# The Poet

*by* Linda Simoni-Wastila

She sits there primly, quietly, a smile playing on her face. The smile is an almost permanent one, lips sloping upward at the corners. Not a grin or leer, not a false beam showing too many perfectly tended teeth. I imagine if you were the minister and woke in the morning, her sleeping beside you, the laugh lines holding her smile in place would crease into gentler canyons.

But back to the wife. She sits in the front pew, always, in the seat closest to the wall, settling in three minutes before service. I use her entrance as a clock for when to deposit the coffee cup, finish the conversation, and scan the sanctuary for my seat. I often choose the empty space beside someone new, someone of the female persuasion, for there is something quite delicious about the air between people strange to each other, something that makes my skin crackle alive with the possibility of touch. During the service hands brush against the other in opening the shared hymnal, when passing the offering basket. After the benediction, the smiles, the exchange of names. I mention I am a poet. She smiles - how romantic! — and the lure is set.

But today I sit three-quarters back on the other side of the room, the view to the front unobstructed. The minister strides past, black robes swooshing. All rise at the organ's stridency. Before sitting she always touches her husband — his hand, his shoulder, the back of his neck. I almost imagine the feel of those dry, manicured fingers. Today is not different. After that caress he smiles and stands before us. She smoothes her skirt around her knees, shushing the children. A paragon of virtue: her daughters clean and polite, her words kind, her potlucks impeccable. The prelude begins.

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