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Under Blue Blankets

Abstract

You're straight, right? says a lean black man
in a Subway on Mass Ave by the Orange

Line stop as you fill up a cup with ice
and Sprite.

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Under Blue Blankets

by Matt W. Miller

You're straight, right? says a lean black man
in a Subway on Mass Ave by the Orange

Line stop as you fill up a cup with ice
and Sprite.

Yes, you say before the question
has really set in

before you have had time to consider
other answers, other possibilities.

You are 23, from a mill town,
you played ball, you like breasts and ass

but perhaps there is a wonderful other
world to love,

to hug, to press lips to lips and linger
at the luxury of a kiss.

What a waste, he says and smiles and turns
to the door, a bike at his side, a Coke

in his long fingered hand.
And was it a waste? Was there a moment

you should have walked after him,
asked him why, why a waste?

And maybe you would have walked
a few blocks with him

and maybe you didn't go back to work
that day but grabbed

a beer at Bukowski's and maybe you
went back to his place, felt a hand

slide to your cock. Or maybe
you waited a couple of days and

then went back to his place.
Maybe his was a kiss

you never knew existed, a kiss
that touched a different type of tender.

Maybe he showed you the gentle
in a man's thick hands,

thighs. And maybe you always wanted
a hug as hard as your own

and so you talk to your girlfriend,
your mom, your dad, your brothers.

Years will need to happen until
the two of you eat turkey and gravy

with them but it would happen
and the two of you will buy flatware

and build shelves in an apartment
and you'll try to write as he gets up

to go to work. *Children? I don't know.*
We start that talk but never

finish. We drink wine, the Walking Dead
is on and we joke sad and silly

about the zombie straight.
He will have taught me to love his beard,

his stink after a workout. Does he want more?
Does he want a nice house in JP?

We enjoy cliché, think it so kitsch. We laugh
at ourselves but kiss deep

after the vows in Cambridge
on that wonderful summer Sunday.

What will he be doing? A waiter?
An architect? A fire fighter. Yes, a fire fighter,

Engine 28, and he stays strong and lean
but lets me get fat filling out

forms for fellowships so I can write
the books that no one buys and

he says one day *Why not a novel*
like the one Sheryl wrote? Now she's on TV

and you are so much cuter than she is
but the way he says it is somehow

not as true as it once was. You are not
so cute as those cuddling moments

in the bedroom we shared that winter
we couldn't pay for heat

so we rubbed sticks together
under baby blue blankets and at *baby*,

as I retell that story, I balk
and he pretends not to notice. I say

something about kids and he says
he wants to go out, *Let's go out*,

we never go out and I say *you go*,
I have edits to do and he does and comes

home late and smells of someone else
but you don't ask because, well,

because you should have gone out
you never go out and the way he lies down

with his back to your back hurts, hurts
deeper than anything you've ever known

because something has changed, something
cold kicks in the blue blankets

even as he whispers something
about adoption before passing out

in the musky darkness. In the morning
you go out alone to a diner

to get eggs and coffee and you and see
the girl you dreamed about one night

in college, a dream you did not realize
you remembered until you see her and

in the dream she had on a red sweater
and black jeans and here she is, black jeans,

a red sweater. Her eyes hold yours.
You don't drop them like you always do.

She will look at you with a smile that crushes
you like a stepped on thing. You talk and joke

about things you knew and things that happened
since. You feel this pulling in your arms,

shoulders, a desire to touch her cheek,
her hair, as if you had done so

a million times before, something old
and familiar and you see it cross her eyes too

for just a second. Then it's gone. You ask
if she's still married and maybe she is divorced

but the kids are great and maybe she'll ask
about him and you'll say yes.

She'll joke and say what a waste
and she'll laugh and you'll laugh too.

You'll exchange numbers but never call.
You'll go home and he will be there.

I'm sorry, he says and *I'm sorry too*,
I say and then the clumsy kiss, goofy hug.

He makes us lunch and we talk
like we haven't talked in years.

Matt W. Miller is the author of the poetry collections *Cameo Diner* and *Club Icarus*, which won the 2012 Vassar Miller Poetry Prize. He is a former Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University and has published work in *Slate*, *Harvard Review*, *Memorious*, *Poetry Daily*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Rumpus* and other journals. He teaches English and coaches football at Phillips Exeter Academy.