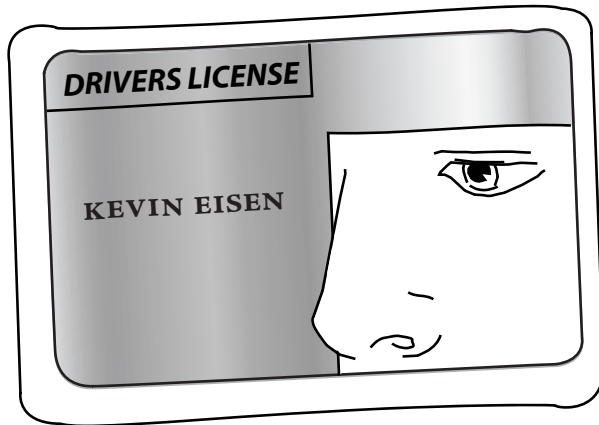


For a Bouncer

BY



Some bouncer downtown just turned down my ID. My real ID with my picture on it. I'm from one of those crap states like Vermont and New Jersey with the IDs everyone else has. I got that license the summer I turned sixteen and I've waited five years to use it. Now some loser with a baseball cap and a GED tells me I can't.

This guy had a thick neck and those lips that stick out a little bit all the time, like the caricature of a fat baseball umpire. Whatever he looked like, he turned me down, asked to see something else. This never would have happened in Europe. I gave him my ATM card, and he told me to take a walk.

They let me in across the street,

but I didn't care. The crowd there was too old, and I walked in one side, straight past the bar, out the back door to the garden patio, and out the back gate. It was raining pretty hard, so the outside was empty.

I always do this. Wait until after to say what I should have said. I should have gone to the cops, that's what I should have done. I should have held up the line or something. Something.

I had to circle the block to get back to my car without passing in front of that goddamned bar again. But what the fuck ever. Things haven't been right since I got back—I spent five months of my last school year overseas—and it's probably

better that I get home while I can still drive there. I have a case of beer in the fridge. I figure I'll get drunk at home and work that fat lump over on the keyboard.

I walk around the corner through the puddles, letting first my shoes and then my socks soak through and splash up my pant legs. Before I left last year, people knew me here.

It's hard to explain, but I was that guy, that guy everyone knew. Even when someone didn't, I was able to somehow transfer the confidence of knowing that they should into conversation. Who knows why me, but I'm telling you I could talk to people with a sense of entitlement back then. I could walk up to anybody, anyone at all, and talk about anything I liked. That sense is part of what made me feel more normal back then. That's not something that exists for me anymore.

I walk past my car in the public lot and turn up the street toward home as the rain bounces off my head. There was a time when I walked for hours like this through Paris, rain dripping off my nose and my hair and into the back of my coat and down my neck. I walked for hours, through streets and alleys and over and back across the Seine two, three and four times at least. I don't remember. It's the same feeling though. That foreign

feeling. Walking past buildings, people, signs, all of them meaningless, all of them deaf.

They forgot about me when I left, forgot how important I was. This schmuck at the bar is just the latest extension. My pants are starting to stick to the fronts of my legs. I sidestep into a patch of mud.

I'm not dealing so well with this anonymity. When I was well known, well liked even, I could toss my associations around like salt over shoulders—names, dates, relationships... these were other people's priorities. It seems that back when I was important, other people didn't have to be.

I don't know anyone here anymore. I never made the effort. I don't know whether to leave the house, and if I do leave the house, I don't know where to go. The places I used to spend my time feel empty to me now. They feel unimportant.

I drop my coat in a wet crumple by the door and set my wallet and keys down on the table beside it. I've lost my place here. I've set aside and closed a massive book with no chapters on a Sunday afternoon and come back to it drunk on a Wednesday morning. It's ridiculous, I know, but my mark here is fading. Maybe it's already gone.

And I'd so looked forward to coming back to this place. I guess I'd taken it for granted that it would look forward to me.