**Just a Little Fever**

**By Sheila Heti**

**April 11, 2022**

She was shampooing her hair with cherries. It was entirely her idea to do it—she hadn’t read about it anywhere. She had taken the little cellophane sack of cherries out of her bag and put the cherries in a wooden bowl and pounded them down with a flat, broad spoon, drawing out the pits with her fingers, then she had slipped into the shower and put the whole mess on her head and shampooed it in with a little bit of moisture. This was her way of treating herself, since only the moon seemed to be on her side, shining down silver on her coat that night. After she rinsed out her hair, it was pink and smelled like cherries. She went to bed with it wet like that, and when she woke up it looked like her head had bled in the night. She put the pillowcase in the sink with a bit of soap and left for her day in the world, the sun shining down on her, creating a golden armor that coated her body entirely.

When she got to work, there was Marla, there was Agnes, and there was Junie. They had already taken their spots as tellers and were standing and serving customers, and she went to her spot and put away the sign that said “Next Teller” and served the first person who stepped up to her station. He was an old but handsome man. He had white hair, and was dressed in a very nice suit. It wasn’t that he looked rich; he just looked like someone who took care to dress nicely for the world. She liked that. She had never seen him before.

“What is your name, dear?” he asked carefully, pulling out his wallet and putting it down on the counter.

“Angela,” she said.

“Angela, my name is Thomas.” He handed over his bank card. “Could I please have three hundred dollars in cash from my savings account?”

She rolled her eyes slightly, but as soon as she did she regretted it. She liked the man, and even if this was something that could have been done at the A.T.M. she shouldn’t have rolled her eyes. She was simply so used to disliking her customers, and she immediately apologized. “I’m sorry I rolled my eyes. It’s just habit.”

“A lot of things are habit,” he agreed, and didn’t seem offended.

“I have lots of bad habits,” she said.

“I do, too,” he said. “It takes a lifetime to get rid of them, and even then that is not enough time.”

As she counted out his money, she asked, “What habits have you overcome and which do you still have?”

“I no longer smoke or drink, but I tell little white lies. In fact, I do smoke and drink sometimes. No, I guess I haven’t overcome any.”

“I forget to exercise, and I eat junk food all the time.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “Your body knows what it needs better than you do, better than all the magazines do, better than the doctors do, better than your girlfriends do. You just keep eating your junk food and lazing around.”

“Thank you,” she said. “No one has ever said that.”

“You do whatever you want. It really doesn’t matter.”

“It doesn’t, does it?”

“I like the color of your hair,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said. “You can’t tell because of the barrier, but it smells like cherries.”

“I can smell them,” he said, then he put the three hundred-dollar bills in his wallet and said, “Good day,” and walked away. She went on to serve the next person, and the next, and the next. But there was a problem: even by the end of the day, she was still thinking about Thomas. She liked the fact that he had not said that she should exercise or eat better, and she liked that he had not flirted with her, except for calling her “dear,” but that wasn’t flirting. He was just calling her “dear” to be nice. Then he had left. He dressed beautifully and was handsome. It didn’t matter that he was old. Old was as good as young. It wasn’t that she was looking for a boyfriend, a father, or a grandfather. She just couldn’t help thinking about him. At first, she despaired, because how would she ever meet him again? But then she just went back to the first transaction of the day and found his name, Thomas Swisher, and his telephone number, and once Marla and Agnes and Junie had left she called him on the little black telephone that was at her station, and he picked.