





Capes in the Wash

Carla Capizzi

“Our Hero has stopped a gang of robbers!... the gang was about to pull off their fourth robbery this September...”

Charlie skimmed the front page, indifferent. The close-up photo of a young man, tall, broad-shouldered, dressed in purple and green, irritated her.

“Daring chase... jeep stopped... trial.” She only read it superficially. She sighed. Always the same news. Always that hero.

“I bet he’s a show-off,” she muttered again.

Her very green eyes, tired and rimmed with dark circles, darted over the letters forming the sentences of the special edition.

The newspaper fell onto her knees, and she leaned her back against the wall of the coin laundry. In front of her, a dozen washing machine portholes spun endlessly, black and orange. The dull, uneven hum of the machines was oddly comforting. The day’s fatigue had hit her hard. Her eyelids struggled to stay open.

She caught a fleeting glimpse of two children running outside, along the street still bathed in the warm orange light of late afternoon. A little red nose pressed to the glass of the laundry, giggled, and pointed.

“Look at all the washing machines!” said another tiny voice. The little girl put her hands over her mouth, her eyes crinkling in a shy smile.

Charlie returned the smile; her hand moved involuntarily from right to left, touched, nostalgic.

The children waved goodbye and ran off. In a few seconds, their yellow and green coats were just tiny dots, crossing a sea of dry leaves. The damp street was covered with leaves. Everything was blue, yet looked orange. The sun was setting, and the wind lifted a few leaves. That five-knot wind—she had measured it that afternoon.

Some cars slid quickly down the street, heading north toward a cluster of distant skyscrapers. The traffic light switched regularly, green then red. A tick at every change. Leaves flew. Sometimes the wind caused it, sometimes the cars.

Charlie jumped. Her eyelids had closed completely and snapped open. The chime of the doorbell welcomed another customer, and a dark silhouette filled the glass.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you,” muttered the deep voice of a young man, embarrassed.

Still dazzled by the September sunlight, Charlie only shook her head and refocused on the newspaper’s front page.

“...our Hero...,” she barely whispered, shaping the words with her lips.

A thud distracted her, and her curly head lifted again, this time toward the visitor.

She paled at the sight of the purple-and-green suit, bright like highlighters. The little green boots, just barely covered by the hem of the purple cape. From the hem, a few stray threads stuck out; there were holes, and some mud stains.

Her intelligent eyes scanned up to the visitor’s broad back, covered by the cape. Higher up, there was no mud. But there was dust. And some dry leaves. And leaves had even settled in the visitor’s chestnut hair.

“Damn,” muttered the same deep voice. Another thud, a metallic clang, the clink of coins on the floor.

After a final glance, Charlie stubbornly stared at the photo of the man in the purple-and-green suit, green boots, and purple cape in the newspaper.

“What a klutz,” she snickered. Her dislike for the boastful hero began to fade.

The shadow of her seated figure stretched to blend with the hero’s, the neon lights of the laundry highlighting her presence, and the orange sunset slanted across the room. The clock struck seven.

In the laundry, the rolling of the portholes was now accompanied, turn by turn, by puffs, thuds, mutters, and metallic sounds of drawers opening and closing.

A few minutes passed.

“Excuse me,” the deep voice finally surrendered, “could you tell me how these... strange gadgets work?”

A cheerful laugh filled the air, drowning out all background noise.

The hero, turning to Charlie, furrowed his brow, and the seriousness in his eyes spread across his face. His thin lips pressed together, but his handsome face softened when the girl, smiling, approached and, with a quick movement, opened the detergent drawer.

“You just stopped a robbery, and you don’t know how to use a coin laundry?” Charlie laughed again, her voice high-pitched.

The hero muttered something, eyes fixed on that strange girl, dressed in purple, orange, and yellow. The colors blended with the green of her eyes, the brown of her hair, the pink of her phone, and the



burgundy of her boots. Colorful clothes, colorful voice, colorful pale face. The hero thought she lit up the room, so vibrant and beautiful at once. Only the torn skin on her fingers betrayed a hint of anxiety.

“Coins, please,” said Charlie, palm open toward the hero. A small shower of coins bounced onto her rosy hand. The blue bracelets jingled timidly.

A questioning expression spread across Charlie’s laughing face.

“But the clothes?”

“Oh... yes... I... have a backpack,” the hero’s thin lips barely uttered. His eyes wandered across the laundry, confused.

“And are the clothes to wash in there?”

“No, I need to wash the suit...”

“But you’re wearing it!”

“I have the clothes in the backpack...”

Her green eyes widened before a new, delighted laugh filled the laundry.

“And where are you going to change!?”

The hero scratched his temple, his face reddening.

Charlie waved her hand, shook her head, then pointed to a corner of the laundry.

“Change there! I’ll turn around and make sure no one comes in! But why didn’t you change earlier?” she added after a few seconds. She filled her gaze with the neon lights of the neighborhood shops, the tall lights of distant skyscrapers, the timid glow of the moon, the indigo twilight. Not a car in sight. The end-of-workday rush was over, and the view was already dull.

“I can’t find my apartment keys. I had the backpack with my change in the car, but I lost the keys,” his lingering tone hinted at the difficulty of removing the cape. Click. Finally, he took it off, letting it fall to the tiles. Then several thuds from boots and little hops as he took them off.

“And you had to wash the suit today of all days?”

“Didn’t you notice the mud?”

Charlie turned, and in front of her appeared a tall man in his thirties, wearing a flannel shirt, dark jeans, dusty leather shoes. Only the chestnut hair and gentle expression, despite his serious eyes, were the same.

The hero held out his arm, and Charlie grabbed a crumpled purple-and-green bundle, mostly muddy. Click. She opened a washer; the aluminum interior became purple and green. Clack, the door closed.

Tick. The black screen above the porthole turned bluish. Charlie pressed a few buttons. White letters appeared on the bluish screen: time, wash, degrees, spin, dryer, play. From a detergent bottle, a thick, fragrant, bluish liquid flowed. A longer tick. The porthole began to spin.

“And now?”

“Now wait 60 minutes: that’s the washing time!”

The hero looked up at the ceiling; the rolling portholes were drowned out by a long, sonorous puff. Longer and louder than the others.

“Here are the keys! They were in my pocket!” The hero slumped into a chair, frowning.

Another laugh filled the laundry.

“What a klutz!”

It wasn’t a long hour. A few jokes, the story of the robbery, a description of the aerodynamic suit—“ah, so that’s why he wears it all so ridiculous!”—the latest movie at the cinema, the loneliness of being a hero, the end of summer. The holidays, about which neither had much to say, since neither of them had taken any.

“A sweltering August in Boston! Lucky the friends who are married or financially well-off,” concluded Charlie. The duffel bag clip closed over the now-clean clothes; a scent of vanilla spread through the air, but she sat back next to the hero.

An hour later, they walked under the white light of street lamps, in late September twilight. Leaves crunched under their feet, a few more cars passed, hurried pedestrians ran home with last-minute groceries. Charlie talked about how complicated weather forecasts had been lately. Cyclones, anticyclones, and then new cyclones. A real disaster! She worked in one of the distant skyscrapers, in the meteorology tower.

They passed two blocks and entered a residential street. A row of tall apartments rose before them along the tree-lined sidewalk.

Charlie stopped on the steps of a red-brick apartment. She leaned on the railing, her face softening into a sad smile.

“Well, goodbye, and have a good evening, Mr. Hero!”

The same sad smile appeared on the hero’s lips. He scratched his well-shaven chin, his eyes scanning the street again to avoid getting lost in Charlie’s green eyes; his breath grew short.

“What a klutz...,” muttered Charlie, one boot already on the first step, her expression now frowning.

“Hey!” The deep, agitated voice stopped her. “I live in the next block... do you like Chinese food? There’s a nice place under my building...”

As the hero hoisted Charlie’s duffel bag onto his flannel shirt, vanilla and clean clothes spilling out, and led the way, in the quiet of the tree-lined avenue, Charlie convinced herself he was a truly good hero, a little clumsy, but genuinely a good guy.

“Anyway, I prefer to be called Pillo... I’m Pillo,” the hero—or Pillo—smiled, under a new shower of Charlie’s cheerful laughter.





Combat on a Velvet Plain

Salvatore Difalco

Far from chess in short.
But it goes on over there
where it matters more
than well-placed knights.

Spend a few moments
under lamplight imagining
the smoke and screams,
the stunning thunder.

Rubble not enough.
A need to squeeze
the blood from stones
supersedes morality.

We see it clearly as day
and yet deny it light.
But we are over here
forking our fucking knights.

Another Malnourished Question

Richard LeDue

Will these words still have a voice
after I'm gone,
or will they be an empty hall
starved for an echo
and forced to watch silence eat,
with its mouth open,
the same meal every day?





The Wife

Trina Das

The house was terribly still so early in the morning. Everything lay untouched from the night before: half-drunk coffees and unopened envelopes and balled-up socks. Lucy placed her feet carefully so as not to step on the boys' Hot Wheels cars; they had a habit of leaving them strewn across the floor like little landmines. Outside, the street lamps cast wide triangles of light onto falling rain. The neighbours' candy-coloured bulbs swayed wildly in the wind, blinking determinedly despite the storm. Water sloshed loudly through the gutters.

Lucy always woke first. Devoted to her appearance, she'd never skipped a day of her morning routine—not even while in labour. She started with skincare: cleanser, moisturizer, two separate toners, and a serum. Then, after all that, came hair and makeup. She never did much in terms of makeup but, then again, she never needed to. Just concealer and a bit of black shadow to supplement the eyeliner she'd gotten tattooed at 19, faded now into a ring of indigo.

She attributed the tattoo's short lifespan to her own sensitivity. In recent years, Lucy had become quite the crybaby. A bit of spilled formula was enough to send her into hysterics. Baby blues, her mother dismissed it as, but her sister Mary kept insisting that a doctor should be consulted. Lucy took Mary's opinions with a grain of salt though; ever since starting medical school, she'd been handing out diagnoses like they were nothing. Her and their other sister, Kate, hadn't spoken

since Thanksgiving, when Mary loudly pointed out Kate's clubbed fingers in the presence of her new boyfriend.

By 6:15, Lucy was in the kitchen making lunches. She cracked open a can of tuna, stifling a gag at the sight of fish chunks drenched in murky, yellow oil. Unfortunately, her boys had inherited their father's taste buds. She drained the tuna and began chopping; celery, onions, pickles, dill. Three sandwiches in total, one for each of the boys and one for Greg. She buttered Greg's bread half-heartedly.

By quarter to seven, Lucy had wrapped up the sandwiches and scrubbed her hands of the awful smell. She put on a pot of coffee and watched the rain thrum against the kitchen window, leaving whatever snow that remained on the ground dirty and dimpled.

Greg stumbled into the kitchen, rubbing his eyes. The stale smell of sleep lingered on his skin. He kissed Lucy's head, mumbled a greeting and, at her lack of response, said, "You're not still mad, are you?"

"No," she said, placing his coffee down in front of him just a bit too harshly for it to be convincing.

Last night, she had told Greg that Amelia would be needing a new set of socks soon. Greg said something to the effect of, "What does a baby need socks for? She can't even walk." When Lucy protested, he suggested she call one of her sisters and see if they could lend her any money.

Greg disregarded the coffee for a moment and pulled Lucy into his arms with the charming persistence of somebody much younger, holding her there until her stiffness dissolved. "Come on," he said affectionately. "Let's not fight over *socks*."

"She really does need new ones," Lucy protested.

"I'm sure we can find one of the boys' old pairs, can't we? Hell, I'll even dye them pink for you." He pulled away and smiled cautiously. "Alright?"

For all of Greg's faults, he had an endearing quality about him. Perhaps it was his good looks, or maybe just that she had no real alternative but to keep forgiving him. Whatever it was, Lucy found it difficult to stay upset at Greg long enough for anything to come out of it. "Alright," she relented.

Greg took a sip of his coffee and peered over her shoulder. "You're not making tuna sandwiches, are you? I'm sick of goddamn tuna."



gaius

airport

till one day it ends...

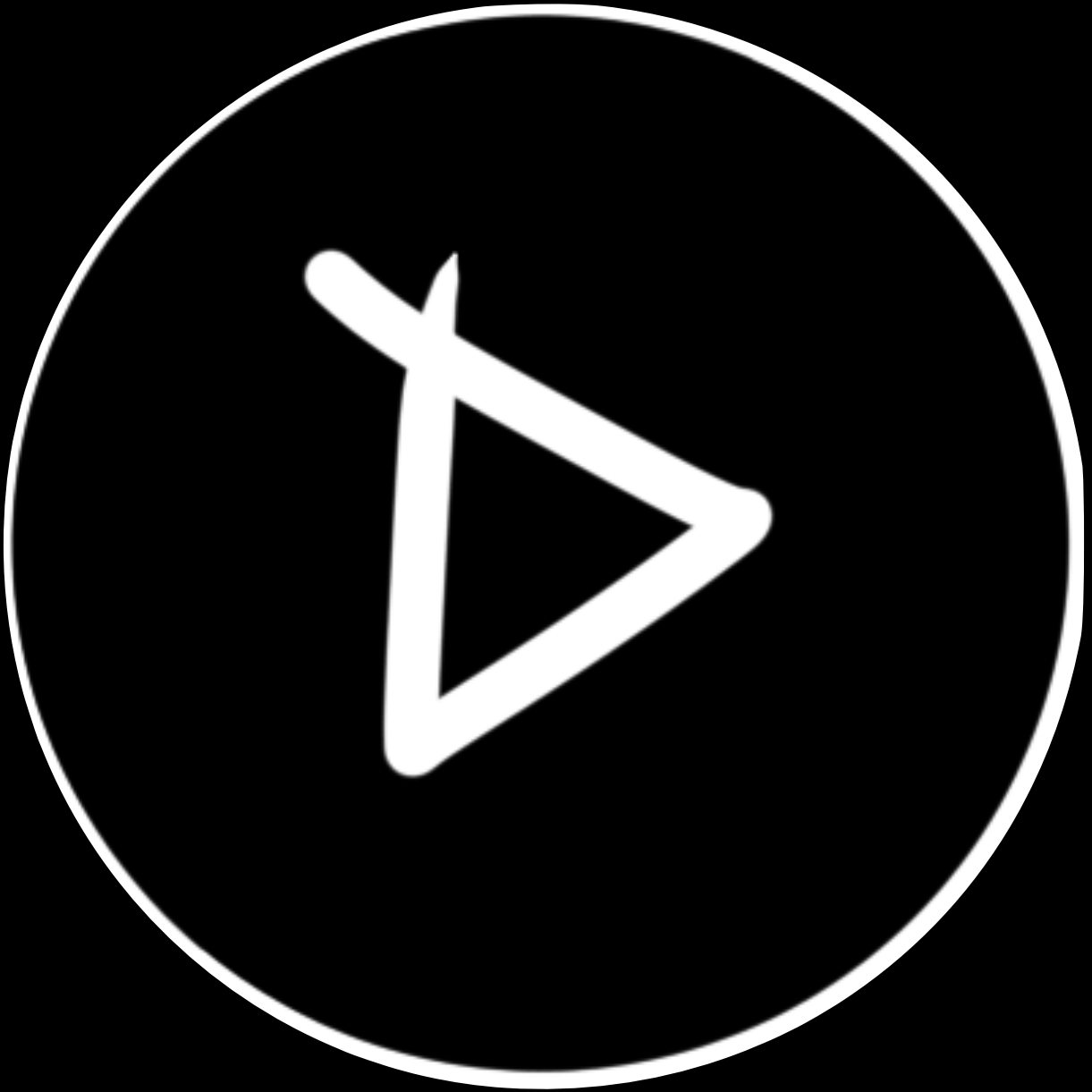
back to the old, ugly Broad Street—parking lot left, parking lot right, big box stores casting a bright glow

two rows out; sleep there, just one night, outside the Lowe's

used to jwalk Bangkok back streets, longboard Shanghai bike lanes, now a Target, now a Walmart, the same from my youth (save a new Homegood's), I buy the same things from Kohl's again...

behind the Target/Walmart, there are tents in the woods, behind the woods the interstate, in the tents... I've never been, why would I leave my car, things are going well for us, things move forward, there were encampments in Bangkok too, rarer in China, out of sight

behind the Walmart, in the Countryside, in the Jungle, I'm alone anywhere I go, a student complains a homeless man robbed their car, a homeless man jumps over the patio of a burger-joint, threatens us with ice, he's deepcover, bothers us all, he does this often says the waiter, we tip well



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“Combat on a Velvet Plain” by Salvatore Difalco
Book: [The Mountie at Niagra Falls](#)

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“The Wife” by Trina Das
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