Moving On

by Tyler Koch

The woman finished packing her things as the man walked in. They looked at one another for a long moment.

"So," said the man.

"So," agreed the woman. She turned and continued packing.

The man set his briefcase on the ground and took a seat on the bed. His eyes found the lake through the closed window, seeing the breeze send ripples across its surface.

"Are you not going to say anything?" asked the woman.

"I don't know what else there is to say." His eyes remained on the lake. "There's nothing left."

The woman zippered her suitcase shut and set it on the ground, moving to the closet and pulling various pieces of clothing from hangers. She draped the shirts and pants and dresses over her arms like defeated things.

"Your shoes too," said the man. "The ones you keep hidden behind the sweaters."

The woman paused a second as if to consider, then bent over and found her shoes. They had been an anniversary present all those years ago.

"And your fleece."

"Yes. Thank you," she said. The woman set her things on the bed and began folding. The man watched without saying a word.

"How was work?" she asked.

"Oh. Fine."

"I didn't think you'd be home this early."

"Rick wasn't in and I really didn't have much else to do."

Their conversation fell flat like a punctured balloon, the precious air escaping faster than the will to stay inflated. Had it always been like this? The woman couldn't remember now. What it

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had been like before. It seemed so long ago, the old pictures like staring at someone else's life. Their doppelgängers. Once upon a time things had been different.

“You could take that if you want.” The man gestured to a picture on the dresser and the woman shook her head.

“No. That's fine.”

“Ok.”

The man's eyes wandered again to the lake, seeing a pair of paddle boarders glide smoothly across the surface. Teens by the look of them, both tan and tall. They looked to be smiling. The boy splashed water on the girl and she retaliated by trying to knock him off his board.

“I wish I knew a better way to do this,” said the woman, continuing to fold.

“It's alright,” said the man. “I don't mind.”

And that was the heart of it. He really didn't. He didn't mind, didn't care. Apathetic and listless. Flat lined emotion, no crags or valleys, climbs or falls. She loved that about him at first, his stoicism. Clear headed during her periods of calamity.

“I could have waited until tomorrow,” she continued.

The man nodded but said. “It's alright.”

But she relished the storm, the ups and downs that came with intimacy. The yelling and fighting and pleading and loving. She rode the wave because it was the most natural thing for her to do. Fire and ice. Wealth and famine. She wanted both. Needed both.

The man stood and went to the bathroom, shutting the door. The vent whirred. Quietly the woman walked over and took the picture from the dresser, placing it in the front compartment of her suitcase. She finished folding the batch of clothes and set them off to the side and walked into the closet to grab a duffle bag. The folded clothes went into the bag. She started on the dresser next, opening the top drawer.

The man returned, the tie around his neck loosened and the top button undone. He scratched the back of his neck and sat in

the same spot as before. The paddle boarders continued circling the lake. The girl fell behind and the boy stopped to wait for her.

“The bottom drawer too,” said the man.

“I know,” she said.

That was his way, always reminding. Since the first date when she'd forgotten her wallet. Since the second date when she'd forgotten the name of the band they were seeing. Since all their years of marriage. He'd been there to fill the gaps.

“I'll try not to take anything that's yours. I'm sorry if I do.”

“Oh, that's alright. I probably have too many things anyway.”

Too many things. Too many thoughts. So few words.

“I'm almost done. I'll be gone soon.”

“Is Mary coming to get you?”

“Yes.”

“That's good.”

The woman stopped her rummaging and took a deep breath. “Is it good?”

The man folded his hands and smiled sadly. “If that's what you want, then yes, it is good.”

“Not what I want. We. What we want.”

“Ok.”

“Ok.”

She continued sorting through the drawer, bunching socks in her hand. She came across a picture buried beneath, a black and white photograph of the two of them on their honeymoon. The shot was taken from the side, the happy couple turned and beaming to the camera. Who were those people who seemed so happy? Where had they gone? She left the picture flipped upside down at the bottom of the drawer and put her socks in the duffel bag.

That was it. She took a breath to steady herself and saw the man looking to the lake. The paddle boarders swam in the water,

their boards floating idly to the side. The girl wasn't a great swimmer and had a hand on the boy for support.

“She's pulling him under.”

The woman nodded. “Good thing for the life vest.”

She took a moment to look at him, the man sitting on the bed before her. This was it, maybe the last time, and she wanted to remember. Wrinkles creased his forehead, gray streaked his hair. His shoulders weren't as broad as they used to be. He walked slower than before. But his eyes were unchanged, the same glint they had when she laughed at a joke he told all those years ago. His mannerisms, the way he danced, the slight lisp only she heard when he talked too fast. Those were the memories that haunted her the most.

“Goodbye,” she said.

“Goodbye,” said the man.

He didn't follow her down the stairs or out the front door. Mary waited for her in the driveway. The trunk of the car was open. The woman loaded her suitcases and bags and thanked Mary for coming.

“I won't hear about it,” said Mary. “Come. Off we go.”

She didn't know why she did, but her eyes found their way to their bedroom window. The man stood there with his hands in his pockets, the tie hanging loosely from his neck. She wanted to wave but didn't.

“Coming?”

“Yes,” answered the woman.

She held his gaze just a moment longer.

Then she got into the car and closed her eyes as Mary pulled out of the driveway, turning right at the stoplight and disappearing amongst the throng of rush hour traffic.