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Christina Chin / Uchechukwu Onyedikam



Advice from a Dive Bar

Alfred Stifsim

The bar was dark like any normal dive you'd expect to see.

A strip of LEDs lit the liquor bottles on the shelf, the colored glow from the jukebox, the smell of stale cigarettes even though smoking indoors had been banned for almost a decade. The kind of place only frequented by industry people and old locals. The kind of place that's always about to go under but you'd never wanna see it get popular and ruin the vibe.

I stepped past the basket of peppermints on a table by the front door, approached the bar, pulled the torn leather seat out, and sat.

Max the bartender with bleached blond hair asked, "Something light as usual?"

I nodded. "Yeah, got any specials tonight?"

"We got Fresh Gold, four bucks a pint. It's a bit hoppy though."

"That's alright. I'll have it."

"Right on," he said as he snapped his fingers and turned to the tap.

"Run a tab?" he asked, turning his head back to me.

"Yep," I replied, pulling at my mustache.

A noise like someone loudly sucking at the bottom of a plastic McDonalds cup erupted from the tap. “Ah shit,” Max said, running fingers through his greasy hair while he poured a large amount of foam from the glass. “Hey, man the keg blew. I gotta go to the back and change it. You can have this while you wait.” He set half a pint of beer in front of me then stepped through a doorway behind the bar.

I grabbed the glass and smelled it, the mix of CO2 and malted barley stung the inside of my nose in a good way. I took a heavy swig. I hadn’t eaten in a few hours, and it went straight to my head with a smile. “Fuck yeah.”

I stood to take off my denim jacket and draped it over the seat, then walked to the jukebox. The display glass was smudged with sticky fingerprints. Pulling out a dollar, I smoothed it, then fed it to the machine. D1; Dead Leaves on the Dirty Ground by the White Stripes. I swallowed the rest of my beer as the opening riff tore from the speakers. When I turned around an old man with a full gray beard and hair to his shoulders had taken my seat.

He smiled at me as I walked up. “This is one is my favorite songs.”

“Excuse me but you’re in my seat,” I said.

“Oh, am I? Sorry, didn’t notice.”

“It’s fine. Can I grab my jacket?”

“Oh, no, no. Have your seat. I must be losing it. Didn’t even notice,” he said with a laugh as he scooted to the next seat over. “You know, I used to come here all the time when I was younger. About your age.”

I smiled at him, to acknowledge the comment but didn’t reply. I wasn’t interested in starting a conversation.

Max returned, set a fresh pint in front of me, then turned to the old man. “What’ll it be?”

The old man pointed to my glass. “That looks pretty good.”



Max poured him one and set it down.

“Thanks, Max,” the old man said in a natural way. Like it was out of habit.

Max leaned back and cocked his head trying to discern if he knew the old man from somewhere, then apparently decided he didn't, shrugged, grabbed a bar towel, and turned away.

The old man lifted his glass with a shaky hand, turned to me and said, “Cheers,” and took a swig.

Nodding, I took a sip and replied, “Cheers.”

“So, what brings you out tonight?” the old man asked.

I exhaled a heavy breath. The kind that was meant to be heard to let the other person know I preferred to be alone, but my Midwest sensibilities still required that I give him an answer. I kept it blunt. “Got nothing else to do.”

“Ah,” He opened his mouth to say more but instead went into a small convulsion as he turned into his elbow to let out an abrasive throaty cough. Slapping his chest, he coughed again, then took a drink. Finally clearing whatever was lodged in his throat he looked back toward me. “No friends or girlfriend?” he asked it like he already knew the answer.

Great. It's gonna be one of those guys. I lamented. Shaking my head, I confirmed his suspicion. “Moved here for work a while ago. Haven't had much time to find either,” I said into my glass.

“Ah, I did the same when I was young. Left my friends and family behind. It's tough.” Turning he coughed again. “Ever wish you could start over, become some kinda geologist, and move to the Amazon or something?”

The muscles in my neck tightened, looking at his face I searched his features with my eyes. “That's exactly what I want. How'd you know?”

His mouth turned to a grin beneath his thick, white bristles.

“Hey, are you two related or something?” Max asked, oscillating his gaze between us.

I twitched at the question. “No, why?”

“I dunno. He looks like he could be your dad.”

The old man chuckled. “I’ll take my bill. He is on me.”

“Sure thing,” Max said.

I pulled at my mustache and looked him over again, feeling bad for trying to brush him off. “Thanks,” I said, taking another drink.

Laying his money on the bar the old man brushed his long hair back and stood. “Here’s some advice, do that thing you wanna do. You won’t regret it.”

He turned for the door but stopped to grab a peppermint. I watched as he put the wrapper to his mouth and pushed the red and white candy through the plastic. Crumpling the wrapper, he shoved it in his pocket and walked out. I could hear his throaty cough as he turned past the front window.

“He seemed like a nice guy,” Max said as he collected his money.

“Yeah, I guess,” I said in a weak voice, thinking on what the old man said.

“Another?” Max asked, pointing at my empty glass.

I nodded and pushed it forward.

Max snapped his fingers and turned to the tap.

I’d almost finished my third beer when the red and blue lights flooded in through the window. I rushed to see what happened. My heart sank. Motionless at the base of a tree was the old man. I ran out the door but one of the officers held up his hand to stop me.

“Go back inside for me, let us do our job,” he said.

“Sean Garvin,” the other officer read the name on the old man’s ID out loud to his partner. “Poor bastard.”

My eyes went wide, my mouth dry. “Sean Garvin?” I asked the officer in disbelief.

“Yes. Did you know him?”

I slowly shook my head no.

“Then please go back inside for me,” the officer repeated.

I think I said something else but can’t remember what it was, I turned and went back into the bar. I stared down into the basket of peppermints. Could he really have had the same name as me? Shaking from my thoughts I took a peppermint from the basket and sat at the nearest table. I gazed at the red and white swirls on the candy for a moment then put the wrapper to my mouth and pushed it through the plastic just as the old man had.



Seasons Change

Daniel Andrée

Many moons ago it seems basking under those bright beams,
where the winding river was O'serene, there lay my thoughts and
my dreams.

The future was grand just like the moon, serenading me with a
blissful tune, my mind was clear and my heart was light, under
the moon of that night.

And as seasons change I still remember, the harvest moon of mid
September, on the placid waters of the Elkhart river, where I
spent my younger days.

Now, I am far away on a similar mid-autumn day, but it's
starker that the times are darker, and the sky is a melancholy
grey.

Although I'm brief when I lament my grief that I miss those
faraway, it does not mean that your beings are less important in
anyway.

So through the dark, let the moon remind us of our kindred
hearts, and of the days we weren't apart, from now till seasons
change.



Winter scenes

Alex Prestia

I

Ignoring the Morning Snow

Covering that jade
town: white morning snow.
Harbinger of calm
northerners unfazed.

Tempestuous as ever
traffic won't blink.
You look at your watch,
confidently stroll away.
Why bother the cold?

II

Guangzhou Starbucks

Her face hard, confident lines
she walks down fake
stone stairs corporate
cup in her hands.
Vehement gait
as the air is cut
by her lacquered nails.

She's mocked me
with withdrawal. Haughty
and above the crowd.
Reminded me that what piques
my slovenliness most of all
is self-assured and beautiful.

III

Ferryman

So I'm sitting there
lost in those lights,
that fake alcohol,
that pretend passion.

It's that idea,
that fantasy.

It's evanescent flashing
a thousand different colors
casual moths to the flame.

It's all for me
It's all for us

Across the table
in your glazed over eyes
complacent on this wretched
pleather sofa.

It's all for you
It's all for me
It's all for us

Only the treacherous lights
are dancing.

I wish the snow had canceled the day.

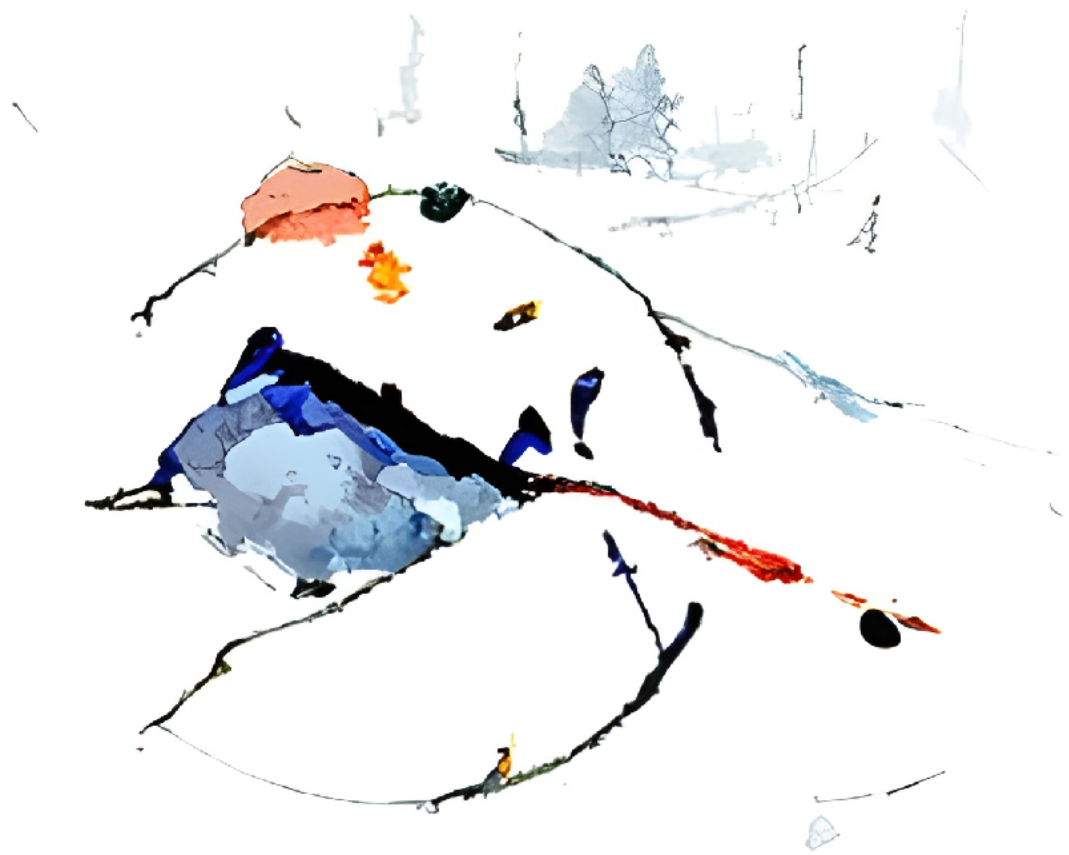




昆明下雪

Daniel Andrée

翠湖边儿望雪花飘下来，吹着吹着慢慢来
翠湖绿，雪很白，使我思考人生的奇光异彩。



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