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EDITORS' FOREWORD

We are pleased to present to you the Winter 2012 issue of *Euphony*. As the days in Chicago grow short and the weather becomes ever more unpredictable, this season our fiction and poetry also run the gamut, from beautiful moments captured in time to surreal journeys through Illinois plains.

Euphony this year has been excited to welcome a large number of new staff members, who have contributed greatly to the work now before you. We are also, as always, slowly and laboriously expanding our online presence, in the hopes of achieving semi-monthly web updates sometime in the distant future.

We thank you as ever for reading the oldest literary magazine at the University of Chicago, and hope you enjoy our latest issue.

THE EDITORS

EUPHONY

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Euphony is a non-profit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations. Visit our website for more information.

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Pam VanderWiel

On a Beach in Korea

Once on the beach
in the early morning
(it was winter)

the chestnut vendor
with steaming strings
of fragrant nutmeats

took my money
with a bow
and pressed it

to her lips
before tucking it away.
The first sale of the day

is good fortune.
On a rock
in the water

a woman prays
and casts rice
onto the sea.

Bryce Thornburg

Untoward

Between the moth
At the window and
The light it's getting at

Flight paths sound
Like a box

Of string shaken
The next morning

Somehow surprised
At finding knots there
Had you expected

A sweater?
Muttering broken

Sentences under your breath
Found a shelf
Between you and me

In the garage
Strings tend toward knots
This instance is different

Only in that
Given time

The tangle would tangle
That night

You hear them again
Summer finds the window
Open now they're closing

The distance looking less
Like pale cursives

And more like the light
That's read by

The Night Keeps

Cool and leaves

Find like parts
To line the yard

Each tree rather

Unclung to
A departure

The fenced-in
Quality throws me

Joe Guszkowski

Cryonics

Ping-pong under
paper snowflakes
twirling slowly in the A/C.
Then the lost dog appeared, clean
and firm as a new candle
even as every dog I know is dying.

The shadow of the biplane
grows on the water.
(My mother's stylist,
so sexy in her disinterest,
was Kathy, my only love.)
We could die this way
or packed in whale skin
sleeping bags, windmill bow ties
teeth blown out.

When it is time to panic
the flight attendant walks slowly to the rear
and shuts the curtain.

Corey Mesler

Lynn Somebody

The first time that I died I didn't even make it to the gates. I was stopped by an angel with a baton and a can of pepper spray. Move along, he said. Where? I rightly asked him. Back to where you came from, Skippy, he said. I thought the use of 'Skippy' unnecessary and condescending but I went back anyway. My wife was asleep in the chair, her head hanging over knitting needles which had dropped from her drowsy hands. She was not attractive in this posture but she was my wife. She woke up. Where have you been, she asked, surreptitiously wiping drool from the corner of her mouth with a colorful, half-finished merkin. I went out for a while, I told her. You wanna sandwich, she asked. I told her I wasn't hungry and went into the rec room because I felt like a wreck. I found some good strong cord. Next time, I thought, I will get pass that bastard with the pepper spray. The second time that I died was a week later. I did not have to use the cord. I was hit by a drunken teenager who had sneaked his father's car out for a joy ride. I was blowing debris off my sidewalk and into the storm drain where it would cause trouble for the city. It was one o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was a pop-up hit to centerfield. I went down to the pavement slowly. I wanted my head to hit square but I glanced off the car's bumper. The kid went back home. I showed up in the queue again and this time the angel bully was nowhere in sight. I reached the gate and the recording angel there found my label after a bit of searching. They had misspelled my last name. I told her that it happened a lot while I was alive, too. Just beyond the gate was a shining, snaking sidewalk, almost like the one out of Munchkinland. Up ahead I saw fields of milk and honey. Up ahead I saw the girlfriend who broke my heart in my sophomore year of college, Lynn Somebody, who later died of breast cancer. She was smiling like a tumbled stone. Up ahead I saw a unicorn mating with the Vegetable Lamb of Tartary. Up ahead I saw my own home and through the window I espied my wife, still knitting, still nodding off, still dreaming of me returning with a story better than the one I am telling you now.

Michael Andreoni

Soft Power

Chris's face is savagely contorted as he delivers another kick. It lands with all his weight behind, followed by a wild, wind-milling punch. The enemy: smaller and softer, no martial skills to speak of, bobbing and weaving, darting in to press his one advantage. A moist nose scores another shiny mark. Each wet touch to the cheek sends my nephew into greater paroxysms of raging, pummeling hate. He passes beyond the ephemeral anger of mortals into something epic, straining, purpled face touched by the Gods.

I lick Slobber Bear's black cotton nose now and then to keep the pot boiling. It has the desired effect; we perform a violent pas de deux across the living room with Chris raining down kicks and punches. I have learned to hold the stuffed animal as far away from my body as possible.

"I'm going to get you with my wet nose," the fighting bear growls with cartoon-like aggression. Chris sneers and goes right back to work.

"That all ya got, punk?" We battle all the way to lunch.

Jen has Slobber Bear to tea. I sit on the carpet holding the bear and a doll-sized cup from one of the suitcases full of toys and clothing I lugged in from Karen's van. "You be good," she'd called through the window, backing down the drive before I had the hatch closed. It flipped back up and she had to stop while I re-shut it. She made an "oops" face, waved, was gone. It is difficult to read in Slobber Bear's fuzzily enigmatic expression what he thinks of this.

We sip tea-water. Jen reclines on a pillow, interspersing gracious hospitality with frank counsel.

"Mommy's boyfriend's a lawyer."

Slobber Bear studies his cup.

"He's coming with us to Disneyland. You could come too."

Jen jumps up when Slobber Bear's nose becomes wet. She skips through the house shrieking merrily: "Slobber Bear can't catch me!"

Slobber Bear follows slowly, aware that catching her won't be necessary.

They wouldn't eat my pancakes the first morning.

"Mommy makes them soft," Jen complained, doubtfully pronging the syrupy stack with her fork.

“Just eat a little bit,” I pleaded.

“These suck.” Chris knifed his into doughy scraggs until I grabbed the plate and scraped everything into the garbage.

“I’m hungry.”

“That’s just too damn bad.”

The thing was I’d started off badly. The thing was they were wise to my inexperience. I ordered pizza from the wrong place. I didn’t get bread sticks and ranch dressing with it. They went to bed without brushing their teeth. The TV blasted all night long. I shut the bedroom door hoping my sister, my reckless, wanton sister, would be early.

Things progressed. The lawyer fizzled well before Disneyland. I felt angrier over it than Karen did. Two weekends watching the kids and then the asshole stops calling her. A trucker seemed promising at first—I took them to the zoo that weekend—until his route, and another woman, led him west. The PhD candidate failed his orals all the way around.

The children now displayed the confidence of conquerors. I had proposed, in extremis, that we were buddies, unaware that I was abandoning the high ground of adult authority for the peer-review swamp. Everything—what we ate, when they went to bed, how often they bathed—became a discussion among equals. They pillaged falcon-eyed through the house until broken toys lay strewn across the carpet like plundered towns-folk.

I rifled their suitcases with the thought that maybe Karen had packed something quiet, like a 500 piece jig-saw puzzle. When she asked how they behaved I was too embarrassed to say anything other than they were “good” kids.

Slobber Bear is flying. He swoops effortlessly under the radar while surveillance is compromised by the TV. Flying and a perpetually wet nose are but two of his many talents. This is an ongoing sore spot with Chris, who, rubbing his cheek and rising to the fight, complains bitterly of unfair tactics. He’s upset when Slobber Bear ignores accepted rules of engagement. One minute he’s hurtling through the air, only to explode wetly from concealment under the sofa cushions a few moments later. Jen, bewailing this further border encroachment during *Dora the Explorer*, jumps out of the way, though not before suffering collateral dampness on the left ear.

A smallish white bear with black plastic eyes packed amidst underwear and toys featuring simulated explosions. He uttered no pre-recorded noises when I squeezed his arms and legs. Not a modern, battery amplified

uber-bear with an audio repertoire of cute. An out of fashion clueless bear that the children ignored and I wondered if either of us was capable of learning any new tricks.

“Your mom’s picking you up early tomorrow. You’d better take your baths tonight.”

“I don’t need one.”

“Me either.”

“That’s fine, because Slobber Bear told me he likes boys and girls who don’t bathe. It makes his nose even wetter.”

Jen scans every corner of the living room. She knows Slobber Bear can attack from anywhere. Her painted-toe feet scamper off. “I call the bathroom first.”

“I’ll POUND Slobber Bear,” Chris solemnly promises, but it’s bubbles for mighty warriors too.

“Who’s your friend?” Karen asks.

Chris and Jen are straining to lift their suitcases into the van. We stand on the porch watching them.

“Oh... they forgot to pack this. So how did it go with Computer Guy?”

She smiles slightly. “It went. You think you could take them again next Saturday? We might want to go up north.”

“Yeah sure. Guess I can give this to them then.”

Her arms bend around me, a hint of jasmine floats above a Starbucks base. “Best brother in the world.”

I wait by the drive with Slobber Bear against my leg. “Bye guys, see you Saturday.” The kids are getting settled in for the ride home and barely glance at me. I keep pace with the van when it backs away and press his face against the window. For a moment I think we’re being ignored until Chris’s hands become fists.

Clayton Clark

Hunting

We walked the black cart path around
the lake, drinking tall cans of beer
and smoking. My brother talked about
his new girlfriend, how she was abused
as a kid. *She's the strongest person*

I know—I'd never screw her over.

Believing, I crushed my cigarette.
I heard the rustle then, but Eric
hurdled the hedge into the mulch,
already after the plated tail.

We chased the armadillo along
a water hazard, past the stuccoed
rental building, across the tiled
sundeck by the tiki bar—the trail
died off near the pool pump azaleas.
Slamming our beers, we pitched the cans
into the plants. We hooted and shook
the branches until it made a dash
for gazebos and we continued chase
while in a condo suite, our dad,
stepmother, and eight-year-old half-
brother slept, never heard us return
with muddy shoes and a dying buzz.

It's called "hunting 'dillos", a story
we laugh about, drinking canned beer
in Dad's basement on Christmas. We tell
the girls we've brought how Eric touched
its leathered back before he tripped
into the bushes. We never knew
how to end the tale, exactly
what we'd have done if we had caught
the thing, until Eric brought home
a Florida girl one year. She told us
you grab a 'dillo by the tail
and hold it upside down until
it stops scratching its hefty claws,
until its wheezing grunts die down
and the thick-skinned body hangs still,
which we also chose to believe.

Shane Goth

Le Grand Voyage

Downtown Calgary fades away each morning I go inside Mary Cherinski's photo studio. Lichtenstein pop art prints greet me from the back brick wall and I am in New York. Mylene Farmer sings to me from Mary's ex-boyfriend's guitar amp and I am in Paris. I put my backpack on a faux-fur retro stool and I am not even in the 21st century anymore. I imagine Mary's apartment is just as sophisticated.

It is the third week of my internship at Mary Cherise Photography. I am learning how filters and focus make the ordinary beautiful. I also plug in lights. One day, I will photograph bands at stadium shows. I will stand among roaring crowds and capture images that define a generation. For now, I am a guy that plugs in lights at a tiny photo studio.

I haul out power packs and reflectors and the morning's shoot begins. Mary's take-charge patent boots clop as she paces behind the tripod. Her polyester monochrome dress gives with her every breath. She points to the softbox light and gestures for me to move it back with a magnificent conductor's wave. The light is like me: tall and bulky. It moves awkwardly.

"Look here, Jenny," Mary says to the model. Jenny is a 10 year old with a glass eye. Whenever I'm caught by her half-vacant gaze, I look down. In front of the camera, she poses with a wide smile and head held high.

Mary says, "Well done! You are a beautiful girl."

Jenny's father picks through the vegetables and blue cheese I have laid out on a vintage TV tray. He tiptoes over to me, chewing a carrot very quietly. I want to tell him that we're not making a movie here. Crunch away.

"You two do many of these fashion shoots?" he whispers.

This is not a fashion shoot. It is for a department store flyer. Super Styles, an outlet store in the 'burbs with clothes that aren't super or in style. Jenny is modeling a plaid sweatsuit. Tottery old women will buy this eyesore as a birthday present for their grandchildren who will bury it in their closets. So the truth then: this is a junk mail shoot.

"C'est fini!" Mary says. She claps her hands at an imaginary crew of a dozen men who wipe their brows and congratulate one another about the morning's productive shoot. But her crew is just me, my face itchy with sweat from standing so close to the lights.

Jenny's father is not a big man, but he lifts Jenny high into the air. "You did great, honey." She giggles in his arms.

Mary invites them for lunch at Au Naturelle. She will order the tofu hash and talk about the difficulties of being vegetarian while facing the stresses of a working artist. She is not really vegetarian. For instance, last week I saw her smoking a cigarette and eating a McChicken in the parking lot. She was weeping on her phone with her long-distance boyfriend Alain. He will be taking summer courses. He will not be coming from Marseilles to visit.

"Back soon!" Mary's call echoes in the rafters of her studio. She twirls a candy-striped silk scarf around her neck. This is what sophisticated women in their thirties wear. I too have become more sophisticated since starting work here: a new leather wristband and my hair a little longer in the back. Plus I am only a decade younger than Mary. A decade is not that long.

They leave. I settle in for a solitary lunch hour and download the photos of Jenny onto Mary's computer. The front door squeals open. Looking at Mary's bubbly handwriting in her daytimer, I see she has no other appointments today.

A lady old enough to be somebody's great-grandma wanders up the steps to the studio area. She marvels at the high exposed-beams and the checkerboard floor like she has just woken from a coma. Her eyes are two grey slits compressed between folds of skin, but their gaze is still sharp. She wears a navy blue sweater, the kind I wouldn't want to light a match around. The collar of a Hawaiian shirt peeks out underneath. I wonder if she is an escapee from a nursing home.

She says, "Is this the Mary Cher-ise photography studio?"

"You got it," I say. "Mary's not in, but what can I do for you?"

I am sure she will want a photo restored. Probably one of her and her husband from the '50s, when everything seemed quiet and everyone's skin looked like speckled wax. We don't do photo restoration here because Mary is still saving up for the computer program that does that. I will have to refer this lady to the mall photo shop, where the staff wear embroidered polo shirts and aren't allowed to have nose piercings.

"Do you do portraits?" she asks.

Mary has promised me I can direct a photo shoot on the last day of my internship. Until then, her camera is off-limits. Those five weeks might as well be forever.

"Sure I do."

The lady gives me a sideways glance. "Maybe I should wait for Mary."

“Heavens no!” It is the first time I have ever said that. It is old-person talk, something to build photographer-client rapport.

I take her arm and guide her towards the stool in front of the camera. This is what gentlemen do. I may be holding her too roughly, because her eyebrows are raised at me the whole way. Once seated, she looks around at the lights and reflectors and power packs strewn on the floor.

“You’ve been busy today,” she says.

“We were doing a fashion shoot.” I position the lights, adjusting them and then adjusting them back to where they were. Perfect.

The woman’s name is Edith. She tells me what she wants. “A professional portrait photo with an interesting background. But natural looking.”

“No problem,” I say. “That’s my specialty.”

I hold Mary’s camera in my hands for the first time. It is a new Nikon D3X, special-ordered from Japan. It is slippery with her lemony perfume. I think if Mary had to choose between me touching her camera or her breasts, she would pick her breasts. And I am not even the least bit French. I am half-Polish community college student named Martin with a nose that looks like a door stop.

I wrap a hand around the lens and practice zooming. Zoom in. Zoom out. Like warming-up at a track meet. Tilt down. Tilt up. Focus. I crank down a mottled brown backdrop. I take a reading with a light meter. Back to the camera. What was that number again? I take another reading.

“Maybe I should wait for Mary,” Edith says.

“Nonsense,” I say, looking through the viewfinder with my hands on my hips, as Mary does.

I take some shots. Edith’s face is a maze of downward creases. “A little more happy, please,” I say. No change. “Happy, happy!” She glances behind her. “Eyes forward, okay?” She shakes her head. She looks back again.

I stand straight and sigh. “Is something wrong?”

She wags her thumb at the backdrop. “Could we change the colour of that?”

“Sure,” I say, walking over. “What would you like?”

She looks at it a while, scrunching her face like an upset baby. She knows what she wants though. I can see it in her eyes.

“Something blue,” she finally says.

I crank down a blue backdrop. On my way back to the camera, Edith clears her throat.

“You see that plant over there?” she asks.

I nod. It is a tall palm in a ceramic pot.

“I would like it in the photograph with me.”

I drag it next to her. This is really an assistant's job but I do it to keep my client happy. Now Edith pulls her sweater up over her head. Her arms flail as if she is drowning. Off it comes. Hyper-saturated flowers bloom on her Hawaiian shirt. A price tag dangles from the back of the collar.

"Could you please hang up my sweater?"

Edith has become what we photographers call a demanding client. Mary has warned me about these types before. After a demanding client leaves the studio, Mary pours herself a glass of Chardonnay, sits in her upstairs office with the door closed and blasts Françoise Hardy. Most demanding clients scowl, shout, and argue. This one is trickier. She has disguised herself as a polite old lady.

The secret to dealing with a demanding client, Mary has told me, is communication. I have already used some old-person expressions. Now I must try compliments.

"That's a colourful shirt," I say. "Going on a trip?"

"No, I am certainly not. It's not safe for me to travel alone."

"Well, go with someone."

Her gaze narrows. "My husband is dead."

"I'm sorry."

"Why on earth should you be sorry? It's not your fault."

I shake my head and put my hands up like a bad guy in a cop show. What an idiot I am.

I take some more shots. The scene in the viewfinder is ridiculous: a lady in a Hawaiian shirt next to a potted plant and a solid blue background. Now Edith is staring at something on her lap. "Look up, please," I say. It's a picture she's holding. She's muttering at it. "Eyes up here, Edith." She's not listening. I stop again.

She shakes the picture in the air. "That damn Greta Peterson and her Hawaiian vacation."

I go to her. "What are you talking about?"

"Greta's husband repaired refrigerators for a living! Can you believe it? My Frank fought for world peace."

"Frank was your husband?"

She nods. "He served in World War Two." She tells me Frank lost a leg when he set off a landmine in Germany. He came back home with an artificial leg that itched when he wore it and squeaked when he walked. "Such a stubborn man. He didn't want that contraption to stop our stroll to the park every day. There was a bench where we'd sit and watch the sun set. But it did ruin the walks. On the way to the park, the fake leg squeaked and Frank would say, 'Christ, it's pinching!'"

"Frank and his leg bickered worse than a divorced couple. I got so tired of it that I told Frank to stay home and I went to the bench by myself.

If he couldn't walk with me down the street, how could he have possibly taken me on a vacation?"

The picture in Edith's hand shows Greta and her husband holding tropical drinks high in the air, toasting the heavens. They wear Hawaiian shirts and smile with mouths open, as though they are in the middle of telling the same joke to each other. There are palm trees and a beach and a big blue sky in the background. The man has his arm around Greta. It means: hands off you Hawaiian boys. This girl's with me.

Edith says, "When we were kids, Greta was the first to go on a date. She was the first to get married. Have children. And now she is flaunting her Hawaiian vacation to me."

Edith's hands are shaking, her lips trembling. I decide Greta is the most horrible person in the world. Greta lies on her tax returns. Greta pushes children into snowbanks. Greta starts wars. It is the battle of the ladies in Hawaiian shirts, and I have chosen a side.

I say, "So you want to send Greta a picture back to pretend you've had a holiday too?"

"Do you think it will work?" Edith asks.

"Does Greta have good eyesight?"

"She had a cataract, but I believe she's getting treatments."

"I don't think it's going to work."

I devise a better plan. Mary has hundreds of travel pictures on her computer from her European vacation with Alain last summer. I will take shots of Edith in the studio, copy her image and paste her into Mary's pictures where she and Alain used to be.

I explain my idea to Edith, and she nods as if she understands me, but probably everything I'm saying is too technical for her to follow. She trusts me though, and that's what is important. "Greta's never been to Europe," Edith says.

"Europe is way more impressive than Hawaii. Are you ready for your trip?"

Since Edith is already wearing a tropical shirt, I decide her trip will begin somewhere hot: Greece. I ask her to put on Mary's bucket hat because I've heard the summer sun is scorching in Greece and I don't want Edith to get sunburn. I open a picture from Mary's hard drive — one with her and Alain walking on a rocky shore alongside bright rowboats. Crumbled steps behind them go up to a bank of ancient ruins. With a few clicks, Mary and Alain disappear from the picture.

"Watch yourself on those jagged beach stones," I tell Edith as she walks across the tiled floor of the studio. I have set up a fan to simulate the breeze coming off the ocean. Fine threads of her silver hair flutter. I copy Edith from the studio shot and place her onto the Greek beach.

Next stop: London. I find Mary's two-row buckle coat that ties at the waist and ask Edith to put it on. It's a little tight, but it gives the effect I want. Scanning through Mary's photos, it seems it will be raining for Edith's visit to London. Isn't it always! I give Edith an umbrella and she whisks it open with a whoop.

I say, "Now, be careful. You're at Big Ben, but there are scammers out there ready to take advantage of tourists like you. Keep your purse close."

She looks up at the spot on the studio ceiling I have told her will become Big Ben. There is even a sense of awe on her face as she does it. Edith travels so well. Out go Alain and his stupid beret, and in goes Edith.

No trip across Europe would be complete without France. I find a nice shot of Mary and Alain there. They are sipping coffee on a cafe patio in Paris as cars and people pass by on the cobblestone street alongside them. I pull out Alain and leave Mary. She is smiling, her cheeks blushed. I wonder what she was thinking about.

Edith interrupts my daydream. "Quit monkeying around! You're on the clock."

I make Mary disappear and in go Edith and the plate of cheeses left over from the morning photo shoot.

Edith rides a gondola in Venice. She stands over the rubble of the Berlin Wall. She poses with two Spanish Flamenco dancers. It's perfect. Greta will be crushed.

"How did you like your vacation?" I ask Edith as the computer burns her photos onto a CD.

Edith finally gives me the smile I'd been asking for. "You should be a travel guide."

"Me? I haven't been anywhere."

"Why not?" she asks.

I hesitate a moment. "No money. But when I graduate, I really hope that maybe I could go work in New York."

Edith doesn't miss a beat. "So do it."

"I'm just in community college. Who'd want me there?"

She says, "I never even finished high school and I've been through Europe."

The CD of her photos pops out of the computer. I write "European Trip" on the label and hand it to her. "You'll have to get your photos developed at the mall photo shop." I sigh. She will be helped by a smiley guy in an embroidered polo shirt. She will tell him he's the nicest young man she's met all day.

I say, "I wish I could be there when Greta gets these photos."

Red floods Edith's face. "I wish Frank could have come on my trip."

She holds up her arms and I pull her sweater over her head until her poufy hair pops out the top. I grasp her arm and guide her very gently down the stairs. She nods. I open the front door and the sounds of traffic and construction and people outside blast in.

"Bon voyage," I say.

She cups her hand on my cheek and pats it. It feels warm and good. For a moment, her grey eyes shine. I lean against the open door and watch her teeter down the sidewalk. Cars zoom past her. I sway my back against the door, and it squeaks in unison with Edith's slow footsteps. I wonder if she can hear it too.

Steven Schroeder

Illinois

Absolute black does not really exist. But like white, it is present in almost every colour, and forms the greys—different in tone and strength; so that in nature one really sees nothing else but those tones or shades.

Vincent Van Gogh, in a letter to his brother, Theo

cornfield plowed in October is absolute black
dirt. Grass six shades of ocher remembers prairie
before it was broken, knows what seems to be
one truth is a composition of fractions
balancing a whole spectrum so it can
hold light to hold a new crop in

come spring. You can see blue and red
and yellow on the edges where the sky
cuts it where the fence cuts it where
the plow cut it, dying to begin again.

A few stray stalks stand the day after
the first hard freeze, thinking reeds
that do not have the memory of grass—

just enough to keep green in mind when
winter wraps every color it can imagine
in cold so bright it could leave you blind
waiting for the day after the last one.

Abend

Der Abend wechselt langsam die Gewänder,
die ihm ein Rand von alten Bäumen hält;
du schaust: und von dir scheiden sich die Länder,
ein himmelfahrendes und eins, das fällt;

und lassen dich, zu keinem ganz gehörend,
nicht ganz so dunkel wie das Haus, das schweigt,
nicht ganz so sicher Ewiges beschwörend
wie das, was Stern wird jede Nacht und steigt -

und lassen dir (unsäglich zu entwirrn)
dein Leben bang und riesenhaft und reifend,
so dass es, bald begrenzt und bald begreifend,
abwechselnd Stein in dir wird und Gestirn.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Stephanie Bastek

Evening

The evening slowly slips into the garments
held out to him by the line of old trees;
you look: and the land pulls itself away from you,
one half heaven-bound and one half, falling;

and leaves you, not so much a part of either,
not so dark as the houses in their stillness,
not so surely calling out to eternity
as that which every night becomes a star and rises—

and leaves you (inexplicably to unravel)
your life, ripe and anxious and immense,
so that, near inscribed and near infinite,
it switches between being stone in you, and star.

Zhanna Vaynberg

Do Not Leave Chicago

Do not leave Chicago. Do not find yourself nostalgic, bored, restless, and then think how nice a trip back to Milwaukee would be. Even if you can barely remember the last time you went out on a date, and you just came home early and fell asleep wrapped around your dog. Even if a walk along the lakefront is the most interesting thing you will probably do all weekend, and you've forgotten what it's like when strangers say hello to you or someone actually looks you in the eyes—just stay home.

First of all, you cannot afford the amount of money you will end up spending on alcohol. Second, although it's been years, and Riverwest has started sounding magical, fun, and exciting again, when you arrive there it will be raining, and the streets will be empty and dismal. Summer will be over. Musicians will be hiding in basements with their guitar picks and home studios; aging hippies will be at bars instead of drinking black coffee, filling out crossword puzzles and chain-smoking on the wooden patios down Center Street. Modern day gypsies, dressed in black and beige, covered in dreadlocks and tattoos and holding weary dogs, will be hopping trains to New Orleans—like when birds fly south and presage winter—instead of hovering outside Fuel Café, that peculiar sitcom center of Riverwest.

Even though you know all this, you will go there anyway. Fuel will be the first place you go. You will walk in and immediately hope to see everyone you used to know in college, sitting around with cigarettes still lodged between their lips, black coffee spilling over white mugs between their fingers, talking across old wooden booths that hug paint-peeling walls, or playing cards by the large windows, so enveloped in flyers for local shows you can't even see through them. But it is full of strangers instead. Middle-aged punks who never grew out of wearing patched-up leather jackets, hipsters fresh out of high school on their way to see metal bands play in dirty living rooms, women younger than you holding kids on their laps. The old chalkboard menu will be long gone, and the walls, usually covered in mismatched frames of former motorcyclist clientele, are repainted bright blue and yellow.

You will suddenly remember that most of your friends have moved on to other cities, and the rest have moved on to bar stools, that you can't even smoke in Fuel anymore, so you'll end up spending more time outside hiding under the awning than inside, reading the latest Franzen

novel, your brand new shoes getting soaked. Only half the baristas will remember you—the ones who have been working there forever, the ones who remember you as that girl who wore too much eyeliner and dated both of the O'Brien brothers.

Because this will make you nostalgic, you will call your old girlfriends you promised yourself you'd never talk to again until they grew up and at least tried to do something more than waiting tables and dating alcoholic musicians, and even though it is still raining, they will come just to see you because they never understood why you stopped taking their calls.

Rose will tell you she dropped out of college again, that she quit playing stand-up bass in locally renowned band The Candles, that she's in love with a married, fifty-five year old music professor, and you will notice she is too skinny and keeps staring at her bagel like it's a bag of rocks. "Just got out of rehab," she will say, as if it's an explanation. Her nose will be pierced with a small diamond stud, and her large hazel eyes, the kind of eyes you might expect to see on someone drowning, will work hard to avoid your glance. Her thin, parched hair, dyed more often than the seasons change, will look on the verge of falling out entirely. "Rose—" you will say, as she looks up, twisting a dry blonde curl around her finger, biting her bottom lip.

"Maybe you should go back to rehab," you mumble, eventually, and she will pretend not to hear you.

Margot will be neck deep in post-break-up gloom, and even though she graduated the same year as you, with honors even, she has spent the last few years in Costa Rica with her girlfriend using up her trust fund, and now she can't find a job with her photography degree. Her dreadlocks fall out of her hat like a pile of loose cords. She smells like sandalwood and, as usual, fidgets relentlessly the entire time and leaves a pile of torn napkins on the counter. She will ask you why you don't paint anymore, now that you can afford to live without food stamps, and you won't have an answer.

Natalie will still be working as a secretary and living with her large Latino boyfriend in a house with no couches and a pit bull with no manners, and looks like she's gained thirty pounds just around her belly; her former, tiny ballet-dancer body nowhere to be found.

You will tell them to get out of Milwaukee. "Yes, I should," Rose will say, throwing her bagel in the trash. "Yes, I really should," Margot says, wrapping a scarf around her digital Nikon like it's a baby. "Yes, yes," Natalie whispers, as you put a hand over hers, and notice it's shaking, that there's a bruise around her wrist. And then they will say goodbye, and wave to you as they walk past the window towards their houses, holding

black umbrellas and watching their feet move across the puddles forming on the sidewalks.

You will leave Fuel after a few hours, after you've had so much coffee your hands start to tremble. After you feel sick with all the things that should be said and aren't. While you are walking to your car in your sopping wet shoes, you will feel slightly panicked every time you hear someone behind you, because of that time you and Margot got mugged at the bus stop on Center and Pierce, but you didn't have any money so they just stole your cheap, beaten-up phones, and you were lucky too, because worse things happened in that neighborhood every day. It was the major pitfall of cheap rent, of cheap old buildings with creaking stairs and windows that breathed in every storm, of carpets molding under leaking radiators. That was the price of living between the cracks of the world. That, and never being able to get out of them.

You will remember that as you walk, as women with stutters and well rehearsed stories beg you for money, as skinny men in ponchos pedal by you on fixed-gear bikes the colors of rainbows, as you shiver under your gray raincoat and continue down Center Street. The trees will shake with water, the wind will hum around your ears, and a man in dusty Carharts and broken sneakers will stumble out of a bar, tattoos rushing out of his white t-shirt, smelling like Old Spice and Camel Lights, run right into you, mumble a half hearted apology and start walking in the other direction.

As you watch him stumbling away, with an arrogant swagger in his hips and hands buried in his pockets, hands you know are small and covered in calluses, you will immediately wish you were back home in your tiny apartment on your tiny blue couch with your dog, watching movies and feeling slightly bored; staring at the sunset over the city skyline from an abandoned beach, browsing the used bookstores in Lakeview, or drinking wine with the Ashleys that live next door. But instead, it is five o'clock on a cold September night in Milwaukee, the moon full and crouching behind gray clouds, your stomach empty and whining, and Liam Knox, already six beers into the afternoon and unsteady, will be a few small feet in front of you—not forgotten, not dead by twenty-seven, not fat or bald or limping. Not nothing without you.

You'll stand there frozen, looking down, hoping he will keep walking and not recognize you now that you have blonde hair and wear a bra, but he will stop and turn around, a question burrowed into his raised eyebrows—he'll come back towards you and smile, as you notice his dark curly hair has grown an extra foot, that he's lost his glasses, that even his chaos of keys are no longer clipped to a belt loop around his waist, announcing his every arrival—and he will notice that you are wearing a simple red blouse and skirt instead of a t-shirt, ripped blue jeans, black

army boots with loose shoelaces. That you smoke furiously, like you can't wait for the next one.

He will cross his arms across his chest and say "I missed you," heavily, like something being dropped, and you will roll your eyes and say, "You don't know how to miss someone. You just find someone to replace them," and you will mean it, but his words will circle around in your thoughts and try to make a home there—somewhere between art school and your job at a graphic design company, between Milwaukee and Chicago, between a girl crunched up against the wall of Fuel Café, resting a copy of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* on her knees, and a boy wearing a ridiculous purple shirt walking towards her like they had known each other forever. With the kind of smile you should never trust but really wish you could.

Liam will still be grinning as he asks you to join him for a drink, and you will say no four times before you say yes, and then you will follow him into a dive bar on Center Street, and you will probably have a great time, finally, and laugh with all the regulars, who used to be your friends, who used to dance around stages and stare at canvases on the walls, who used to pull you into the bathroom of Fuel to share lines of coke. You might even do some, just to remember how fun you used to be, while a punk band plays in the corner, while Liam talks about guitars and loop pedals with the bartender, while you wonder if he still has that amazing six-pack hiding under his old high-school wrestling shirt. Then you will do shots of whiskey and start to feel drunk and happy that you finally came back to Milwaukee, you will forget why you left in the first place, and Liam will pull you outside by your elbow, and your feet will walk towards his house, which used to be your house too, and when you get there you will both stand next to the door, looking down at your feet. You will back away, lean against the railing, and light another cigarette, a cloud of smoke rising around you like a wall. The old wood of the porch will cave under your weight. Cars will swim through the flooded street.

You will ask, "Where's your girlfriend?" And he will say, "Where have you been the last five years?" and it will be raining again, your clothes will be soaked, and he will look at you with those eyes that you have been searching for in every face for years and never found.

"I should go," you will say, as Liam steps forward to open the front door, the last number of the address blocks still missing.

"I've heard that before," he will say, laughing, and open the door.

You will follow him inside. It will be dark but you'll notice he hasn't changed the pinstripe drapes, that even the worn out rug from IKEA is still there, next to someone else's table, next to someone else's flip-flops, the cheap kind with flowers on them. You will stumble through a river of empty bottles and sit on an old gray couch you inherited from your

grandfather, wrapping your arms around your knees. It will be quiet. Like too much weight on a balloon. A black lab named Pajamas, no longer a puppy, a giant now, will investigate you with his nose.

Moments later, Tom Petty will sing sadly from the speakers, and Liam will pull you off the couch, hum along, move your body with his as if it's a marionette and only listens to him. You will feel alive again for the first time in months, maybe years, and even though you shouldn't, you will say "I missed you, too," and he will say, "I know," and lead you to his bedroom, which used to be yours too, and you will say, "I think I could spend my whole life missing things."

You will shiver as he throws your wet clothes on the floor, as he moves your tangled hair to the side and kisses you, hungrily, as his black jeans fall around his ankles, as you catch a glimpse of his body, still in perfect shape and resembling a Greek statue, reflected in a long mirror attached to the door—as he says, "Sarah left me," and throws you down on the bed.

"She'll be back," you will say, still shivering, as you close your eyes and pull the comforter over your heads. "She always comes back."

Do not leave Chicago. Because after the \$50 bar tab and espresso-spiked coffee, all the broken glass on the street, the empty cigarette boxes and empty pockets, the black guitars and pink hair and loose anarchist pamphlets—after all the years of leaving him, leaving *that*—you will wake up in your old house, on an old, stained queen sized mattress on the floor, and not want to return.

CONTRIBUTORS

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