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La Rue Paradis

JUAN ANTONIO MIRANDA

Ivan stared blankly at the horizon, freckled with tall figures, where the sea interchangeably kisses the sky *bonjour* and *bonsoir*. He saw the caramel eyes of her cold face. "Where do we go from here?" With grim curiosity Ivan wondered what lay beyond the ledge under his feet.

Clouds amassed over the erect buildings eyeing him like indifferent jurors. The wind howled in protest and thoughts cluttered his head. Anxiety tailored him a suit of tension. "Here comes the migraine," said Ivan, as he groped his face, wiping away beads of despair. He then combed his charcoal curls with his fingers. It was a habit he had first developed when the migraines commenced their blitzkrieg sometime in July.

The now quelled September breeze caressed him with a song fit for a siren's voice, specifically targeting the heart's ears. He shivered. His nervous hands ached for the reassurance of a cigarette between his fingers. His lips quivered for its noxious kiss. Reaching into his left jeans pocket, a pack met his hand and a stick was plucked. Mechanically, Ivan exhaled billows of woe towards the horizon.

He flicked the butt towards the street, the wind instructing it how to dance amidst its descent towards the sidewalk. A sudden burst of wind dispersed the hovering clouds in a surfeit of rage, as a lion does a flock of vultures scavenging a carcass.

"That should be me," he thought, recalling that Saturday long since passed with Arianid.

The disconsolate waves greeted the shore as if the certainty of their first embrace was never retained. The sun, dressed in clouds, was half-mast. Ivan and Arianid lay, their bodies like entangled yarn, beneath a blue towel. Wrapped in tender affection, they were an island in a sea of sand.

Ivan pulled himself back to his ocean of solitude, his body numb and entwined within the ripples of his thoughts, hidden

from the moon's reach and oblivious of the distant pockets of light speckled across the sky. The last words whispered in Ivan's ears that flitted from Arianid's thin, pink lips were like a butterfly's search for the right flower. Motionless atop their island, Arianid – with eyes closed and chin pressed against Ivan's left breast, the warmth of her breath stroking his neck – whispered: *“Entre la luna y el mar te deseo confesar que el sinónimo de alegría sumamente la descubrí sólo en tu sonrisa.”*

Ivan could no longer bear the apparition. His arms vainly flounced in attempt to dismiss the image. He opened his eyes and stared at the distant sidewalk.

That day remained a stain in Ivan's memory, an ink blotch bleeding through a pad of paper. There is no way to quell the anarchy of the mind. Within the beauty of the mind lies the abstract notion of time, where past memories, current thoughts, and future aspirations comele within an arbitrary framework, where one realizes, though may not always understand, the futility of control outside the realm of one's own decisions and actions where one confronts the realization that in most – if not all – instances, *why* is an easy question to ask, but not necessarily one with a simple, adequate, and prompt response.

Ivan's tic resurged with ignited fervor. His gnawing teeth resembled a symphony of rusted gears grinding in a mill.

The image refused to be dismissed. Arianid's blood-curdling screams following the gunshot clawed Ivan's mind like nails dragged across a wooden floor. The horrifying screenplay rolled the same reel over and over within the cinema of his mind. It always ended with that stunned and pleading look on her face before the body went limp.

He opened his eyes again. The wind ceased its shrieks and stroked Ivan's bearded face. The sound of silence lulled his restless soul. From the twenty-third floor, Ivan studied the ants.

Perhaps, he thought, we are all ants, drones partaking in

this imposed and constructed reality, waking in search of attaining that repugnant dream dear to so many – perpetually in pursuit – hoping these material goods will satisfy our desiring hearts, will amend our open sores and thrust us into the arms of happiness on La Rue Paradis.

Inebriated by the nectar of pathos, Ivan yearned to self-impose his exile. Hope sprouts no fruit in this desert, gives life to no organism that dwells here. Despair asphyxiated him to the degree of dementia. He wanted to escape, even if it meant undressing the mind of its body or the body of its mind. Who truly knows the essentiality of our being and the meaning of our existence? Is there even a universal meaning? We are all diseased, of that much we can be certain, the contagion – life. A cure awaits – death. Some dress in scrubs and heal others, themselves too. Others endure the symptoms until they succumb. The rest submit themselves to false hopes devoid of any reason. Shrouded in ignorance, they frolic in the entrapments of their sightless faith.

Ivan considered the defeat he must accept should he leap. Is it right to put an end to this all? The end inevitably comes, eventually. No debt evades time, especially those owed to the cold scythe. But, he thought, isn't all being relative to existence? That is, if I were to perpetually close my eyes, all Being, relative to me, would cease. Yet, pondered Ivan, I am not the sole person of Being. If death were to embrace my desire with its calm, would not others reminisce about me, though my existence, relative to me, is void? Am I too egocentric to believe that my death brings about the devastation of actuality? Isn't the human being wholly, if not minutely, driven by ego? Certainly it is uncertain what constitutes the relationship between relativity and universality, but why let anxiety drape the indiscernible? Quietude arrives through suspension, never through hassle.

“Two roads diverged in the woods,” and from them, forking paths. But, which one will Ivan toddle upon? Must he step to the pavement below, or tread back to the door?

Silence sank its jagged claws into Ivan's shoulder – the onyx cardigan cloaking his slender body proved too thin a coat of armor – as a gargoyle would perch itself atop a ledge. Captive for seconds – perhaps months, even decades – Ivan finally, or instantly, for Being is no juror of time, clenched his arms, avoiding his habitual tick.

Scarlet-stained eyes, pink-rimmed lids, mahogany colored pupils. A lone tear surveying the texture of his left cheek. Mucus protruding from the nostrils.

In Ivan's mind looped Prufrock's thought: "In a minute there is time for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." In his final embrace with despair, Ivan understood the severity of his condition. It was as if an unwanted burden had been cast upon him, he the mule to carry it, inhibiting his thoughts and acquainting him with his task. Who knew what would become of him? Perhaps, solely he. Though we live this life and feign to devise morality, we do not qualify as judges, merely as prosecutors, defendants, and witnesses.

Ivan whispered to the mute audience of space, buildings, and empty souls: "Let the breath of the wind enter my scarred lungs and dictate the actions of my stained hands. If I am to be exiled from life, let it be by my means, and let my actions, as well as my known thoughts, constitute my definition. My mind is set." The wind sighed with relief as Ivan took a step...