Sacre Something

by Johnny Dantonio

The youngest of the San Franciso sisters left us early to smoke hash from an apple with their tour guide from earlier in the day. The brunette twin is fading, clinging to her impulsive, Australian romance by the nape of his neck; nuzzling, her lips about his throat with slow, sharp kisses; with implications. They are seated on the right half of the futon. I'm on my island of the left.

Amanda sits in a chair close to me. She is tall, and freckled by the sporadic sun that has blessed my entire trip abroad. Her smiling lips veil her teeth. She rolls her eyes and winks at me after looking at her twin's attempt at love or lust or fulfillment. Amanda needs no such silliness - her roommate of a boyfriend has been faithful to her for six years. Her ringless left hand holds a glass steady as she empties what's left into the merlot bottle.

Both the remaining sisters had studied in Spain when they were younger - Sevilla. Amanda adds Coke Zero to the drink and hands it to me.

“I'm sooo taking this home with me,” I laugh to thank her.

“Yeah? I better get credit,” she smiles.

The inflated lovers slide out. Amanda and I sit. I ask things you shouldn't ask a stranger. She doesn't budge.

“So is the lack of a ring significant? And if not, is ‘you not being ready' some sort of mechanism?” I chuckle into the glass as I trail off.

“No, not at all. He's great. We're great. It's so strange how comfortable you can get with someone after so long, you know?”

Her posture informs me how much more sober she is than me. Her answer is agitating, expected; exasperating. I turn my glass up.

“Welp. That's about that. It was great to meet you, madam. You guys have safe travels and what not, and we'll see each other on the interweb there, buddy.”

She is startled by my abruptness, or my inability to stand up straight without the crutch of the futon rail.

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“Oh.... Okay...” she somewhat asks.

I hug her with one arm and slide down the pitch black stairwell, feeling the wall the whole way down. I am whistling “Always on my mind”.

I stop at the market on the way home in total disregard of my money situation, the hour of night; the levels of my own inebriation. The five words of French I know seem to do wonders, and even produce a hearty laugh from the sweaty Middle-Eastern cashier. Gold chains are draped around his neck and mired in the chest hair that protrudes from his wife-beater.

“Ciao,” I tell him on the way out — I'd rather be Italian than American when he retells this instance.

My echo is loud and bounces off the buildings on either side of the cobblestone street. I am in tune, but am slurring my words; the lyrics are right, but delayed.

“Little things... I shuddashaid en dun... I just... neberr took ze time...”

I am fucking exhausted.

I sit and sip. I blow on top of the bottle. The train has left the station.

“You were always on my miiiind.”

The bottle empties. I lay it on its side and roll it down the curb away from me, speaking to it like a leaving lover.

“Get away from me!”

I find that funny.

Leaning back, my neck almost snaps as the heaviness of my head shoots my vision straight up. The stars are abundant and immense. They're so tiny so often. Not here.

I rectify my field of view to normal and notice I've sat down in front of Sacre Coeur. I look left and right. Why didn't anyone tell me I was here, I wonder.

Staring at the thing, my chapter ends. My first abroad journey completed. A picturesque way to end it all, really. I'm into that, I think to myself: making things play like movies or dramas or as beautifully as I can make them.

My phone slithers from my pocket to the street. I rub the face of it like a steamed mirror; a dusty picture frame.

In my mind, I subtract five hours from 5:06 a.m. and figure it's only midnight in Virginia. My mother let's me know it's 11 actually, and that I've known that for the last four days.

“Mom... I'm really proud.. of myself, though,” I swallow hard to compensate for the lack of liquid.

“Haha, yeah? Well, good buddy. You think you're gonna make your flight?”

“Fuck that, Mommmm... Wh- why you wanna ruin a beautifulll mo-men? I'm callin' (hic-up) ‘-allin you from fuckin Fr (hic-up) ance.”

She laughs uncontrollably.

“Okayyyy, whateverrrr.. I'll let you go I guess, Mom, but hey - hey! I love you.”

“Love you too! Get home safe. We can't wait to see you.”

I don't know how to play the piano, but I fake it on my air keys after hanging up. I have Ryan Adams “Friends” in my mind.

The basilica is a magnetic white attached by darkness. We stare at each other awhile as I stand.

“And whennn, you look at me like that,” I begin to sing, pointing to the structure, “I know someday it's gonna end.”

I wave to the cathedral, turning down the alley way that will eventually feed me into the mouth of my seedy hotel, alternating between humming and moaning as I walk.

“And when I can't look hm hmm / I can paint you picture perfectly in hm hmmm. / And when I get hmm. H'm gonna miss you all the time.”