

In the alley

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [September 17, 2014](#) issue

Here's a story. My first job, at fifteen, was in a bakery,
Cleaning the vast foul pots and kettles and baking pans
At night, for hours, alone, with horrifying chemicals, &
Finally locking the shop and trudging home in the dark.
I hated it from the first hour but I couldn't quit instantly
Because I was afraid to be teased and be mortified. This
Went on a week. The back door to the bakery was in an
Alley that looked like a good place to get shot. One day
As I shuffled sadly down the alley I saw a slumped man
Sitting by the back door, smoking. I didn't know him &
Figured I was about to get rolled. I was sort of relieved,
To be honest, because then I'd have a decent excuse for
Quitting. But when I got there the man stood up, and he
Said boy, I run the shop next door, and I see you in here
Working, and I bet you have not eaten, and that's awful
Hard work, I know how that guy leaves his kitchenware,
So here's a sandwich. Now, it's not from *me* exactly but
From my wife who has a real sharp eye. So there you go.
I quit a few days later, and at my dad's instruction I quit
Face to face with the baker, who was furious, and it was
No fun at all, but then I went and said thanks to the lady.
Even now sometimes I see that man smoking in the alley,
And standing up, and being kind to a kid he didn't know.
Even now I'll be walking along and suddenly there he is,
Waiting to be kind. We think we are alone but we aren't.