

Balconies

by Brian Michael Barbeito

The woman had purchased green grapes and it was still the early morning as they sat out on the balcony watching the sea crash on the shore and then roll out again. The tiles and the furniture, the walls and even the windows under the hurricane shutters had all been affected by the salt air, and though still confident, were weathered and faded now. Where the once beautiful and popping yellow of the chairs juxtaposed the white of the chairs, there were now these two colors that almost matched, a broken sort of yellow, a color called 'once yellow' and a disheartened white, saddened by storm and also the bleaching and unforgiving sunlight that so many worshipped. But the salt air was good when it wafted to the man and the woman's noses, and her hair was a golden brown and parts of it shined like honey in a bottle when the sun would strike it. The man's hair was dark, and he winced in the sunlight, and looked out almost always to the sea, and it was as if the sea promised to tell them something, but it did not.

"Look up there, to the next building, they are still there," said the woman, motioning lightly towards two men that sat on the highest floor balcony peering at the ocean with binoculars and a still intent.

"Ya they are there always, and I think one only goes in to use a washroom once and a while," and the man pulled a grape, examined it, and ate it, then looked out upon the sea once more, noting that it was starting to rain. And in an instant the rains began and pounded the dry sand in order that it would be heavy and clumping, darker and uninviting. In a few brief moments the entire sky became full of this wetness and greyed to the point of almost blackening, and it was a Sunday morning, and the man thought that thoughts were strange things, because he had a piercing epiphany that there was no God, because the rain would not seem so malevolent on a Sunday morning if there was a God. He knew that his logic was not logic at all, but felt the rightness of the epiphany, a reverse sort of epiphany,

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and it did not hurt, and though a piercing, it did not sting, and he reached again for some grapes and ate them.

"They are waiting for drugs...that is what they are doing," intoned the woman.

"Probably."

"And they are patient."

"They are patient. It is important. They have to watch well to see."

The woman looked as if she had solved a mystery, and pulled her coffee cup up to her mouth. She was in her late thirties, and beautiful because of her dimples and brown eyes that looked like a deer's eyes, but also because she was confident in her movements and always knew what clothes to wear or what to do in the situations that are difficult where everyone really wants to be around someone that knows what to do. "Well, do you want to go to church?" And as she said this she glanced up at the men on the balcony again and covered herself with a shawl to protect from the rain that was being swept in by the wind.

"No."

And then there was movement from the binocular balcony, and a third man, one not seen before, appeared beside the other two, and one of the men with the binoculars started yelling to the others and waving his hands, though it could not be heard what he was saying. The other two men were then disappearing behind the inside of the doorway while the first man giving the orders kept yelling, as if to birds or to the sky, and anyone watching him at that moment and not before would have only seen a man alone on a balcony yelling to the ocean.

Out at the bottom of the apartment the other two men soon appeared, and were running. The rain increased and the storm was angry, and one of the men tripped on the wet sand but got up right away. They ran to the ocean about two hundred feet away and then started racing back and forth in different directions. Then they would each change directions and run again towards one another.

Up top the man with the binoculars was yelling, but there was no way they could hear him because the storm was too loud. There was nobody around, and the once crowded beach appeared like a forgotten place, a place that nobody had in fact ever gone to, and now only man o'war, the odd driftwood, and the muddy brown and heavy sand remained. Out in the distance was a large ship, but it was now blocked by view, and it moved but did not appear to move. If you could see it, you could only mark its progress by waiting and measuring how far it had changed in accordance to where you were standing, the way people measured stars. And the ship would seem also like a jet that doesn't move or a fan that is moving very fast, but the men were not as fast or distant as to appear still. The men moved frantically and this could be seen.

“Did they get anything?” said the man with the grapes.

“No. But it is there somewhere. Must be. The one up top is going crazy.”

Then one of the men appeared with a large package hoisted up on top of his shoulder, and was able to run across the beach in a diagonal line to the building. The package appeared black, black like the night with no stars, and that is when the woman was surprised to find out that she had thought they would be holding something white, though she did not know she thought this until she saw that it was black. The second man on the beach followed the first man, and now they were as two soaked towels, and they disappeared into the building with the package. Up top, the yelling man had disappeared and now the balcony looked lonely in its vacancy, as did all the other balconies and most of the area. At the same time the sea looked well in its bareness, and was absorbing and part of the storm, two friends in violent agreement, the sea and the sky.

The man and the woman stood and looked longer, and one of the shutters flew open. The man reached over and closed it, affixing the latch again, and the woman fixed the strands of her hair that were falling into her eyes from the wind, by placing them over her ears, and said, “Let's go inside, the show is over...”

Inside they listened to the wind, and outside the stucco walls and the palms made a strangely beautiful picture together, while in the front of the building the rain would ricochet off of stairs, cars, posts, and lights. Day had been turned into night, and the hurricane season was proclaiming its rights. It rained through that day and into the next, but mid-way on the second day the rain lessened and the sun shone. Large water drops stayed on the bright yellow newspaper boxes and on the recently painted strong white lines that designated the parking spots on the black asphalt grounds.

