

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/3

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Prodigal

Father is watching Mirko eat. He has polished off two servings of liver dumpling soup and is now on a second plate of sauerbraten with dumpling and sauerkraut. His hands are shaking. When he rang the bell at Father's, he was ready with an apology, expected Father to grumble, but Father, wiping the sleep from his eyes and yawning, gave him one look and pulled him into a bear hug. Mirko bit his lip to stop from bawling.

"You look like shit," Father growled but his voice was gravelly. "Let me throw a shirt on, put a comb through my hair. No food in the house but you know that. We'll go to the railway cafeteria, main courses served there 24/7. How many days since you've eaten?" Mirko looked away without answering. "That's what running from everything all -," Father starts.

The smells of boiled meat, burnt onion, soot from the tracks mingle with those of unwashed travellers and the homeless who sit in the warmth for hours clutching a tea, catching a few winks. Mirko is beginning to fill up but now his eyes are closing.

"Palacinka?" Father offers, motioning to the crepe maker pouring batter on the griddle, flipping, covering with jam. Mirko loves them and normally cannot resist, now he only wants a bed. "Let me just grab a morning paper and we'll get you home," Father says. Mirko nods off, wakes with a start. Father has the paper open but Mirko's eyes are caught by a headline. He leans in to read "*Blue Dream Restaurant Fire an Accident. The Fire Marshalls have determined a cigarette was the cause of the recent...*" They'll stop blaming him now. Mirko exhales. He puts his head down on the table and weeps.