

Sweet Sounds of Home

by Andrew Stancek

Mirko opens the window wide to air the place out and hears the shattering glass and Father's swearing. He runs out without even putting his shoes on, kneels next to Father, pulls his arm, grunts. Mirko offered to do the shopping but Father said he'd been cooped up too long in the back-breaking cold snap and he'd rather have Mirko wash up in the kitchen. Just a few necessities is what he'd get: rum, hard rolls, eggs, bottle of milk. The broken bottle is the milk. Father makes sure the rum is safe, and still down, on his ass, he unscrews the top and takes a slug, and then a second one. Mirko is trying to drag him upright; Father is cursing, "Jezismaria, jezismaria, it's broken; it's broken damn it, I can't." Mirko lets go; Father sinks down, still holding the sacred bottle, takes another swig. He puts his head down on the ice, exhales. Mirko feels like crying, laughs instead.

"I'm hurt, for Christ's sake. What the hell is funny?" Father starts, but then looks at the shards, the rolls and egg yolks in the dirty snow, the bottle in his hand and laughs, too. "Shit, that leg hurts. I'm sure I shouldn't be moving it. Go in, call an ambulance. I'll have to get moved by pros."

A week later Father is in his own bed, leg in a cast, hoisted up in a contraption Mirko and Mr. Dudak made after Father announced to the examining doctor following a single night in the hospital that he'll shoot everyone in the place, first the chattering nurses and then himself. Mirko is in charge of the bedpan and bringing Father food. He feels he'll need to take a pillow and hold it over Father's face for about ten minutes, just to be sure.

"You got a job yet?" Father asks every morning. "When I was your age I sure had to work. Not like you young ones these days. Soft. Everyone's gone soft."

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Mirko puts the radio on full blast in the kitchen, hears the announcer say it is the seventh consecutive day of record cold temperatures. Can't go live outdoors yet. "What the hell are you doing in that kitchen?" Father's voice booms. "You waiting for chicks to hatch? You gotta break the eggs in the pan, then bring them to me." Mirko tests the sharpness of the butcher knife.

