Colors of the Last Bright Morning

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

I am a housekeeper at a private women's college in upstate New York. I live in a basement apartment with high, narrow windows. There's a small stove for me to cook my meals and I knit and write poetry in my spare time.

I grew up in Poland. We left Lodz before dawn on September 10, 1939. My father sent a car for us that rattled over narrow roads to a hill farm sixty miles away, a cheerful place, safe from the city terror.

Upon arrival I run here and there thrilled to find trees bending low with apples; purple and lavender flowers; butterflies more beautiful than stained glass. Animals peer at me from inside their barn.

The house is white and fat and square. Tiny pink roses bloom up the wall beside the door. In the kitchen pitchers and dishes with hooks or knobs hang across a window, flashing their yellows and blues like the last bright morning.

"Look!" I say and run to a basket of vegetables on a big wooden table, pale turnips and potatoes still damp from the ground. Brown sausages loop over pegs in a cupboard.

"This is all for us? All ours?" My father's in his state police uniform, plain blue now, the white eagle gone. All grey, my mother stands beside him. She is smiling, but not enough.

"Yes, all for you," my father says. When he reaches for me, his fingers outstretched, I see the red blood under his nails.

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