

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.