

The Distance Between Us

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The woman brushes her hair to the side and cradles a half empty glass, before pushing open the rusty screen door. “Are you coming?”

A man shuffles along behind her, out onto the dimly lit porch. She quickly lights a cigarette. Walking over to the arm rail, he studies the green and yellow algae growing on a nearby oak tree. He runs his fingers along the damp bark as she exhales and fills the sky with another cloud.

“Easternmost of the belt and south of Alnitak, the black horse waits to collapse in a mist of crimson into light.”

“Poetries?” she asks over the beat of reggaetón coming from inside.

“Partly. That and a bit of astronomy,” he says, looking back at her partial silhouette. Pasted glitter at the edges of her light brown eyes gleams off of her olive skin.

She walks over to him with an exaggerated sway in her step, her gaze hidden in the hollow space beneath her brow. She leans on the railing. The old paint cracks against her skin. “Why you know about that?” she asks, looking up at the blank horizon.

“When I was young I read all about it. I would go out at night for hours— anything to get away for a while,” he says, adjusting his eyes, to the emerging moon.

She flicks off the ashes and takes another drag. “I do not getting it,” she says, squinting roughly where she imagines his eyes are fixed. “What are you looking? There are too many light pollutions to see anything.”

He chuckles, turning towards her. “A nebula. One close enough you might see it with your own eyes. Do you ever wish you could explore what’s up there?”

“I used to... but there is much experience for me here, things I can taste and touch. Whatever is up there—just is not as interesting as traveling Moroccan desert by camel or cave diving in Bahamas,” she says, looking back at him with a striking glance. Her amber tinged eyes blooming in the pale light.

“Up until recently I was never interested in anything ‘down here’—too chaotic.”

“But that is where the funs are!” she says, shaking her hips and shoulders to the faint music.

“I suppose,” he says in a friendly tone.

She takes a sip from her glass before resting it on the railing. The wind stirs the moon-cast pines into a flurry of black, cutting at the night. “So hey, what you trying to get away from?” she asks, leaning towards him. The rail creaks and the paint crackles between them, like embers of a fire extinguished.

“I am—err—I *was* getting away from family. That was the main thing, anyway,” he says, letting his eyes wander to the shadows of insects decomposing in the porch light.

“Simón tolded me you was adopted, right?” she asks, scratching her nail into the paint.

“Y—”

Cheers and clapping from inside distract the two. Her lips stretch across her face revealing the faint dimples in her cheeks.

“Yeah. Because of that I’ve always felt a special connection with my parents,” he says.

“Did tell you or discover it yourself?”

He takes a deep breath. “Yeah, they did. All my life I’ve known where I came from. You know, people would laugh and say how my parents never wanted me, but what’s so ironic is that *they* did. I can actually say that they not only chose to have a child—but that my parents *chose* to have *me*.” He sighs and smirks back at her.

She takes another sip from her glass, holding the cigarette loosely between her fingers. "I have always wonder what it be like. I have issue with my father. My mother—we don't talk anymore," she says, examining the clump of white paint wedged beneath her polished nail.

"Does your relationship with your father have anything to do with why you're here in the U.S.?"

She bites down hard on the inside of her cheek. "I am here to practice my English," she says coolly, flicking the glob of paint into the bushes. As the gob caroms against the bundle of dead branches, wrapped together in a web of decay, she considers his honesty and feels the urge to reciprocate. "It is feeling nice to be away," she says, brusquely.

His eyes widen a bit and he inches closer to her. "When my parents found me... I was malnourished, sick and alone. Despite the love and patience they filled our home with—I struggled for many years because of the way I was treated in the orphanage. I couldn't speak—literally. If I tried to write, my hand would seize up and turn into this arthritic mess." He massages his right hand. "They thought I had ADD, but really my brain would focus on everything at once—it was like sensory overload at all times. With a telescope I could pick out exactly what I wanted to focus on. It helped, you know? These things haven't gone away. I've just learned to adapt to them."

Picking deeper into the railing, she discovers a lavender purple.

"Traveling... I have opportunity to enriching myself," she says with conviction. "I can always find pieces of what I am when I go. Is a chance to learn about different culture and develop my knowledges of the world. I feel like I have made the right decisions and became the healthier because of it."

"What have you found?"

"That if I am there—I am having change on things."

He looks down to the scattered puddles, reflecting the vague glow of the moon. "When I was a teenager, and my father realized my condition wasn't improving at the rate he'd hoped... he decided to take more drastic measures—paying off therapists to say I was psychologically and emotionally disturbed."

"Carajo," she says, nearly finishing her drink. "Your father have more intentional than mine."

He snickers, still staring at the way the light creeps across the water. “The worst part was that it was all done out of love. He thought that if I had these labels preceding me in life that somehow others would give me more of a chance, being someone that was mentally deficient.” He looks down at her fingers.

She moves her hand close to his and offers the last drag from her cigarette. He takes it and rolls the smoldering nub between his fingers.

“It’s almost beautiful how far love can take a person when they feel like it’s their child’s future that’s on the line,” he says, raising the lipstick covered filter to his mouth. He notices the lingering aroma of cherries, and fills his lungs with it completely.

“Here,” she says, gesturing to her glass with a yellow smile.

He drops the last embers into the cup, releasing the final billow of smoke within.

“From of my father I can travel. He moved on too quickly... I think. He found a family perfectly desperate for to enter. I wondered who needed the other more. If them I could understanding but when it is my father... it was best I go away—see if he would change in time. When he could not—I keep going.” She grinds her nails deeper into the paint until she reaches the moldy wood beneath.

“It’s a bit ironic, you think?”

“The things I am traveling from are not changing.”

“Look up there. A bit of time in the dark and even in the city you’ll see the stars start to come out. Of course it will never be the same... but if you have just enough you can find what you’re looking for,” he says, pointing to Alnilam. “It was this idea of giving things enough time for you to understand them that helped me eventually make it out of the negative place I’d been in for so long. I found a way to reimagine myself and no longer live entirely in response to other people.” Gazing back at her, he notices her eyes fixed on the range of colors trapped beneath her cracked and faded nails. The wind bellows between them, slamming the screen door against its frame.

“That is what I am doing. I feel happy with the things I learned from the places I go to. I can go any parts in the world and it is feeling like home. Why return to a place that will be always the same? There’s so much of me to find. I don’t want to waste my time.”

His eyes lower to the exposed rot beneath her fingers.

“Do you want to go back in?” she asks, pushing off the railing, white flakes stuck to her forearms.

“Yeah. Alright,” he says, breathing out the muggy air, looking back at the settling trees and advancing clouds.