

Neatly Creased Newspapers

by Foster Trecost

A sharp line separated her lips, like something sketched with a pencil. Same with the eyes, closed but not quite, slit-windows to the world. Maybe she took in her surroundings, but I don't think she did.

Tables strewn about the sidewalk resembled an obstacle course. Rain had run most everyone away, but the rain had stopped and I sat outside. A few tables down, she sat outside, too. People paraded past clutching closed umbrellas like lances, ready to impale anyone in their way, but she paid them no mind. She had made herself alone; I wasn't there, nor was anyone else.

Beneath her coffee cup was a newspaper, laying flat like a placemat. I was unsure why she would withdraw from the world, yet buy something designed to pull her back in. Then I realized the paper had not been opened. Maybe she had been seduced by a headline and bought it on impulse. Maybe it had been left there by someone else.

An associate joined me and followed my gaze. "My God," he said. "I've never seen anyone so sad."

I turned to him with a quick and disapproving glare. When I turned back, she was standing, and then walked on. I watched her until the crowd closed in, until I was no longer sure which one she was. On the table her coffee cup sat atop a newspaper, still neatly creased, still unread.

"On the contrary," I said. "She just might be the happiest person I've ever seen."

