

le Misérable

by Fred Osuna

I read the last line and close the book with a smack. “That ends that section,” I tell him. “Coming up is the chapter titled ‘The Ancient History of the Sewers of Paris.’ We’ll read that tomorrow.”

He doesn't reply. I know he's not asleep. I set the book under the nightstand where I'll find it the next day. I grab the remote and turn the television on. I find “Jeopardy” and turn up the volume. He stares straight ahead at the screen.

I make a few phone calls from the chair beside his bed. It's hard to hear - Alex is talking loudly - so I compete. The old man doesn't seem to notice. I change the channel. It's an old Bogart flick. He watches it, no flinching, no emotion.

When the movie ends, I rifle through the CDs. There's a Mahler 2nd, the cover a beautiful art deco mosaic. I slip it in the boombox on the bureau, turn it up high so I can hear the soft parts clearly. Is he listening?

The back door opens — it's Marti, back from grocery shopping. I shout a Hello, go help her unload the bags. We chat over the music, which is booming down the hallway from the bedroom.

Finished, I go to his room. I tell him I'm going. “See you at noon,” I yell in his ear, so he'll hear me. He stares forward. I leave.

The old man closes his eyes and thinks of smiling. In silence.

