

## The Typewriter

"Well, what was it? Thievery? Homage? Maybe it is just satisfying. Ka-thud-Click. Ka-thud-Click. Onamonapia, you know?"

"Its loud. And its 7:20 in the morning. And your rhythm is terrible. I'll buy you a metronome," she was playfully annoyed.

I flipped my hair and beat my lashes, mocking her last night at the gangster movie where she flirted with a college-guy concession worker while I buttered up. She was not as stealth as she thought and I teased her all night.

I swiveled in the office chair and channeled James Cagney, "Don't be defensive, sweetheart, or I'll blast you full of lead!" I waved an imaginary Tommy Gun and cigarette ash fell onto the linoleum.

My Cagney was a stretch even with an hour of caffeinating.

She responded by rolling over toward me and folding open the top sheet.

"I guess you'd have to blame Kevin Dean. If you're looking to form a posse."

She pressed the pillow into the wall with the back of her neck and curled her chin under like a fiddle head fern. "Damn you, Kevin Dean," she mumbled into her chest and stretched her arms out straight from her shoulders, parallel to her legs like a human hair pin.

"Foe gully."

"Qua?"

"Poe gilly. Something like that." I took a drag of the cigarette and focused and unfocused my eyes around home row. "That's what the kids called him. It meant perm. His hair curled tight and stood thick when it got long enough—denser'n a humid Armenian.

"The elementary kids would wait for us near the elevator, wait for us to board and then pile on in. Sometimes ten, fifteen of 'em until the max. capacity alarm started to beep-beep-beep. They'd shift and groan while the door opened and closed. Finally some poor kid would get popped out and have to walk up the Hakwon."

"Curly hair," she purred as May danced through our window leaving a glowing, astral path atop the sheet.

"When the doors closed, they could be real kids. You know? No Korean adults. No security cameras. No real teachers. They were primed to go nuts after eight hours of school with six hours of academy to look forward to. Chock full of instant noodles and colorful sugars, stirred in a bus, excited and expanding, suspended in a sealed metal box."

There were a pair of robins frolicking in the patch of grass outside. I had been watching them as I worked for the last week. They must have a nest with some babies to feed in the nearby willow tree. I know they will return to the same tree even after a future July gust will furiously ride their nest into the swamp.

"In the elevator, they would talk ESL schoolyard smack in broken English because of Kevin and me. It was great, prolly the most worthwhile language practice of their day. Poor Guiley and the Golden Monkey."

"I miss your long hair. Like in Puket. Sun bleached blonde. Knotted forearms, tan skin, those oyster calluses on your palm. That ridiculous straw pirate hat. You should grow it out again, darling." She was thoughtful on her back, pillow on her eyes, mouth exposed. "I guess its one of the first things you can say to describe another person in a second language. Eye color. Skin type. Those kind of specifics."

Always the same pair, sharing beak-minced pieces of worms and head-tilt hunting-til one would fly off. The other would follow after a delay reacting to an unseen ionic charge translated into flight by a lover's wing.

"He was the first real writer I knew. Somebody that loved to write, not just an academic who was publishing to get out of tenure purgatory. Kevin Dean lived with it every day like a vice. Kettle by eight thirty, type-writer by nine. Six days a week.

"He lived one floor below me in Mr. Hong's APT, right behind the hakwon." Every morning the churning rice stomach of late nights and soju were hammered deeper into my fitfully waking brain by each keystroke of his typewriter. A phantom hangover rippled from my navel. He wrote as a salute to the sunrise with the efficient stroke-A-stroke-A of a typing pool professional. A story

from Kevin felt like a manuscript or a historical document with creases that needed to be delicately preserved with white cotton gloves.

I wrote late at night by the rushing water drains and the steamy subway exits. I wrote with a green bottle in a park listening to some lonely way-gook on the top floor of Mr. Hong's APT playing sad, old songs about cotton fields and crossed roads. I drank to his songs about loss and despair. I smoked cigarettes with the zombie castes of midnight ajumas and expatriate garbage men who pulled rickshaws full of soggy cardboard and composting-fermenting kim chi cuttings. Squ-Eaksqu-Eak underneath the yellow street lights.

"What did he write about?" she mumbled from slumber's parlor.

"He came to Korea with three bags. The first was a duffel of clothes." I smiled, remembering the first night I caught him predicatively mouthing my words—essentially lip-syncing to our conversation—drinking Hite from paper cups, playing cribbage outside 7/11.

"The second was a framed backpack he'd had through Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; full of paperbacks. The treasures of American Alexandria, from Hemingway to Fitzgerald to Kerouac. He gave me a collection of Russian short stories, of which *The Signal* was my favorite."

A rebellious muscle in her forearm conspired with a rogue neuron to fire. She was tugged again over the threshold and commented, "That poor old man and his bloody arm. Freezing to death in the snow as the train sped by whOo-oosh whoo-oOsh."

I lifted my eyes from the keyboard first to the beauty asleep and then the robins romancing. "What did your friend, Kevin Dean, write about?" She asked again, sounding more alert.

"He conspired with that damned machine. Every morning, nine A.M, he pounded away humid stories of sultry languish; of floating atop Florida's mangrove swamps; of glistening Cuban siestas while husbands worked; and he wrote of wise old men who sold fishing tackle; and of children and their pets." I trailed off to recollect.

I thought about an old man that I met outside of Albert Lea, Minnesota. I was alone with a guitar and was happy to find his lodging affordable and quiet. Upon checking in, I asked if he often played the ornate upright piano which graced the lobby. He lifted the stub of an amputated left arm, to affect, mock-pointing over my shoulder toward the closed, dusty music box. "My wife used to play. But she's dead now. I think I'm going to break it down into firewood. You ever go camping up by Detroit Lakes?"

"Go back to sleep dearest, I'm almost done. And when I finish, I'll bring you fresh chicory coffee, sliced honey mangoes and cranberry chutney. We'll wrap ourselves in the mid-day sunshine and nap. Of course, first we will take time to curse Kevin Dean together."