and Marie on their wedding day; he in his Navy uniform, his cap at a jaunty angle; Marie in a large, brimmed, gauzy, forties hat.

Slowly she buttoned her coat, carefully wound her scarf about her neck to steel herself against the impending cold. And she thought about Marie's hat, about the young, pretty woman staring out at her, Marie's smooth, open face pressed eternally against Rocco's cocky mug, about wartime weddings, about The War and Hitler and Pearl Harbor. Rosie the Riveter. Women in big hats and bright red lipstick, men in uniforms. Children sticking little colored flags onto maps of Europe. About fear and rationing and terrifying headlines. And she was convinced she understood everything that happened on Rocco and Marie's wedding day: She knew what they'd felt as they dressed that morning, how the priest hurried through the ceremony; she knew what their parents and friends whispered to them at the tiny, cramped, smoky reception, the jostling, uniform-filled crowds at South Station, the young couple's relief to find a seat on a train bound for Newport News, their stilted we-are-man-and-wife conversation in that packed Pullman car as it coursed through the night.

Jewell went back into the front room and planted a big, smacking kiss on Rocco's big, bald head.

"What's that for?" he grumbled, not looking up.

" 'Cause I felt like it," she told him. "See ya Thursday."

What was left of the melting snow had turned to ice, and the sidewalks were now sleek and scary. Jack Daniel's gave Jewell an odd and unexpected equilibrium not possible when sober, however, so she negotiated the treacherous sidewalks with ease. Humming, she cruised down College Avenue, the beginnings of a headache just pressing against her temples.

And then, as sometimes happens in Somerville, there was one of those sudden lulls in the traffic when everything became quiet, the snow blanketing what-



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ever sound might be coming from Davis Square. Jewell felt the earth beneath her, beneath all that damned ice. Whole and alive, the earth breathed in rhythm with her own hot breath against her scarf.

As she rounded the curve toward the Square, she saw a large crowd gathered on the sidewalk in front of a tan granite church. Jewell stepped out onto the street to get past them.

“Need a boyfriend?” inquired one hunched-over creature, a lit cigarette cupped in his ungloved hand.

“All set, thanks,” she replied, picking up speed.

“Jewell?” a voice from the crowd questioned.

She stopped. No mistaking that pathetic, please-feel-sorry-for-me tone. It was Rose.

From Esperanza Place.

“Hey, Rose. How ya doin’?” Jewell asked. Pointlessly. Even by streetlight Jewell could see for herself. Rose was wearing a thin, purple windbreaker, much too small, the sleeves’ elastic bands cutting into her fleshy arms a good four inches above her wrists, her belly filling the jacket as though about ready to deliver. Hatless, her bleached hair sat on her head like straw. Rose had no teeth.

“Forgot to put them in,” she explained to Jewell, noticing her stare. “I’m waiting for the dinner,” she continued, nodding her head in the direction of the church. “Every Tuesday night.” Her voice was slurred but she didn’t appear drunk. The crowd began to move.

“Whyncha come?” she asked as she reestablished her place in the line.

“Okay. Sure. Why not.” Suddenly ravenous, Jewell stepped back onto the sidewalk.

The two women followed the others up Chapel Street and into the church’s side entrance. Jewell suddenly smelled something once-familiar: Protestant church. It’s the smell of candles and carnations, furniture polish, old-lady perfume, and in *this* Methodist church, an overlay of garlicky spaghetti sauce.

The church basement looked like every other church basement, maybe a little larger than most, with a small stage at one end, rows of long, brown tables, dark, heavily shellacked wainscoting, and a wooden door with a little round window that swung onto a steamy kitchen. Good church ladies stood behind the serving table in their no-nonsense aprons and murmured a greeting to each and every dinner guest: “Hello—nice to see ya—glad you could make it—hello—nice-to see ya—glad—”

Standing behind the good ladies Jewell recognized none other than The Italian Stallion, the Somerville cop whose “nice buns” Nadine—another Esperanza Place guest—once admired. Those famous buns presently rested against the wall; the cop stared straight ahead.

“Yeah, I’m bored,” he silently communicated. “But don’t try anything.”

Fifteen or twenty people, mostly men, piled their paper plates with pasta, thick, maroon sauce, oily salad, garlic bread. After loading up, most spread themselves out in the far corners of the large room and crouched over their food.

Rose and Jewell found an empty table and seated themselves across from one another. Jewell, who, after a couple of starchy mouthfuls was no longer hungry,

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watched Rose gum her food for a while.

"So, what have you been up to?" Jewell asked.

"Day treatment."

"You like it?"

"It's okay."

"What do you *do*?"

"Nothin' much."

Jewell waited. Surely Rose could say more. But Jewell was wrong. She decided to take charge of the conversation:

"You seem—I don't know, different, I guess. What's different about you?"

"The meds, prolly." Rose replied. "I been havin', you know, like flashbacks? From all the abuse?"

Jewell sighed. Her shrinks had pestered her about flashbacks. Which, thank you, Jesus, had happened only once or twice, she'd assured them. Years ago. Ancient history.

"They put me on—" Rose began an animated explanation of each and every pill she took, how many milligrams, what each one was for, the side effects—which were considerable, apparently—and how attractive her doctor was. "He's Cuban," she leered.

Jewell grinned lasciviously as if she, too, had been treated by a sexy Cuban doctor. Several, perhaps. What in the world will I ask next, she wondered. The promised headache arrived full force.

So she simply watched Rose's shaking hand bring a plastic cup to her lips, listened to her slurp her apple juice.

I've fallen down a deep, dark hole, Jewell realized. But then, suddenly, Rose's face brightened and with a toothless grin, beamed at someone standing behind her dinner companion.

"Sit by me," Rose commanded to a skinny, pock-faced kid with a greasy mullet and a ratlike face. "This is Jerry," Rose beamed. "My fiancé." Rose extended her shaking left hand toward Jewell; on her fourth finger was a gold-colored claddagh ring.

"Very nice," Jewell managed.

"Why you so late?" Rose asked as Jerry took his seat beside her.

"Lookin' for that comet," he answered. "That Hayley Boop."

"Think it's gonna hit us?" Jewell teased.

"Could," he replied.

Rose whimpered.

"I was just kiddin'," he assured her, patting her on the back, then began eating as if starved and, judging from his general appearance, that was very likely the case.

"So, Jerry," Jewell began. "Where do you hail from?"

I sound like my damned mother.

"Hail from?"

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"Where do you live?"

"With Rose!" He had a butter smear on his face. "I usta live with my mother. In Everett. She's sick." And he smiled at his fiancée, nervously staring at the basement ceiling.

"Oh?"

"Cancer," Jerry explained, his mouth full.

The deep, dark hole just got deeper. Jewell looked around the now-filled hall. Was The Italian Stallion staring at her?

"So how did you two meet?"

"Here!" They answered in unison. Thank God they didn't say day treatment. Yes. The cop was definitely looking her way.

"How nice."

A cop? Could she date a cop? What would Lily say?

"Jerry? Would you mind getting me some more bread?" And Jewell practically batted her eyes at Rose's fiancé.

"Yeah, sure," he grunted and grudgingly got up.

"Rose," Jewell hissed the moment he was out of earshot. "What's the matter with you?"

Rose looked at her in that hangdog, toothless way of hers, and for a brief moment, Jewell was tempted not to start down the road she'd embarked upon. But something compelled her to keep on going. "He's young enough to be your son, for crissakes! Can't you see what he's doing? You've got your Section 8. He doesn't. He's using you to get away from his dying mother!" Jewell spotted Jerry approaching their table. "I just don't want to see you get hurt," she finished just before Rose's fiancé sat down.

"Here's your bread," he said, tossing a greasy piece at Jewell. He'd carried it in his hand; his fingernails were disgusting.

"I know youse was talkin' about me," he announced. Rose and Jewell looked down at their paper plates.

"I said, I *know* youse was talkin' about me," he shouted. The shelter pair still wouldn't look up.

In a heartbeat, the cop loomed over the table: "Any trouble here?" Slowly, methodically, Stallion stared at each of them one by one. Jewell could see in the man's cold, cold eyes that he *knew* something was off, something was weird about her. For the briefest of moments, Jewell longed to explain herself, to justify her presence in this grungy church basement, to distance herself from these two losers.

So it was Jewell who spoke in her most rational, calm, voice. "It's nothing," she said. "We're fine. Right?" she asked her dinner companions. They nodded. Jewell threw the cop one of her million-dollar smiles.

"Been drinkin' huh?" he observed.

"So? There's no law against that, is there?"

"I think you'd better leave before there's any more trouble."

"You're kidding me!" she sputtered.

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"Now!" the cop shouted. "I said—"

"Fine, fine, I'm out of here," Jewell leapt up and grabbed her coat. See you, Rose." She nodded at Jerry. All the diners stared at her as she walked past their tables with as much dignity as she could muster.

I will not cry I will not cry I will not cry.

Outside, a group of men huddled by the church doors smoking, shifting their weight from one foot to the other in the cold. Jewell pushed past them.

"Hey, Red," one started.

"Fuck you!"

Sobbing, she walked slowly down College Avenue, her head hung low. Suddenly a moving shadow on her path stopped. There was an intake of air, then: "It's you!" She looked up to see a young, bespectacled man before her, his face radiant.

"In your dreams," she snarled. Jewell tried to cross the street but heavy traffic pinned her to the sidewalk.

"No, wait! I remember you," the young man's words rushed on. "You live on Brattle Street, right?" She waited for a break in the cars so she could dash across the street.

Maybe I'll just—

"At least you did in January," he added like a little kid recalling the words to a hard-to-memorize poem. "Am I right?"

"Please just leave me alone."

Right after this next car—

"Hear me out, okay?" His eyes behind black-rimmed spectacles entreated. "A big, black dude passed out in your back yard and you called us. In January, it was. Me and my partner, we call you 'The Angel'."

She noted the present tense.

"Only in galoshes." And he looked at her hopefully. Even-featured, with dark, thick, slicked-back hair and a clear, olive complexion, dark eyes fringed with noticeable lashes, he had the neck and shoulders of someone who works out regularly.

She imagined that January scene the way this earnest kid might have seen it: The dark night, the softly falling snow, Lily's back yard illuminated by her carriage house spotlight, herself in a long, lace-trimmed ivory nightgown, her flame-colored hair streaming over her shoulders, the tender way she had crouched over the homeless man passed out in the back yard, and Lily, in her saggy plaid robe, standing in the kitchen door shouting "Is he all right? Should I make coffee?"

"You'd left your soda cans out, again, didn't you?" Lily accused her later. "Your redeemables. That's why that man was in our back yard. So he could—"

"No, I didn't!" Jewell had lied.

"Yeah," Jewell admitted now. "That was me. But don't get the wrong idea. It's not my yard. I'm just staying there. I—" Wiping away some still-brimming tears with the back of her hand, Jewell introduced herself.

"My name's Greg." He tilted his head towards the lights of Davis Square. Without discussing their itinerary, Jewell and the young man silently walked

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towards the T.

Like returning to a childhood haunt years later to find that hallowed place so much smaller but no less magical, so Greg discovered that this Jewell, this gem walking beside him, was not a young woman. Streetlight revealed a trim, compact woman in her mid-to-late thirties, who carried herself as if tall—he'd remembered her much taller—but who, in fact, was an inch or two shorter than his shoulder. Her corkscrew, amber hair, unrestrained despite her tight-fitting cap, was of a shade far deeper and more burnished than he'd remembered. But her eyes, yes, how could he ever forget her eyes, dark-lashed emerald eyes that had so steadily held his gaze that snowy night? Sagacious eyes, which, he now understood, had witnessed so much more of life, hard life, than he'd reckoned. He'd remembered freckles, for surely such opalescent skin meant freckles? But, no. And, he just now saw, her nostrils, slightly flared, were of different sizes. How had he not noticed this charming defect?

"You all right?" he asked.

"You gonna give me CPR?" Now her fuck-you tone became a game for Jewell, a game which, in thirty-four years, she'd never played with a man. How long before he gave up, tossed his cards and game pieces back into their box?

"If you need it," he answered simply.

At his artless reply, Jewell wanted to abandon her game. An amazing warmth soothed her belly as if she had been wearing too-tight jeans and just shed them. At the same time, however, she couldn't stop crying.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't want to talk about it." Passing the West Branch library, Jewell noted that the raspberry bushes along the fence were still there, a large patch of snow shadowed below them. And she remembered a summer evening not that many years ago when she had made a meal of those berries and counted herself lucky.

She was close enough to him now to discover he wore that same after-shave she'd been smelling all over town. And the too-sweet smell of fabric softener.

Some woman does his laundry. His mother, I'm guessing.

"You want to go get coffee?" he asked.

"I wouldn't be very good company."

"Yeah," he said, looking at her teary face. "I can see that, actually. Dumb idea."

His contrition *almost* made Jewell want to let him off easy: "I need to get home. I have to study," she could say truthfully. Instead, intrigued by this game she'd begun, she shrugged.

Years later, neither Greg nor Jewell would recall this gravid, well-lit moment. For how could they have known that right there and then, on a patch of icy sidewalk in front of Store 24, lottery and cigarette customers forced to walk around them, College Avenue traffic stilled at a light, they'd *both* decided to play-act? Still not quite believing his good luck and already besotted, Greg determined that keeping his distance from this angel in galoshes the best strategy. For hadn't a former girlfriend—and he was not quite over the tasty Kim Oliveira—scolded the twenty-two-year-old, "You're all over me! Don't crowd!?" An older, experienced, perhaps world-weary woman like Jewell would prefer coolness to an over-eager puppy dog, he decided there and then.

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“Look,” he said, “why don’t I make this easy?” And he reached into his back pocket, pulled out his wallet, took out one of those yellow, customer-copy credit card receipts. “You got a pen?”

She did. He wrote something. “Here’s my name and phone number. If you want, give me a call,” he said, handing the slip of paper to her. Jewell took the slip without reading it and stuffed it into her backpack. They walked in silence to the T station, then said goodbye.

On the Red Line, comfortably seated for once, Jewell pulled out the yellow paper; it was from a gas station on Beacon Street. His full name, she discovered, was Greg Lang. She studied his penmanship: The lower-case letters were small, careful, straight up and down and completely legible. The G and the L, however, were considerably larger than the other letters and swirled and curved dramatically.

You’re a baby, Greg Lang, she decided, tossing the yellow slip into a Harvard Square trash can.

### A Brief Biography

**PATRICIA WILD**’s full-time writing career began in 1998 when her novel, *Swimming In It*, was published by Flower Valley Press, Gaithersburg, MD. For many years, she had taught adult learners at the Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences; *Swimming In it* is based on the stories her homeless students had told her.

Nine years ago, she began to wonder: whatever happened to the two African Americans who desegregated her high school—in Lynchburg, Virginia—in 1962? That question became a quest; *Way Opens: A Spiritual Journey*, published by Warwick Press in 2008, tracks that journey. Her web-based companion to *Way Opens*, [www.tiljusticerolls.com](http://www.tiljusticerolls.com), tells the story of Lynchburg, Virginia’s civil rights movement.

A former bi-monthly columnist for *The Somerville Journal*, currently she posts blogs on her website, [www.Patriciawild.net](http://www.Patriciawild.net). Wild’s short stories have appeared in *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Out of the Blue Writers Unite: An Anthology* and *Peeks and Valleys: A New England Fiction Journal*. Her poetry has been published in P&Q Press and the Ibbetson Street Press.

A member of Friends Meeting at Cambridge (Quaker), Patricia lives with her husband in Somerville, Massachusetts.

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