The Sad Gregorio

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Old Artist
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He sat there, dressed in unfitting clothes and gray shoes. His foggy eyes staring into the same world he was ignored by. The customers who attended the bar were oftentimes irritated by his shadowy presence. They heard him whisper strange questions from time to time and saw him shaking his head from side to side as if he was tormented, but more likely deranged. They noticed his wrinkled face, his crooked nose, his dirty hands, and they ignored him. All except Alfredo, the owner of the bar, who would say, “Here you go, Gregorio,” while pushing a glass of whisky on top of a napkin into Juan Gregorio’s twitching hands. Juan Gregorio would simply take the glass, ignore the white napkin, and direct his piercing eyes around the bar. It never failed that whatever he saw made his face lose all color, mutilating him.

At 12:30 am the bar was full, and the wax began to drip from the white candles, blending the faces of the customers with the darkness. Yet, despite the obscurity of the bar, the paintings that hung on the red walls always stood out. It was these paintings that Juan Gregorio would stare at for a long time, the torture inside of him becoming even more unbearable. His eyes lingered on one piece in particular. It was one surrounded by aesthetic beauty; an evocative piece of an old man and a woman sitting side-by-side staring directly at the viewer. What stood out about this piece were the eyes of the two figures, powerful and penetrating eyes that carried an unquenchable fire, a connection that reigned between the two.

Having finished this drink and fearing losing the only cure to his torment, he turned around to wait for Alfredo to pour him another glass of whisky, when suddenly, out of nowhere, he heard a soft voice asking for his name. No one ever spoke to him, except the seldom voice of Alfredo. Therefore, Juan Gregorio believed the voice to be a figment of his imagination, but upon hearing it again, he decided to turn around. Then, he noticed a woman sitting next to him. She looked to be about thirty years old. She was drinking white wine. She was tall, lean, and wore a tight, elegant dress. But none of that mattered to Juan Gregorio, he cared only for the dark eyes that acknowledged his presence. Staring directly into them and mistrusting them, he said with his most powerful voice, “Why do you care?”

The woman, whose name was Angela, was taken aback by his rude response. But seeing his blurry eyes focused so deeply on her face, she responded with the same soft voice, “I simply wanted to know your name because I have seen you here
before; forgive me for intruding.” For a moment the face of Juan Gregorio lightened, but with the same harsh and dominating voice he said, “My name is Juan Gregorio. There you have it, now what else do you want from me?” and then he turned around, ignoring her completely.

Angela sat drinking her wine, until a few minutes passed, and she heard the harsh voice again, asking her, “What do you notice around this bar?” The question seemed strange to her, not at all like the superficial questions she was used to answering. Juan Gregorio sat expectantly. Angela shifted her body, opened her eyes even more, and stared around the bar. She noticed a group of men, of women, the old and the young, all drinking, all well dressed, either standing or sitting. Not one person stared at the walls and looked upon the artwork that secretly invaded the bar. They were there to drink and nothing more. Angela slowly turned her face and noticed the old man staring at her. For a second it seemed as if a new fire had replaced his dim, grey eyes. She told him, “I see that everyone is distracted, that no one, not even myself, had ever noticed the beauty of those paintings that hang on the walls.”

Juan Gregorio’s eyes turned back to their foggy sadness and his face once again became distorted, almost as if a dying man had conquered his body. He lifted his glass and drained the last drop of whisky into his mouth, his soul escaping him. His grey eyes looked into hers and standing up from his seat, he told her with a voice of unknown suffering, “Good night.” As he took a step to leave, he paused and stared again into her eyes. He grabbed her hands desperately and with warm tears he said to her, “Try to always notice the things that surround you, especially those things that are abandoned.” And with those trembling words, he departed.

Angela was left alone, desperate, and in a state of sadness, her hands still bearing the warmth of his touch. She finished her wine, grabbed her small purse, and walked towards the door. But just as she was about to leave, the lingering words of the old man tugged at her soul. She stood and stared into the painting of the old man and woman. Their eyes painted with such purity. They must have been in love, she thought. She stared into the dark background, and she was startled, for she saw in the corner, almost invisible, the fine and firm signature of Juan Gregorio.

Natalia Correa is currently studying English Literature and International Studies. She hopes to publish a worthy novel someday.

Ethereal Venice
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