

Where They Have to Take You In

by Andrew Stancek

“Why in the name of all that is holy....” Mirko wakes to his stepfather's yelling voice, cut off by his mother's soothing one. The scream is related to him, Mirko knows, even if he is unaware of the transgression.

“Two days in your old room, a chance to tell us about living at your father's, we'll catch up,” Mother said. At Saturday dinner the Beethoven is so loud the chandelier shakes and Mother keeps grinning. Drying dishes afterwards, Mirko drops the crystal whisky tumbler, giving himself a deep gash on the foot.

“Bloody hell...,” his stepfather starts before Mother's look and Mirko can almost hear the counting to a hundred before he continues, “Plenty more where that came from. Let's look after that cut.” Mirko allows Mother to bathe the wound with iodine and bandage it.

He looks around the bedroom stacked now with boxes of sheet music, a bass in the corner, two violins, a cello, batons on the dresser. His eyes finally find the clock. Not quite six. Sunday morning beginning with a bang. Accused, found wanting, sentenced.

At Father's the bed is lumpy and his stomach usually empty.

He turns over, hoping he might sleep again. Minutes later he splashes cold water on his face, puts a note on the kitchen table. “Thanks for having me.” He makes sure the door does not bang behind him.

