

## Wilderness House Literary Review 6/2

*Matt Potter*  
**Old haggis**

**“YOU SMELL LIKE OLD HAGGIS,** Dougal,” he said, inserting the needle. I watched the vial fill with my dark blood. It made me think of colour swatches and shopping for just the right red tartan with my mother in an Edinburgh kilt shop.

“Thank you,” I said. “I’ve been eating it a lot lately.”

Odd, for at the time I was extremely yellow and not remotely haggis-like. But then, it was Berlin and the vagaries of the German health system were still largely unexplained to me.

“Herr Doktor Krumme,” I said. “It’s great that you do this every day. I would be lost without you.”

He smiled as he withdrew the needle, replacing it with a cotton ball and some gentle pressure. Such service – other patients had to make do with nurses, but every day Doktor Krumme took my blood himself.

“And every day your liver count becomes a little less high.” He smiled, gently pressing a plaster into the crook of my elbow.

“Well, I always like a good project,” I said. I got up out of the chair and running the grim glare of Frau Renntner as she sentried behind the reception desk, walked to my tent in the waiting room.

I tried to like Frau Renntner. But her hostile stare and indiscriminate caber-tossing of my medical file into the compactus when Doktor Krumme wasn’t looking, left little doubt in my mind about her lack of empathy.

Even when I offered her a slice of the Highland game pie I’d cooked from scratch on the camp stove beside her workstation, Frau Renntner still gave me the cold shoulder.

Lucky Doktor Krumme was so professional with his care.

I sat inside the entrance to my tent while other patients sitting in the waiting room read magazines or kept watch out of the corner of their eye. And as I tried to decide what to make for dinner that evening, flicking through the ‘Recovering from Hepatitis A’ cookbook – complete with legible inscription inside the front cover from Doktor Krumme himself – Doktor Krumme crouched beside me on the floor.

“Dougal,” he said. “I think it will be better if I sleep here at night with you in this tent.”

“Is there a problem with Security?” I asked. “Because I can learn to operate the alarm system. They don’t have to be bothered every time I need the toilet.”

Doktor Krumme smiled and patted my knee. “It will give us a time to

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get to know each other better.” He squeezed my shoulder. “And you can cook for me on your camp stove your world-famous Scottish shortbread.”

I looked into Doktor Krumme’s face and saw more than just the Hippocratic oath: I saw love. So I guessed that night was as good a time as any to tell him I was faking my liver count too.