

Their Story

By **Stuart Dybek**

They were nearing the end of their story.
The fire was dying, like the fire in the story.
Each page turned was torn and fed
to flames, until word by word the book
burned down to an unmade bed of ash.
Wet kindling from an orchard of wooden spoons,
snow stewing, same old wind on the Gramophone,
same old wounds. Turn up the blue dial
under the kettle until darkness boils
with fables, and mirrors defrost to the quick
before fogging with steam, and dreams
rattle their armor of stovepipes and ladles.
Boots in the corner kick in their sleep.
A jacket hangs from a question mark.

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Stuart Dybek is a masterful short story writer as well as poet. The qualities that distinguish his fiction—a strong connection to place, particularly his native Chicago, childhood nostalgia tinged with irony, a meandering narrative pace, and an ability to find beauty amid urban blight—also characterize much of his poetry. Few writers have captured street life as movingly as Dybek. The son of a Polish immigrant, he has published two critically acclaimed books of short stories, *The Coast of Chicago* and *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*, as well as a collection of linked stories: *I Sailed with Magellan*. He teaches at Western Michigan University and lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan.