

Crossing the Illinois River at Sunset

By Scott Andrew Fack

This is how I will always remember you: your arms resting on your car's roof; you grinning at me; a small American flag on the ferry's mast flapping in the spring breeze as the Illinois River meanders all around us. Sunset goldens your skin, tinges the tips of your black hair auburn, pirouettes in your aquamarine eyes.

I tuck my hands behind my elbows. "Aren't you cold?"

"Not really," you answer in your sing-song accent, your smile steadfast.

This river's like many others in the state it's named for: a massive volume of muddy water inching towards the Mississippi. As a born and bred Chicagoan, I find hundreds of smelly semi-stagnant streams feeding into a multitude of murky malodorous rivers pedestrian. You act like it's the best river you've seen in your entire life.

I let you savor the moment.

"You're not enjoying this."

A non-committal smile rises on my face. "I'm fine."

You return to absorbing the scenery.

As the ferry passes midriver, the sun disappears, the world greys, and your washed-out words land between us. "Maybe we should try again."

"Again." I glance away, imagining where the Mississippi and Illinois converge, the eddies whirlpooling. "Three times not enough for you?"

Water lapping against the ferry fills our conversational gap.

You empty it. "You know how I feel about you."

"It's not always apparent."

You shrug. "Discretion is important, yes?"

My heart surges stronger with every beat. "I don't want to do this anymore."

"We're almost there." You nod towards our destination. "Oh." Your smile sets on your face.

The ferry slows as we approach the shore, Route 108 disappearing over the ridge before us. I fold my arms against the car roof and rest my head on top. "Please. Just take me home."

THE END