## Writing Raw

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## **Watering Hole**

By Iris N. Schwartz

On their first date Marcus met Naomi with spindly purple flowers. He called her "zaftig in a very appealing way."

What was left of his hair was chestnut brown. His eyes were lake blue, his cheeks, pink.

By way of explaining his faux pas, Marcus said, "They tell me at my favorite watering hole that I can be a jackass. I mean, sometimes I offer opinions before being fully informed."

Naomi said, "You mean, sometimes you're a jackass?"

She told him she was kidding, and Marcus took her hand as she reached for her water.

Naomi felt a shock as their fingers touched, and audibly gasped.

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He put up bookshelves for her, and a small, free-standing CD tower. He grappled with screwdrivers and nails, sweated. Naomi felt a jolt in her nether region as she watched Marcus, shirtless, work with tools and wood. Somehow she managed to keep from kissing his naked head before he finished.

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Marcus hung his head sheepishly as he told her of getting drunk—after work—at his favorite watering hole. He ordered a round for his friends, then another. He spent too much money that night, and didn't have a credit card with him, so he couldn't take a taxi home.

At three in the morning on a Tuesday, Marcus, Jello-legged, walked the streets of downtown Brooklyn. He said he must have made an irresistible target. Two men told him to give them his wallet. He hesitated, tried to explain he had little money. One of the muggers grabbed Marcus's wallet, took the remaining five-dollar-bill, and tossed the wallet to the ground. He stomped on it, screamed at Marcus. Man number two asked Marcus to give them

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his ring and watch.

"They were gifts, Naomi, from my grandfather," Marcus explained. "I tried to reason with them."

This was why, when she met him at the movie theater on Saturday night, his right eyelid and surrounding tissue were varying shades of mauve and yellow. This is why he held his side when he laughed during the film.

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"Why do you want to go out with me?" Marcus asked her more than once.

Couldn't he see what she saw? An intelligent, articulate, generous man, sexy, humble as hell.

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When Naomi stayed over at his tastefully furnished apartment, he didn't offer her coffee or dessert. They had already eaten dinner, so she chalked it up to that. Or to the immense bulge in his pants that she felt when he kissed her.

The next morning, as Marcus snored quietly, Naomi put on his shirt and walked to the kitchen. She would surprise him with breakfast. Maybe challah French toast, strawberries, coffee. She opened the refrigerator door onto two bottles of Pinot Grigio. On the tiled floor, to the right of the fridge, was a carton of wine bottles. She opened two kitchen cabinets: no canned tuna, no soup, no dishes. Nothing.

Naomi returned to the bedroom, kissed him on his bald head, and retreated into the bathroom to shower and dress.

She was shaking as she closed the apartment door behind her.

The End

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**Iris N. Schwartz bio**: Iris N. Schwartz, a freelance editor based in New York City, writes fiction and poetry. She has work anthologized in such collections as An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind: Poets on 9/11; and Stirring Up a Storm: Tales of the Sensual, the Sexual, and the Erotic; and in such journals as Ducts, November 3rd Club, Pikeville Review, and Vernacular.

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