

## Gover Prize Finalist

### Homeless with Dad

by Annie Dawid

Davis isn't bad. Nice parks, and everyone rides bikes here. Dad keeps promising he'll find me a used one, but no luck so far. I miss the trees in Oregon though; it's too hot, and the people aren't as nice as they were in Portland. Plus it's hard getting used to a new name: Nicole. I wish he hadn't given me Mama's name. But at least he lets me go to school. Of course I had to start bleeding on my first day; what a drag to live in a tent and have your period! Plus I don't like the smell of it. Dad says he can't smell anything, and that I'm being hypersensitive, just like Mama. We got a letter from her, or from an aide who said she was writing what Mama dictated. I'll write some of it here. With Dad always tossing everything, we never hang onto her letters, and I don't know how long I'll be able to hide this journal from him.

*Laurel, we named you that because you were my prize after so many miscarriages. I used to call you my little leaf: petite feuille. God had something in mind for you because He let you live. My job was to give birth to you, and your father's is to raise you up. I was depressed when I was pregnant and depressed afterwards. I couldn't be a mother to you—not a mother you'd want to have. I wasn't safe. For all these years I've been mad at your dad, but I*

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*know he did the right thing by taking you away. Forgive me. Nicole.*

I'm going to write her back and tell her to stop asking me to forgive her. Dad says she's sick, like a person with diabetes, and we need to love her and pray for her. It's weird to forgive someone you can hardly remember, and I'm never exactly sure just what she wants to be forgiven for. Did she do some horrible thing to me when I was a baby? Dad won't tell me anything. I wonder why we never go back to Maine, not even to visit, and if she ever wants to see me; she never says she does. Dad tells me I should be grateful to have one loving parent, plus another one at a distance, because some kids don't have anyone, anywhere, to love them. He's probably right, but still, it's hard to share his optimism anymore, his faith that everything works out how it's supposed to, for the best. Sometimes I'm sick of this life we have, me and Dad. Sometimes I want to run away.

**Annie Dawid's** third book, *And Darkness was Under His Feet*, won the Litchfield Review Award for Short Fiction, and her flash fiction, "Nitza Kosher Pizza," won the 2012 Orlando Award.