

## The Writer

**H**E HAS BEEN trying to be a writer for four years. It isn't that he isn't any good at writing. Most people say he is quite good.

But publishers just don't seem to like his work. They want him to make his stories simpler, so people don't have to think too much while they are reading. And they would like him to add more excitement, perhaps make someone jump off a bridge. They tell the writer he doesn't have enough beautiful women and

enough beautiful men. They ask him if he's ever thought about writing a diet book. Diet books sell very well, they say.

All of this has, of course, made the writer quite poor, and if ever anyone didn't need to think about dieting, it is he. He has been living on brown rice and lettuce for a long time.

What is he doing in Flowers, Kansas, in early spring?

The writer is on his way to the Pacific to see the gray whales. He gave up writing, and instead delivered telephone directories until he had enough money to drive to Oregon.

So here he is, in the Van Gogh Cafe.

He sits peacefully at a table and watches everything around him. The young man who owns the cafe, Marc, interests him. Marc has his long hair in a ponytail and today is wearing a shirt that reads YES. Just that. YES. Marc seems happy in his cafe. Now and then he pats some-

thing affectionately. The phonograph, the hen, the pie carousel, his daughter.

The daughter fascinates the writer. She is so still. Wide, watchful eyes. She reminds him of the moon or an owl. Her brown hair is braided down her back and she wears a sunflower jumper and basketball shoes. She has noticed the writer and from time to time she glances at him. Curious. He loves her curiosity.

The writer sits a long time watching people come and go. He watches their faces change when they enter the Van Gogh Cafe—the tiredness lift, the worry relax, the hurry slow down. They come in and they are kind and modest and funny.

The writer understands now the song playing on the old phonograph.

And as he sits, the magic in those walls begins its work on him. There in the Van Gogh Cafe, he is reminded of what he is and of what

he finds beautiful. His heart swells with the revelation that he is a real writer and not meant to deliver telephone directories or produce diet books. He remembers that the artist for whom this cafe is named sold only one painting in his entire life. And the writer knows that he has a book inside him. But he isn't sure what to call it.

When he finally decides to get back on the road to Oregon, he walks up to the register to pay his bill. The hen smiles at him. Marc tells him, "Have a good trip."

And as he leaves, the writer looks over at Clara who is quietly reading. He can't see the title of her book because the neon sign in the cafe window is reflecting across the jacket, making a new title.

It is calling the book *The Van Gogh Cafe*.

And that is all the writer needed to know.