

Short Fiction

“There is no greater agony
than bearing an untold story
inside you.

- Maya Angelou

Baby Blue

George Nevgodovskyy

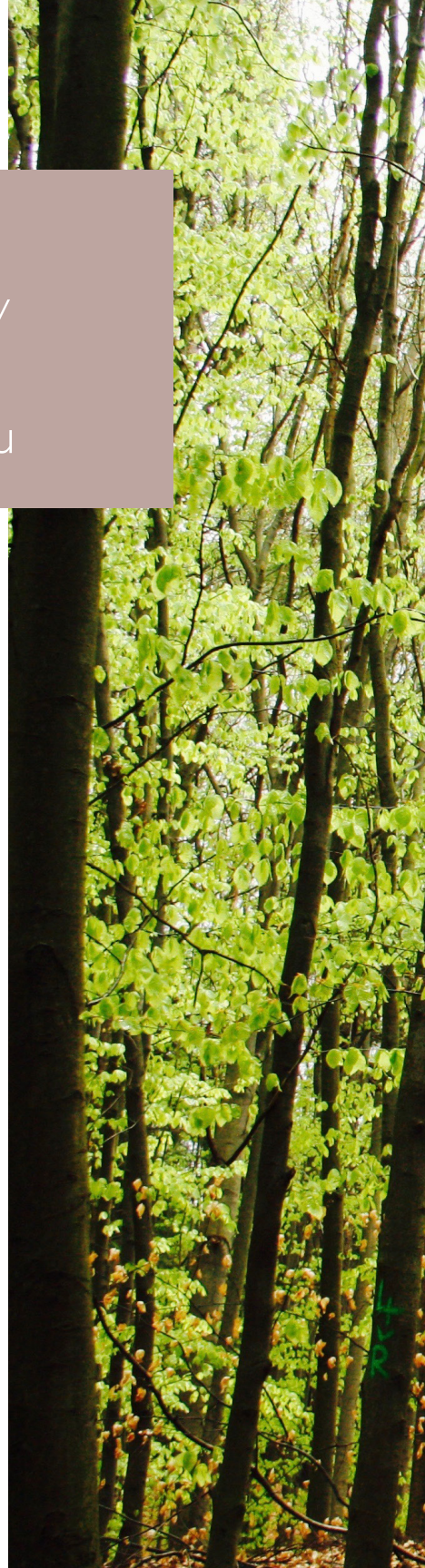
He watched as she turned her wedding ring around and around her finger from across what seemed like miles of kitchen table that stretched between them. They'd been sitting like this for an indeterminable amount of time when suddenly Mia got up to pour both of their mugs of tea down the sink, like she'd just remembered that she had stirred cyanide into them instead of sugar.

“In the wintertime here you can't forget about your tea for a minute without it getting cold,” she said into the black hole of the drain as she rinsed out the cups and filled a fresh kettle of water to boil – luxuriating in the mindless and mundane world of food and weather before he would inevitably begin to drag her back into a different world of memories and sadness and regret and consequences.

But which part of it did she regret? She saw the clock on the microwave and realized that Grant would be coming home in an hour. She couldn't imagine that Matty would be staying that long. On top of the microwave was a copy of Thérèse Raquin with a sushi takeout menu marking her page. The baby monitor stood beside it with a tiny, green light indicating that it was on.

“You got your sleeve filled in,” Matty said, stupidly, unable

Continue...



to help himself. "Did it hurt?"

"Yes. But in a good way. I wanted a different pain to take my mind from...that other one," she said as she stirred sugar into her mug so vigorously that the boiling tea splashed onto her wrist and scalded her skin. "Fucking shit."

"You alright?"

"I'm fine."

Mia licked the sugary tea from her skin but it didn't taste sweet at all. She felt like she was losing her fucking mind.

"Why did you come here, Matty?"

"I wanted to see how you were."

"Well, go ahead and look," she said as she set their teas down on the table, knowing that they would probably suffer the same fate as the previous ones did. Grant could be home earlier if the traffic is clear. God, why did Matty have to come here?

Matty looked, just as Mia told him to. He knew that she wanted him to see how much she'd changed - her haircut, her sleeve, her thin arms that protruded out of her sleeveless blouse, a hole in her lip where a piercing used to be. But Matty still saw her in the only way that he could, the way she looked when they first met: her long hair a washed-out shade of purple, a stud in her lip catching the sun, an unfilled tattoo sleeve running down her arm, her fingertips yellowed by nicotine spinning her wedding ring around and around just as she was doing now.

"Do you wish you'd never met me?" he asked.

Before she could answer there was a sound that emerged from the baby monitor, dissonant and sudden like a distant car crash. Mia sprang up without thinking and ran up the stairs to



the room that had been the nursery. He followed behind her.

The first thing he noticed was that the crib was still there - all decomposed and stripped down to its jagged wooden skeleton. The fresh coat of baby blue paint on the walls almost made Matty sick. The other baby monitor was propped up on a little table in the corner, identical to the one that stood in the kitchen. The sound that had called Mia up here had been a fallen bookcase, spilling Hemmingway and Irving and Zadie Smith onto the carpet. And that was where he found her, crouched down and despondently picking the books back up.

"We get these little tremors here sometimes that rattle the walls. You can barely feel them, but the house can."

He knelt down to help her, their bodies closer than they'd been in years.

"Why do you still keep it on?" he asked.

"It's hard to kill habits. Or maybe I'm just scared to try."

There was a still silence. Neither of them moved.

"I wish I could've seen him," he said.

She realized she wished for that too.