

## Untitled by Shadia Hazelden

Driving down the unfamiliar narrow country roads with the weak autumn sunshine fading fast, Millie gripped the wheel of her ancient car tighter in concentration. She still had a thirty minute drive ahead of her before she was due to arrive at her destination the imposing sounding Wickenden Manor, the country estate of her reclusive new employer to take up the position as private chef and she was anxious to get there before the sky turned pitch black.

Professionally, it was a very exciting time for her and the large salary and live in accommodation would allow her to save some much needed cash to help launch her own catering business.

As she zipped along the winding lanes Millie thought back to the second interview she had had to secure the job with Mrs Bell, a delightful english lady in her sixties and mother of her new employer. They had met at a grand private residence in London and had spent all afternoon engaged in conversation whilst she had whipped up a culinary feast for sampling in the luxurious marbled kitchen. There had been some odd questions about her taste in music but having been brought up by her wonderfully eccentric and old fashioned grandmother she was only able to comment on classical music. Mrs Bell's blue eyes had sparkled at that comment and later she had clapped her hands in delight after sampling the intricate tasting menu Millie had prepared. She had found herself relaxing and responding to the natural warmth of Mrs Bell's gentle questions and had ended up telling her about having been brought up by her wonderful grandmother in the the idyllic sussex countryside and her subsequent training and job at one of the country's foremost michelin starred country retreats.

Mrs Bell's eyes had been gently assessing as they took in Millie's artful innocence as she spoke along with her thick dark hair which had been scraped back from her beautiful oval face into a careless

**Editor's Critique:** Thanks for sending in your first page! My interest was piqued by this reclusive employer in his country manor, and I like that he is so mysterious.

Be careful not to try to do too much with that first sentence. You want to grab our attention with something quick and full of action, surprise, emotion, or mystery. This sentence is quite long and a bit difficult to follow along with, which isn't the best way to draw the reader in. Watch out for run-on sentences in general. For example:

She still had a thirty minute drive ahead of her before she was due to arrive at her destination the imposing sounding Wickenden Manor, the country estate of her reclusive new employer to take up the position as private chef and she was anxious to get there before the sky turned pitch black.

could read as:

She still had a thirty minute drive to Wickenden Manor, the country estate of her reclusive new employer. She was anxious to get there before the sky turned pitch black.

Set the scene, then turn your attention to why she's going. Remember that great bit of writing advice: show, don't tell. You don't need to say "imposing sounding"—the reader will see it's imposing sounding on her own!

It's tempting to give a lot of background all at once so we know who Millie is. Instead, the first page should drop us into the action—focus on Millie's present journey and her anxiety. Is she anxious about her employer, as well as the drive? Mrs. Bell and the second interview, and Millie's taste in music, can come later. I'm intrigued about her choice to become a private chef for a reclusive man so she can save money—focus on the emotion involved there and her anxiety or her determination that she'll do a good job. Good luck!