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EDITORS' FOREWORD

Welcome to the Winter 2011 issue of *Euphony*. Our poetry and fiction this season finds the unsettling, the terrifying, and the beautiful in slices of everyday life. Whether examining the existential rapture of Wiley E. Coyote or attempting to attain nirvana through the morning weather report, there is something unexpected on every page of this new issue, and we hope that you find the journey to be as stimulating as we did.

Our online presence continues at www.euphonyjournal.com, where you can find additional pieces of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction, as well as electronic copies of our previous issues. Submission guidelines and contact information can be found on the website or in the back of this issue. We thank you for reading *Euphony* as we enter our second decade, and look forward to many more exciting years.

THE EDITORS

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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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Sally Molini

Eulogy

is the kindest of summations,
a soft landing, a feather
falling to meet its shadow.
Every meeting becomes
a last impression, my own
departure also beyond
the comfort of imagining,
a question on what to do
about the unseen, a hint
of otherworldliness
in any goodbye.

William Winfield Wright

Presence

the Buddhist monk is on television
the television falling from an 8th floor window

he's giving the weather report
patient at the long list of cities

he holds the syllables of Celsius in his mouth
each match of the Fahrenheit burns

all the way down to his fingers
before he lights the next one

he points at icons of cloud and quarter sun
with surprise and a small smile

as if the coming Thursday rains
were sweet strawberries hanging just above our heads

Gary Joseph Cohen

Palsy

I'm prone to abstraction from time to time
and keep my loose atoms in a mason jar
atop the bookcase, next to my pipes and tobacco,

though I don't smoke; I sublimate, and
fill the air with flagrant vines and shafts to avoid the obvious
penalties of my vices. In this way the walls sag a little

with my particles from the sudden shift in balance, as when
there were two nudes in a canoe and one jumps out for a night swim
and takes on a school of thought, not vice versa.

Samantha Stiers

The Architect's Wedding

The Kremlin's silks
billowed around my husband's legs

like hot air balloons. I came gowned in Taj Mahal,
still pools reflecting my glide down the aisle.

The bedchambers in my depths glowed like jewels
while inside my groom, a general slipped poison

into the prime minister's vichyssoise.
The pyramids of Giza looked delicious

on the banquet table, but crumbled like sand
in our mouths. If only we had split them--

we would have found chocolate
drizzled into hieroglyphs,

could have crunched pharaohs
dipped in candy sarcophagi.

Richard Schiffman

Varieties of Fishes

In the shooting gallery at dusk
the tin cup moon slips

its cut out duck
below the ridge line,
as barracuda clouds

gobble star minnows.

And I too toss
upon dark tides.

How long will I stay afloat

dog-paddling in memory
before I am overtaken
by the bore of sleep?

But some fish skim
the glinting surface

jumping all night long,

and some dive
into delicious silence
and are gone.

Some even glow
in the dark,
become stars

in the ocean

as if remembering
(dimly)
when they lived
in the sky.

Adam Tavel

Against Elegy

Mother told me when the snoozing drunk
sledge-hammered her sister Barbara
two weeks after graduation

they lost the Big It, the thing that makes
buttercups sprout through sidewalk cracks
and meadow pipits perch on barbwire.

After funeral mass the clan circled
around the open grave
of their kitchen table sniffing

at sweet inedibles. Through the window
just then as she tells it
a buck trotted snow-crowned from the hollow

and stood under Barbara's dogwood,
the sapling she
planted as a girl. Grandchildren

when they ask about the senior portrait
atop the piano's fading varnish hear
how eleven siblings peered bloodshot

whispering holymoly
at flecked fur and antlers
sentry among the falling cold.

Tractor Supply

“I believe I’ve traveled this road before”
he let drop the steady quiet
we had passed back and forth
as custom since starting out
but then caught it with the same hand
brushed it off
no harm done
none meant
and we continued on
again our silence pouring
from one side of the pickup
to the other side
gravel kicking
with the curves of the back roads

so it continued on through Tractor Supply
the long looks of judgment
down lengths of lumber
the standing-to
at the ranks of nails
the silver coils sliding
into the pickup
only the ringing of the register
to scrape across our quiet
all without sign all without subtitle

then back home on the same curved roads
passing the very same quiet
we held easily between us
until we turned up the gravel drive
and stopped
looking out at the field
where the fence would soon stand
the very same quiet
leveling off and dying away
until he let go his grip again
“Many times.”

Deanna Larsen

The New Motherhood

Surgeons slit a keyhole in my navel;
plunged their gloved hands into a bloody swimming pool.

I signed a waiver.

Scrape paint off the walls. Unmake the bed.
Strip mine for gold.
Would you cradle a baby in a snake pit?
Drop a bassinet in this abandoned elevator shaft,
alligator mouth,
moldy tulip bulb,
phantom limb, unfired bowl,
Victrola with no needle.

My friend held a basket of wild cells. *Teratoma*.
A benign tumor of hair, teeth and bone.
An unwelcome vulture nested in her ovary/aviary.
Wound like twine, snarled around her
landfill, landmine.
Doctors covered us in gauze
to mark the casket.
There will be no breathing
in these cast iron lungs.
Before my crazy great-aunt hung herself,
she hung dead crows from her trees.
A warning to other birds:
Nothing takes flight here.

Jason Tandon

Driving to the Coast, Easter Sunday

Clutching the neck of a dead duck
a boy with blue hair
sprints across Main Street,
leaving a girl on the other side
dressed in a long black skirt and skull cap.

I wave at her to cross,
but she's jumping.
I can see big holes in her socks,
the skin of her ankles.

The boy gives me the finger.
In the rearview mirror
I am a torn flannel shirt,
bed-head like a January bramble,
little cause for his rebellion.

He climbs the hill
to the old stone church
where the parking lot is full.
The girl is still jumping.

At the shore I rip bread for the gulls.
Two sisters pack wet sand
into a muffin pan, flip it
onto a warm rock face
and wait for it to bake.

Holly Day

Practicing for Armageddon

I'm practicing for Armageddon, I say
to my husband as I
stitch quilts out of old shirts
embroider cushions with ribbon roses and french knots
make raincoats out of scared plastic bags.
someday, civilization will crumble
and the person who can knit the best scarf
will be king.

Luke Geddes

The Passion of the Coyote

In the beginning there is nothing, no unformed clay, no blank canvas, nothing. Then there is a God, or a force, or a brainless mechanism, and whatever it is—there is nothing, no one to observe it—triggers the bang, an expanding orange and yellow mass of zigzag edges clouded in smoke and swirling stars. From out of this eruption the universe emerges, stretching out like the wings of a great bird.

Then, billions of years later: life.

The coyote, yellow eyes leery, fierce brows knit in concentration, crouches alert behind the Brittlebush that grows along I-19 in the Arizona desert. Perhaps he thinks enviously of his ancestors, of the freedom they had before man's arrival, when the desert was theirs and theirs alone. Perhaps he feels God's loving presence in the quickening beat of his heart, in the way the clouds blow across the sun carrying cool shade to his warm fur. No, for as that blur of blue and violet streaks by, a cloud of dust following it like the exhaust of man's automobiles, surely all the coyote thinks is: Hunger.

The coyote is smart. He has studied his prey, watched and followed the roadrunner through Arizona, Mexico, Texas and back, although man-made geographic distinctions mean nothing to him. Sometimes he feels as if it is the roadrunner that is chasing him, as if he is tumbleweed caught in its slipstream. But then God's love overwhelms him, and though, wise he may be, the coyote is too ignorant to recognize it, viscerally it affects him; is it not this love, more than base survival, that evokes his hunger, his insatiability at once his bane and his *élan vital*? Without conflict, Earth is lifeless, and this story has no beginning, middle, or end.

The coyote knows the roadrunner more intimately than he knows the bitches with which he has mated. A nomad, a rebel: unlike the other, uxorious males of his species, he's abandoned his cubs and mates for the lonely pursuit of prey. His nose, kissing the cracked desert floor like a wet stone, picks up the faint, familiar scent, like rubber and licorice, of the roadrunner. It intensifies, crawling through his nostrils and down the edge of his throat; the roadrunner nears, circling back. Stupid creature.

Because he is a wily predator, because he has been chosen by God, because he is slow and lumbering compared to his nimble prey, the coyote must employ tools to catch the roadrunner. From where do they

come? Only God may know. An enormous length of thick polyester rope lay coiled near his feet, four stark white letters printed across the braided fibers at one end: ACME. He holds the lassoed end of it in his paws and sets the hoop in the center of the road, then ties the opposite end to his wrist and crouches again behind the Brittlebush, tongue swelling and ears pinned back in anticipation.

The roadrunner speeds along the highway, almost more machine than bird. As it rounds a dusty mesa, it turns its head and calls, Beep! Beep! The coyote licks his chops, the roadrunner's cloud of debris like an arrow pointing to his prey. He clenches the rope, muscles tense. The roadrunner surges closer and closer, a gust of wind that blows the flowers off the cacti. The great orange sun shines in the coyote's eyes. He covers his brow with his free paw and arches his other arm back. Time slows in his predatory yellow eyes and he watches the roadrunner's three-pronged feet step in slow motion along the dashed line of the road.

Just as the deliciousness of the bird's scent threatens to send him into delirium, the coyote yanks the rope, feels the lasso tighten around the roadrunner's stringy ankle. Success, after a purgatory of hunger, is hardly recognizable to the predator. He salivates so uncontrollably and his heart beats so rapidly in bestial arousal that he neglects to reel in his catch. The roadrunner runs on, dragging the rope as it snakes miles down the road in mere seconds.

Beep! Beep! is the last thing the coyote hears before the ground sucks out from under him and he is thrust through the Brittlebush and into the road. Skidding, sharp asphalt waves grate him as the roadrunner's dust blows into his throat, his eyes, his nose. Fur and skin tear loose from his body, tiny rocks like teeth biting his flesh. Blood streaking the paint of the white lines pink, the rope carries him until finally the roadrunner turns sharply and the coyote swings, the arm of the rope drawing a perfect parabolic arc, into a prickly cactus. Stuck in a gap in the desert plant's green arms, the rope pulls, pulls, pulls, and snaps, catapulting the coyote into the bright yellow sky. He crashes like a misfired rocket into a low lying mountain and slides down its jagged edge, dead.

Because God has blessed the coyote with a unique adaptability, death, for him, is as transitory a state as sleep. Though his lifeless body lies still as the sun falls off the horizon like a dropped anvil, through the cold desert night he works at his regeneration. God alone, watching from the cosmos, sees the coyote's skin, flayed and hanging loose on each side of his neck like lapels, stitch itself back together of its own volition. He sees the coyote's smashed yellow eye roll tight into its socket. The coyote blinks once and it's gleaming and whole. And inside, sinews reconnect muscle

to bone, heart beginning to pump with the vigor of rebirth. By sunrise it is complete.

The coyote gasps awake and sits upright, clenching his sharp, white teeth. What does he remember of his death? Only God may know. It matters little to the coyote; his only concern is the hunt. Almost immediately his nose begins to twitch. Though his snout is crooked, the coyote possesses an extraordinary sense of smell.

Through the desert he wanders, a never-ending expanse of physically illogical rock formations and deflated plants teeming with hidden life. The lonely trek suits him; the coyote is a solitary creature. One of a kind, he stands on two feet, evolved. Does the journey last days? weeks? months? The calendar of man is useless to him. Near the Mexican border, where the engine sounds of the roadrunner buzz in his ears like a small insect and its scent triggers his salivary glands once again, the coyote conjures up his next plan—or rather, the plan conjures him. He emerges from a deep arroyo and it's resting beside the road, calling to him like a burning bush.

The catapult is large and sturdy, emblazoned with the ACME logo and with a boulder preloaded onto the spoon at the base of its beam. All the coyote will have to do is pull the trigger mechanism at the right moment and the roadrunner will be flat enough for him to fry like a tortilla. But the coyote is careful. He learns from his mistakes. He adapts. He first marks the projected landing point of the boulder in the road with some ACME brand paint and launches it in a test-run. The boulder hits precisely on the X, and the coyote smiles a crooked, wolfish, hungry smile.

The trap is set. The coyote has sprinkled bird seed in the road for bait, has constructed a sign that reads "Free Bird Seed" so that it won't be missed. He sits on his haunches at the side of the road, perfectly still, his paws clasped together in patience or perhaps prayer.

As if on cue, the roadrunner comes zooming toward the trap. The coyote rises, dashes to the base of the catapult, and grasps the trigger rope tightly in his paw. The roadrunner skids to a stop, pecks vacantly at the seed, its snakelike neck outstretched, the usual stupid, aloof expression playing on its face. The coyote can almost taste it now, can almost feel bits of its meaty flesh stuck between his teeth. He licks his lips in a counterclockwise direction and pulls the rope. Instantly a familiar uneasiness overcomes him.

The enormous boulder rolls backward off the catapult and topples onto the coyote, crushing his bones to dust, his brain and tongue and eyeballs a mass of liquid goo. The roadrunner, oblivious, sprints onward.

Is the roadrunner the devil? Its innocent smile and ignorant gait belie a horned crown of sharp purple plumage, a hooked though feathered tail, feet like upside-down crucifixes. The roadrunner is a trickster, after all, cunning in its simplicity. Perhaps this is why the coyote has been chosen.

The coyote, alive once more, will not wait this time for his prey to come to him. He straddles an ACME brand homing rocket, pats it like a reliable friend. Embedded in the side of the great red missile is a tracking computer. All the coyote has to do is program it to target the roadrunner. From behind his back he retrieves a small purple feather, which he holds before the computer's scanner. The targeting complete, it emits a satisfied beep, and the coyote initiates the rocket's launch with the simple push of a button. Preparing for takeoff, it sparks to life and rotates so that its tip faces the desired coordinates. The coyote counts down on his fingers. Lift off in four, three, two—the roadrunner whizzes by, the wind in its wake blowing the feather from the coyote's grasp and into the sky—one, zero.

The rocket bursts into the air, gliding along the road, the roadrunner's tail wagging just inches out of reach. The coyote looks up to the sky for a moment, as if to ask, Could this be it? He shuffles carefully up the rocket. Claws outstretched, the coyote's nails graze the bird's fleshy tissue. Suddenly, the rocket takes a sharp, nauseating turn, lifting straight upward, upward, upward into the sky, where the feather, which the rocket has been unintentionally programmed to destroy, floats idly over the desert. The point of the rocket kisses the stem of the feather and explodes, an expanding yellow and orange mass of zigzag edges clouded in smoke and swirling stars.

The coyote, a flutter of black ashes, falls like confetti to form a pile on the ground, topped by two yellow, melted eyeballs.

Will it ever end? An ACME brand giant rubber band tied to two boulders at opposite ends of the road snaps the boulders together, crushing the coyote between them. From out of a painted tunnel a truck emerges, its wheels flattening the coyote's organs against the pavement. The force of a cannonball expelled from an ACME cannon sends the coyote careening off a cliff's ledge. The roadrunner charges through a pit of superglue at such velocity that it sends waves of the adhesive splattering onto the coyote, catching and drying instantly in his nose and throat, suffocating him. An anvil dropped from an air balloon trampolines off a pair of power lines, hitting the coyote smack in the snout.

And through it all, God watches—for surely there must be something out there that gives meaning to the coyote's meaningless pursuit. The coyote's pain and anguish saddens this omnipotent force, and yet It, or

She, or He concedes the necessity of pain. Still, God wonders, perhaps the creature has suffered enough.

How did it begin, all those eons ago? Did God watch as microscopic organisms swam through the film of the Earth's primordial stew? Was He sole witness when one prokaryote began to wriggle its pili and skirt hopelessly after another prokaryote that wriggled its pili much more rapidly? And did He name the prokaryotes, in a language that wouldn't be invented for billions of years, proto-eternalii famishiis and proto-beepus-beepus?

The coyote gallops behind the roadrunner. He has eschewed traps and other devices now for a simple but fruitless hunt. After all, this is how his ancestors did it, an eternal race for survival, bestowed by God with nothing more than the vague and powerful instincts that spurred them onward to the kill. Of course, the coyote's ancestors did not carry in their paws stainless steel forks and knives the way he does, did not tie napkins around their necks like bibs. The ACME brand silverware is just there, in the coyote's paws, as if it had always been.

And has he ever wondered? Has the coyote ever thought to ask himself where all the tools come from, what the letters stand for? No. Absorbed by the chase, sprinting on two-feet-become-many, he simply follows his nose.

Beep! Beep! The roadrunner, heels digging into the road like two jackhammers, skids to a stop. The coyote doesn't. Bursting through a Road Closed sign like a finish line, further and faster he runs, and then gradually, tenuously, he pauses.

There he stands, suspended midair above a great chasm between two towering mountains, only his faith keeping him alive. He looks down, can make out the distant, hard ground below only faintly. He pats the floor that's not there with his foot, his paw. Frowning, broken, he looks down again and gulps. Outward he gazes, as if at God, as if to say, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" As if to say, "Uh-oh." And he drops, the fading sound of a whistle echoing through the canyon, and collapses like an accordion when he lands, a lifeless sack of organs.

There is no resurrection. This time, that's all folks. The coyote's soul slips out of his body like smoke from a fuse. He floats high over the desert, beckoned upward by a great force toward a realm in which there are no beginnings, middles, or ends. It's a tremendous relief to be falling in a direction he's never fallen before. From this high up all the noise of the world is nothing more than a faint beep. The Earth grows distant and shrinks, and the coyote—or what was once the coyote—prepares himself

to let go, to allow his soul to be enveloped by the force—God, if one must name it—that has watched over him since before the beginning. And in his last moments as a solitary spirit, absolute knowledge flows into him and he realizes what should have been clear all along: this force, this God, this all-encompassing entity that made the coyote, that lit the first boom and created everything out of nothing, what else could it be but ACME?

Stephen David Grover

Mixed Blessings

My friend Kate makes fun of me because when we go to the grocery store together, which is often (since she has a car and I don't), I'm always smelling things. I smell the marshmallows through the bag, I smell the circus peanuts and the maple nut goodies and the Necco wafers in the candy aisle. At the checkout I lean in close to the minty gums—spear, pepper, double, winter—and try to inhale their brisk, crinkled scent. I'd open the bleach and sniff if I wouldn't have to buy it afterwards.

When we get to the bread aisle I'm hopeless. I crouch a bit and skirt along the shelves with my nose just centimeters from the plastic bags; I hyperventilate in the effort to get as much yeasty musk in my head as possible. I want to gulp in the air, but it's not a smell you can taste. I want to hold it in forever, but lungs don't olfactorate either, and they must be emptied to get another whiff through my nose. Kate just laughs and keeps a safe distance so strangers won't think we're together.

The truth is that my sense of smell is very weak, and I'm so excited by the few things I can smell that I can't help myself. For me the world is a mostly colorless smellscape. I can go on breathing for days without being reminded of my nose's other function, but when I am, I'm as happy as if I'd been kissed.

The first mixed drink I ever had was a screwdriver of sorts. I was at my best friend John's house after school in the fourth grade. He asked me if I wanted some orange juice. I said yes. He brought me a glass and I drank it, upon which he asked, "Did it taste funny at all?"

"No, why?"

"I put rum in it."

It was an odd moment for me. I felt alienated from John. Here I thought we were friends, and it didn't seem all that friendly to slip a guy a drink. But John's face didn't hold any malice; it only showed a little mischievous curiosity, the same look I'd see the next year when we found a box of condoms in the attic or when there were reports of a stack of Playboys having been dumped in a storm drain. I didn't know what John's parents thought about alcohol or what they had taught him about its right- or wrongness—his dad was a trucker, almost never home, and his mom was Filipino and spoke no English—but in my family it was pretty clear that alcohol was taboo. I wondered: Have I sinned? Was John a

good friend or the type of guy they warn you about at church? Will I be drunk?

I paid close attention to my physiology over the next hour, waiting for some sign of impairment or highness. But I didn't feel anything, so I assumed John hadn't put enough in to sway my ninety pounds. Things went on as normal.

In college I dated a girl who wore Moonlight Path, a Bath and Body Works fragrance consisting of lavender and lily. My brother and I would show up at her house, or she'd come over for dinner, and my brother would take one breath and start pumping his eyebrows up and down in mock romantic reverie. "Smells like love, like...Moonlight Path!" he'd croon at her, teasing. I'd be so jealous because I could never smell it; all I could smell for some reason was the faint scent of pizza dough in her hair all the time. Don't get me wrong—I loved it; it was comforting—but I hated feeling excluded from something wonderful and womanly, and I worried that she would feel like I couldn't appreciate her properly because I couldn't smell her perfume.

The first miracle Jesus performed was to turn water into wine. This he did at a wedding in Cana when his mother gently informed him that the party had run dry. She told some servants to do whatever he said to do, and then she left the room. He had them line up and fill with water six pots of two or three firkins apiece (about 120 gallons all told), and when the servants drew from the pots, they found the water had transformed. Jesus had done so well that the "governor of the feast" joked about how people usually serve the good stuff first and put out the bad stuff once people were too drunk to care or notice. But here, he remarked, they had obviously saved the best for last.

When I disembarked from the plane at the Kimpo International Airport in Seoul, my first impression was the smell. Cigarettes. Seoul, Korea, smelled like Austin, Texas, like my grandparents' trailer, like my great grandmother sitting there at the kitchen table smoking. It was comforting to feel at home at a moment when home was as far to the east as it was to the west.

I was in Korea as a missionary; my job was to explain to people what Mormons believe and to help those who were interested come closer to Jesus by being baptized.

Over the next months I came to know the other smells of Korea—the pungent stink of garlic; the sour tang of kimchi; the ripeness of doenjang, a fermented soybean paste much like the Japanese miso. Everything in

Korea smells, and does so more potently than here, which I found to be the source of some disparagement among expats. I, however, never really disliked what I smelled—it was more important that I smelled. Even the winter reek of urine and dirt and cold porcelain in a public bathroom was a kind of joy for me, part of the mental map I was constructing of my new home. To a nineteen-year-old with a weak sense of smell, finding Korea was like opening the door onto a Technicolor Oz.

Mormons don't drink alcohol. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, received a revelation in 1833 called the Word of Wisdom. In it, the Lord directs the members of the Church to live a law of good health, which includes abstaining from coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol.

Thus, as a practicing Mormon, I've made the decision not to drink alcohol. My first drink, that accidental highball at John's house, was also my last.

There were things in Korea that I couldn't smell. When people found out I liked doenjang soup, they'd often ask if I'd had cheonggukjang, another form of fermented soybean paste: "You like doenjang? I thought Americans couldn't stand the smell."

"It smells alright to me," I'd say. "It's delicious, anyway."

"Oh-ho, you should try cheonggukjang, then. It's like the big brother to doenjang. It stinks like shit, but it tastes like a dream."

"Cheonggukjang?"

"Yeah, pay attention when you walk in the market—you'll smell it!" they'd cackle, tickled to death that an American approved of their foul-smelling edibles. I always tried to keep an eye open for a sign and a nostril open for an unearthly stench (for a Korean to describe something as strong-smelling meant it should be clear as day to an American, I reasoned), but I never caught a whiff. It's impossible that I didn't at one time or another walk past a cheonggukjang restaurant, and I could smell other potent edibles just fine. Bundaegi, for example, the roasted silkworm larvae kids were crazy about, haunted street corners and market edges, and its reek was obvious: it smelled like melting tires and burnt hair mixed with mud. But I smelled no cheonggukjang, no delicious shit.

After high school I started waiting tables at a local steakhouse. It was exciting to be challenged at work after spending months mopping floors and stocking shelves at a craft store. Waiting tables was a sudden test of charisma, memory, stamina, and balance, and I was good at it.

During my first month on the job I was required to become certi-

fied by the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission in the safe serving of alcoholic beverages. I spent a Saturday learning about the relationship between weight, blood alcohol content, and metabolism and listening to horror stories about litigation against servers. I learned it was legal for a parent to order a beer and hand it to his or her child, but that it wasn't legal for me to hand alcohol to anyone but a confirmed adult. I learned to work story problems: A 200-pound man drinks a beer, a glass of wine, and a margarita over the course of an hour. He also eats a 16-oz. ribeye, a sweet potato, and a wedge salad drizzled with blue cheese dressing. What is his blood alcohol content and, if he orders another drink, should you serve him?

But more importantly: how big a tip should he leave? I didn't just have to know how to safely serve alcohol; as a server I needed to know how to sell alcohol. For the first time in my life I learned the difference between vodka, tequila, gin, rum, whiskey, and liqueur, and I memorized which brands were our house and which were our premium varieties. I had to learn which mixed drinks contained which kinds of alcohol so that when a guest asked for a Colorado Bulldog I could say, "Stoli or Smirnoff?" and not, "Beefeater or Seagrams?" and look like an idiot. Martinis were served "straight up" (no ice), but could also be made "dirty" (with olive juice), "dry" (with less Vermouth), or "with a twist" (meaning you ran a slice of lemon peel around the rim before twisting it and dropping it in the glass); "neat" meant a shot of alcohol with no mixer or ice. Garnishing drinks became second nature for me—a Corona got a lime jammed in the bottleneck; a Lone Star Iced Tea got a lemon wheel wrapped around a cherry and speared with a plastic sword—and asking about preferences became a reflex: "So that's a Sangria Swirl Meltdown Margarita™ made with our top-shelf Bacardi®, splash of Grand Marnier®, and no salt on the rim? Got it."

I became proficient in carrying long-stemmed martini glasses filled to the rim in the center of a tray balanced on the tips of my fingers, across the restaurant, smoothly around corners, around bumbling guests, and down onto the table without spilling a drop. Same with tall, top-heavy pilsner glasses frothing with draft beer. I kept a wine key in my back pocket and learned how to throw a white napkin over one wrist and present a bottle of White Zinfandel or Pinot Noir to a table: show the bottle to the ordering guest for approval; insert key and remove cork (this is really hard to do while maintaining a single, classy grip—an inexperienced hand tries first to hold the bottom of the bottle and then the top, looking for the best leverage); remove cork from key; present to guest so he can smell it, pretentiously; pour small amount of wine into one glass and give it to guest so he can swirl it, sniff it, swig it back, and nod his approval (as

if that means anything in a suburban, mid-priced steakhouse, not even the nicest on the block); fill the other glasses and then the orderer's glass all while holding the bottle from the bottom, letting the wine slosh just a bit as it pours and then lifting and twisting as you finish each glass; and finally place the bottle on the table with the label facing the guests. Then go check your other tables because you haven't seen them in a while.

I liked being around alcohol, liked feeling natural around it, not having had much practice at home or among friends. I idolized the bartenders a bit, Denver and Gerard, because they knew everything and could wait on the entire bar, the four smoking-section tables, and the thirsty people still waiting at the door—all while making drinks for the other sixty tables, keeping an eye on the basketball game, and sympathizing with whomever needed sympathy. I admired the good feelings among strangers that alcohol seemed to inspire, the camaraderie associated with a common hobby.

I liked being able to recommend a red wine with steak, a white wine with chicken or fish, liked gently upselling to our better brands.

Once in a while someone would ask me my personal preference on a wine or margarita. I'd stumble a bit, slightly embarrassed that I'd never once tasted a single beverage that came from our bar (except perhaps that splash of Captain Morgan ten years before). "I'm only nineteen," I'd say, feeling prudish and feeble, "but many of our guests seem to like the Kendall-Jackson chardonnay."

Once a year or so my sense of smell will break down entirely. I don't know if I'm ill or what, but for a week or ten days I'll only be able to smell one smell. I privately call it the "Edward Scissorhands Smell," because the first time I ever recall smelling it was the night I saw the Tim Burton film of that name. I was 13. My parents had just bought me a sleeping bag in anticipation of a Boy Scout backpacking trip I'd be going on that summer—a mummy bag, they call this kind, because there's only an opening at the top—and I, encased, a chrysalis, hopped into the TV room to watch with my older sisters.

I became hot wearing a bag meant for sub-zero temperatures. The movie was supremely weird. And I noticed that everything smelled funny—not bad, but a little bit sick. The "blah" way my stomach feels in the morning if I think about fudge or cotton candy. Like the memory of vomit or the shadow of nausea. I thought it might be the bag, but the smell remained with me the next day and the next. It made my food taste off and my clothes feel dirty. I'd try to forget about it by breathing shallowly while sitting in class or reading a book, but then I'd forget and take a heavier breath, filling my nose with the scent of sick—it was like being brought out of a daydream by a sudden noise and realizing that life would

never be as good as I could imagine. I've been a little apprehensive of Edward Scissorhands ever since, even after the Smell finally left and life returned to normal.

It seems stupid to attribute such power to a scent, but we all feel this power don't we? It takes only the faintest whiff of something to send us reeling into memories—my aunt's apartment in Manhattan and her cat, Bob; the flat I inhabited one summer in London; my grandparents trailer home. The tiniest trace of car exhaust on a cold day can send me flying back to Seoul, and I'm sure it takes nothing at all—the breath exhaled from a canister of biscuit dough or the cold mist escaping the freezer door—to steep you in years of recollection. Small wonder I live in fear of a smell: our noses are time machines over which we have only limited control.

I'm honestly embarrassed to admit any of this to you. I'm sensitive about my insensitivity, about my wonky sense of smell. Maybe I should be more mature about it, but I really do feel like the kid who's just gotten glasses and knows his friends will see him tomorrow at school. I'm mortified. I'm jealous of those for whom life really is a bouquet of roses. Every week I find myself in a room where someone says, "What's that smell?" and I don't know if they mean "that awful stench" or "that delicious aroma" until they elaborate. Is it me? Do I stink?

And so I go to the store and pump my lungs enthusiastically at the bread and the gum and the marshmallows, happy just to have the fleeting sensation of a full life. The air passing through my nose momentarily excites my broken sense and it flickers, like a poorly wired Christmas light; me, an outcast Rudolph.

I'm likewise embarrassed that I don't know what a cold beer at a baseball game tastes like. That I've never chosen a bottle of wine for a romantic evening. That I've never sipped a piña colada on the beach, nor loosened my tie with a bourbon in hand. I don't even know if these are formative life experiences or clichés.

While Jesus performed miracle after miracle, beginning with the changing of water into wine, John the Baptist did none. John was an ascetic. He scratched out a living in the wild by eating locusts and wild honey; he wore a rough garment of camel's hair. He didn't drink alcohol. He was known for his fasting. Said Jesus: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

These men were contemporaries, were cousins even, were working on the same team for the same end. Both were godly, and both were

ultimately rejected and then martyred for their belief. Why would God direct the one to abstain and the other to partake?

There was another thing I couldn't smell in Korea: drunk breath. Missionaries attract drunks like cheonggukjang attracts flies, and I was no exception. My missionary buddies were always telling me of all the times they'd been kissed by some happy inebriate who proved faster than expected: "The breath, man! I mean, it'd be funny—no harm done—but the breath. It's like death."

It wasn't just in Korea that I'd heard about this; alcohol breath is an old chestnut, the butt of so many sitcom jokes and seventeenth-century sonnets. But it was in Korea that I realized it was missing from my life, that I'd walked the streets for months and talked to countless sots without ever reeling back in disgust. And this prompted another question: How many drunken people had I spoken to without any idea they were drunk? They don't always try to kiss you, and if I couldn't smell the evidence, how could I know who I was speaking with?

God has always given commandments that seem arbitrary or contradictory. He withheld pork from the ancient Israelites, but allowed it to Christian Jews of the New Testament. "Thou shalt not kill" was preceded by the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, and it was followed by the command to Saul to "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

He made John a teetotaler and Jesus a bartender.

To Adam and Eve he gave the Garden of Eden, filled with all the good things he'd made, but he withheld the fruit of one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This presented a problem: life in Eden seemed good—great even—but how could Adam and Eve know it was good unless they ate that fruit? At the same time, how could they come to know good without also experiencing bad: one tree, one fruit, but two consequences. Eat and know how good you got it, but get kicked out for doing so. They seemed stuck between sweet ignorance and bitter bliss.

They ate, the story goes, and it's been a mixed blessing ever since.

One day a few years ago I was visiting home and had arranged to meet some old friends from high school. Autumn and I met at the steakhouse where I had worked, and we got a table in the smoking section next to the bar. Over the course of an hour or so, people from way back when dropped in to chat for a while. Autumn and I got an appetizer to share, and she drank beer and smoked.

Story problem: Autumn, a 130-pound woman, drinks a few beers over the course of "an hour or so." She also has some steak nachos, but

the exact number is unclear because (a) she's also smoking, (b) you're a boy who loves nachos, and (c) Laurence shows up at the same time as the nachos and he is a boy who loves nachos. You're not sure how many "a few" beers is either. And your TABC certification has long expired. When Autumn offers to drive you home do you (a) accept, (b) decline, or (c) forget to even consider whether this is a problem because you can't smell her breath, have little sense of what intoxicated looks like (is it that much different from what Autumn was like as a teenager?), and have never in your life wondered if you yourself were safe to drive, having never had a drink?

I let her drive.

On the way home Autumn went to make a left turn onto a busy, divided, four-lane road (my house was to the right, but I thought it impolite to point out how much we'd all forgotten of our hometown geography in five years) and pulled into the path of an oncoming car. The other driver had the presence of mind to swerve away from our vehicle, smashing at 35 mph into the front, driver's side fender instead of the driver's door. After confirming my own status as safe and unbroken, I looked to Autumn and the other car's passengers—all safe—before it occurred to me that Autumn might've been impaired. There was a 10-foot-tall, concrete barrier wall at that turn that made seeing far to the left difficult, but this wasn't a spot I'd ever seen an accident before. How many beers had she had? How long had we sat at the restaurant?

No one—not the police, not my parents when they showed up, not the driver of the other car—questioned her blood alcohol content, so I let it go. I didn't trust my own judgment, of course, the way I don't trust my sense of smell, so if no one noticed anything odd about her behavior, that was good enough for me.

A large part of our sense of taste—some say up to 90%—is really just our sense of smell helping our taste buds out. So I can't help but wonder whether what I taste as an unbearably delicious combination of sharp cheddar, golden grilled buttered bread, and basil-laden tomato soup is, to someone of full olfactory powers, a life-altering revelation. Whether my predilection for pumpkin and cinnamon is mere child's play, and whether what I experience as a Fourth of July sparkler is, to the gourmet, a full-on fireworks display. Have I been coloring with six faded crayons my whole life while others have hundreds of tints and hues to enjoy?

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "Hmm: seems like this guy's sense of smell works just fine to me. He's spent this whole essay smelling things, things I never even noticed." But that's just it—once I realized I wasn't smelling as much as I should have been, I became slightly

obsessed with smelling in an effort to compensate, like the undergrad who binge drinks to make up for years of parental supervision.

Maybe it's foolish of me to think so much of something so little. After all, I may not actually be missing as much as I think I am; smell and taste, like pain, are subjective experiences. And there's no telling how much trouble I'm spared by not smelling so much—Korea might've been a much different place to me had I a more potent sniffer.

John the Baptist never raised a glass of wine at a wedding, just as I will never pop open a cold beer at a barbeque. Did that bother him? Did he feel like he was missing out on something important in life? Did he see Jesus "eating and drinking" and feel jealous, or did he understand that some things are mixed blessings?

If nothing else, John understood that he didn't understand everything. When Jesus came to be baptized by John, John at first declined, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee."

Jesus' response was more a request than a reason. "Suffer it to be so for now," he said, and that was good enough for John: he suffered him. Maybe John never knew the reason why.

The thing about alcohol that most tempts me is its variety, the sheer number of tastes and smells it promises. Thousands of forms, brands, flavors. Wheat, rice, barley, hops, corn, potato, grape, apple, honey, sugar, juniper berry. Single malt, blended, pure pot still. Cabernet, Chardonnay, Merlot, Shiraz, Pinot gris, Port, Muscatel, Madeira. Jack and coke, scotch and soda, Seven and seven. Hundreds of bottles of liqueur lined up against the mirror behind the bar, creating the illusion of hundreds more. Variety: the spice of life.

Distilling, fermenting, brewing. Mixing and pouring as art forms. Even the glasses are a science. Tall, thin flutes keep the hand's heat from warming chilled champagne; short, broad snifters do just the opposite for brandy. Wine glasses force one to inhale the bouquet when imbibing the wine; aroma is said to be the most important part of a wine's taste: "The nose is fruity with hints of black cherries and raspberries; it has an oaky finish, high complexity, well balanced, soft tannins."

I would like to smell those things, to taste those things. The pub crawl, the wine-tasting, the champagne celebration. I would like die knowing I got to sample everything life had to offer.

By choice and by chance, however, there are some things I will never smell, will never taste.

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