

# Viszlát

by Roberto Carcache Flores

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*Para mis papás...*

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## **Acknowledgments**

**1101 Mejicanos, El Salvador**

**24/5/1991**





I hereby layout the conditions for our meeting; you know how nice it is to number things:

1. That we both use blindfolds and are led to our meeting place by a third party. I think it would be easier to rely on our respective voices as the only empirical measure for time. This third party should preferably be someone who knows little about our past.
2. We should meet in a public place, preferably a large park where won't draw too much attention. There

should be a bench and a source of shade, so we can sit comfortably for the duration of our meeting.

3. That we use our current signature fragrance, though this shouldn't have to be stipulated.
4. The questions asked should be vague but not abstract.
5. No hellos and no goodbyes.
6. Maybe we can bring snacks and cold drinks.
7. Our memory can't possibly improve over the years so it is best if we

record our conversation and  
transcribe all the important bits.

I think that's basically it for now. Please let  
me know what you think in due time. I'm  
looking forward to our eventual encounter.  
Cheers!



## **Custom[s] Form**



Fill in the appropriate answer:

There [will] / [will not] be a day when I wake up in the morning feeling [more] / [less] refreshed than when I first went to bed. The sun will shine outside and birds will [sing] / [cry]. I'll walk with [purpose] / [shame] towards the people who matter most and [tell] / [not tell] them why they matter so much to me. The words will [flow from] / [remain trapped] within.

I [will not] / [will] have to issue apologies that day. "This [is] / [isn't] a person who belongs among us!" curious onlookers will exclaim. I shall wave at them and carry

along with my [companion] / [shadow].

[Songs] / [Nothing] will be eventually  
written about me.

My [children] / [turtle] will be proud of who  
I've become. The night will feel [easy] / [like  
this]. I will look into [your eyes] / [the  
mirror] with [gratitude] / [gratitude] and  
say something along the lines of [we were  
fine after all] / [we were fine after all].



## **Airplane Magazine Story**



*“Somewhere in an empty square a pigeon pecks away against cement. Seagulls safely tuck your memories in their wings. You name them accordingly, praying some of them get lost. The river guides you, now that you are free and without a past. One thing is certain: there will be a sea at the end of this valley. Who or what will meet you there has never haunted any of your dreams. You simply walk of course.”*

Sofia read the author’s name once again to make sure it was not a vision, to make sure it was not her lack of sleep, to make sure it was who she knew it was. The

stewardess was still in front of her row, stretching out an oxygen mask. The older couple sitting next to her had already fallen asleep. They knew the plane wouldn't crash.

*“Your feet eventually grow weary and you stop every once in a while to catch your breath. You start wishing for bravery or at least speed. You start wishing for the ability to say exactly what you mean to say, even though no one is listening, even though this is a solitary march.”*

Of course the plane would not crash. Why was she still so nervous? Sofia looked out

the window. The crew had already finished with the luggage. There was no one among them holding a poster with her name in bold letters, urging her to stay, at least until the weather got better again. She read on...

*“Even the air begins to change. It grows heavier with a salty touch. You begin to understand this will be home. You return and depart, only to return. You don’t have to speak about death, just as you always expect the sun to set. For the most part, you have done things your way.”*

The plane began to move. She sort of smiled, the way people do when no one is watching. There would always be time later to think about what came next. She was still young, without children, and most social obligations. She could enjoy this moment, alone, with an airplane magazine in front of her.

*“You begin to whistle, even though you never really learned how to do it. You have a lot of different songs to occupy your time with. Just then, you see another one of those seagulls gliding above. I’ll miss you, is all you need to say.”*

**Unsent**





My only regret was not being able to talk about pain. I don't know how significant this is anymore. I believe I meant everything that was said, at least in that specific period of time. Now it doesn't seem genuine, though this shouldn't come as a surprise. Perhaps we will meet again unchanged, willing to say no when it counts.

I would ask you to adopt me as a pet; an old dog you keep around to guard the gates into your home. This is merely symbolic of course. I can barely bite my own tail anymore. Feed me scraps and watch me shudder in the morning. You can change

my name, though I'd prefer something generic like Ranger or Scout.

You must admit, our goodbyes have grown increasingly warmer. I can now look back on them without tearing up, often smiling at my good fortune. Forever is not something worth promising. I'll be here when you want, while I can, and ask no questions. Until then...

## **Moving**



“I think it’s broken” she said.

We’d spent most of that Sunday morning carrying my belongings into her apartment from my van. This was the easy part of moving in. The hard part was finding a new home for my clothes, books, CD’s, journals, and whatever else I crammed into a box labelled *etc.*

Disagreements broke out over location, spacing, and utility. Eva paced around, wrapped a dusty rag around her forehead, and made lemonade, as if squeezing her nerves and anxiety through a lemon. I gulped it down as a symbol of compromise.

It burned my throat and we started to question everything once again.

Everything about us had been rushed, dramatized, forced: two strangers at an indie show, a conversation over a drum machine, kindred spirits who took pride in the absence of another. Drunken texts became drunken dates, dramatic gestures of commitment, and long nights talking about what we wanted to be when we didn't grow up.

A no would have compromised our “whatever you want to call it” so I said yes when Eva asked me to move in. My lease

was almost up and it was nearing the end of June. It didn't matter if we met just three months ago. We were what we though we deserved for each other.

After having lemonade, we decided to start putting the remainder of my belongings in her bedroom. I'd already experienced a confirmation of certain things Eva only brushed upon in past conversations. I was going to put my toothbrush in a cabinet when I found the pill organizer. An unambitious collection of wine bottles also stood proudly on a shelf above the bathtub.

Eva seemed unfazed by my findings and made no mention of them. She had time to prepare for my arrival, but I saw her face cringe slightly when I opened the closet she said I could use for my stuff. There was body-length floor mirror inside along with some unused canvases and painting supplies.

“I think it’s broken” she said.

I didn’t have to pull it out to know it wasn’t true. I sort of motioned her to step away towards the door and let the mirror fall.

“I think so too” I said.



Our laughter drowned out the echoes of  
broken glass and we carried on as before.



## **The Last Remesa**



When asked about the fire, Don Esteban could only bring himself to say: *I'm putting words behind me for now*. Not only did he refuse to do any interviews, he also refused to explain what inspired him to sit on his rocking chair a few hours before sunrise; the last flickers of embers slowly ceding their glow to the brisk October night.

I was the last reporter on scene and could not leave an untold story alone, even if it would most likely remain as such. I couldn't pass up the chance to lose myself in the canvas of a blazing fire, its generous smoke, and the subtle murmurs made by

the crumble of wood. I knew the old man didn't mind me sitting on the tall patch of grass next to him. I knew we could remain quiet spectators.

In the few hours we spent together I smoked at least ten cigarettes while Don Esteban hummed what could have been a nursery rhyme, though I can't declare myself an expert in the matter. I knew whatever questions came out of my mouth would be lost among the smoke which still flowed between us. But when the sky first shifted towards a lighter shade of blue I felt the urge to ask:

“Don Esteban, I understand and respect your privacy. I’m not recording anything at the moment. I just want to know what’s next for you. Do you have a place to go to? Can I be of any assistance?”

“I’m leaving.”

It wasn’t the first arson case I’d covered, but it was the first in which the fire had begun with a pile of dusty books, olive oil, and a match. Don Esteban also confessed to the crime, calling the local police station a couple of hours earlier to warn them of his intentions and to spare the fire department any inconveniences. I only

learned that a few days later when I went to the police commission to continue my investigation.

I remember being astounded during the fire at the lack of any police officers, firemen, or even curious onlookers.

Everyone around Don Esteban's property seemed to have shut their lights off. A few stray dogs gathered around but even they seemed to adopt a dignified silence. No one seemed to care, especially the homeowner himself who sat on the sidewalk, rocking and humming, humming and rocking...

\*\*



Viejo Cuscatlán is a village of roughly 1400 inhabitants with two perpendicular paved roads which meet at the town square. Here you can find the city council, police commission, church, park, bus stops, market, and so on. Adjacent dirt roads grow out in unwieldy patterns leading to small suburbs untouched by time, save for the national cell-phone and cable providers. Don Esteban's house was located at the very end of such a road.

Unlike most of his neighbors, Don Esteban's property was directly linked to a legal document paid in full over forty years

ago, when he moved from the capital with his wife. Unlike most of his neighbors, Don Esteban's property was built with imported bricks; as opposed to the adobe the rest of the nearby houses were originally made of. In short, Don Esteban was a wealthy man, but a dignified one at that.

“But what does that mean? Dignified in what way?”

“That is all I can say out of our respect for Don Esteban and everything he has done for this community. We are humble people sir, but full of respect. It's best if you don't pry around.”

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.”

It was all I could get out of Gilda Blanco, the town mayor. My obstinacy would get the best of me.

\*\*

After having no luck with Don Esteban’s neighbors, who shut their doors as politely as they could, I turned towards the closest *tienda* in the vicinity. *Tiendas* have always been the hub of all the local gossip and folklore, usually owned by a middle-aged woman with an uncanny ability to extract

and spread personal information from her customers. This was the place to learn more intimate details about Don Esteban's life.

I walked to the metal counter and rapped on the iron rails which separated its interior from the outside world. A small girl of maybe eight came up timidly to the counter. I asked if I could talk to one of her parents. She recoiled back into the house like a cat before a stranger. I was alone, disillusioned, and hungry. An unexpected lead called from below as I made my way back to the ruins of Don Esteban's house.

“I know what you want,” it said, “everyone around town does.”

It took me a few seconds to register where the voice was coming from. There was a shirtless old man sitting on the curb a few paces in front of me. His thin back was arched so that his spine looked like a brief series of dirty railroad tracks. Years of drinking bloated his sun-worn face and turned his brown eyes hazy. There was an urgency to his speech, an effort to express himself clearly, a desire to have his first drink of the day done and over with.

“I can help you, but it’ll cost you a just a little. A poor man like me has to eat.”

I reached into my wallet and pulled out a five dollar bill. It was enough for a ‘personal’ bottle of *agua ardiente* and a liter of soda to wash down the taste. The little girl at the counter took the money from him in exchange for both items. The old man came back much more lively than before. He took a sip of the alcohol and then the soda with the same expression of painful relief. The following is a much more polished version of the story he went on to relate.

\*\*

“Don Esteban and his wife Alma came to Viejo Cuscatlán in 1973. I was working as an apprentice for a mechanic at the time. They had that beautiful house built down the road. Many rumors circulated around town but most people agreed she was the one with the money. Such a beautiful woman: fair, slender, kind, like a movie star on a summer retreat. He was a lawyer, tall, and severe, but full of respectful for all of us.

He opened a small dispatch in the town square and provided cheap legal advice.

Doña Alma taught adults how to read and write after mass every Sunday. It was the 70s and they were progressive people during oppressive times. Things changed rapidly everywhere, even here. The army began coming around to recruit all the young people while the peasant groups did the same with everyone who remained. Bodies started popping up in nearby creeks. You know, the war came and people either left or disappeared.

A lot of strange people started gathering at their house: intellectuals from the capital, priests, musicians from abroad. Alma



welcomed everyone with open arms. Don Esteban knew his home was under constant surveillance. I think it was January. I know the year was 1981. Alma left with just two suitcases full of books and the bare essentials. The poor man...all he had left...those trips to the post station...Lord knows he tried...such a woman...a different sort...I've said enough..."

By this point the old man had finished nearly two thirds of the bottle. He didn't have any soda left. The sobs in between his words were no longer separated by

cohesion, becoming a single outburst of phlegm, tears, stutters, and regret. I walked up to the *tienda* and bought him three small pieces of bread stuffed with beans. He stared at me like a child and quietly took the plastic bag. I thanked him for his help and wasn't sure whether to shake his hand or not.

\*\*

The post-station was a small white building made of brick, located next to the city council. Our national flag hung without luster from one of its windows like a declaration of surrender. The station was

completely empty, save for an old clerk sorting through paperwork in a faraway desk. He calmly licked his finger every time he turned a page. There was a real gusto about this simple action which just captivated me.

I walked up to him and introduced myself. He immediately became suspicious and stood in place, uncertain. I told him everything I knew about Don Esteban without going into detail about my sources, placing an emphasis on the trips to the post office. I told him I could offer him a

small payment for his time and completely confidential collaboration in the matter.

He did a smile of sorts and said we could go to the storage room, a place where we could talk in peace. No one really collected any mail at this time of the month so he could spare a few minutes for a brief interview. His eyebrows perked up a couple of times at the word interview. I shrugged and reached into my wallet and gave him a \$20. The room smelled of paper and the ink people use to take down fingerprints.

\*\*

“After Alma left him, Don Esteban came here unfailingly twice a year to pick up his *remesa* or remittance. You know how they spiked up after so many people left during and after the war. Only, his *remesas* didn’t come in an envelope and wasn’t any sort of monetary payment. They came in the form of books. ”

“Books? From his wife?”

“Of course they were from Alma. She sent him one book on his birthday and one for their anniversary. We didn’t read them here. We just had to see if she smuggled anything inside and she never did. They

were just normal books. They didn't even have any scribbles.”

“Please explain a little more sir.”

“There were many theories as you can imagine. Several women came and went in Don Esteban's house after his wife.

However, during those two dates he dressed nicer than usual and walked to the post office. Every time he returned home with a book in his hand.

At first they didn't have any addresses of origin. Some said Alma was sending them out from a guerrilla camp. You know how

people are. But then they started coming from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Cuba, Mexico, South America, even Europe. Everyone said Alma left with two suitcases full of books. Maybe she was just slowly returning them.”

“Returning them?”

“Yes, my theory is that each time she sent a book Alma was in some ways sending a message no one but Don Esteban could understand. It could have been too painful for Alma to write and she moved around so much it was no use sending her any letters.”

“I still don’t understand what this has to do with the fire.”

“Ahh...the fire. It’s October right? It was Don Esteban’s birthday a couple of days before the fire. He came here as he usually does, but he didn’t receive another book in the mail. It was the last of his *remesas* I believe.”

“What did he receive?”

“I cannot say and you can’t buy my loyalty with another twenty dollar bill. No one here will tell you.”

“But why is everyone so secretive?”



“Did you see those two paved roads here? He financed them. He did just about everything for this town. He was the one who wrote the letter of reference which made me post master. Don Esteban was a fine man and no one will betray their loyalty to him.”

\*\*

That was the last person I talked to in Viejo Cuscatlán. I tried following different leads but the post master was right, no one would betray their loyalty to Don Esteban. Life went on as it should. I travelled from one remote part of El

Salvador to another. The arson in Viejo Cuscatlán, along with its peculiar perpetrator, were quickly forgotten and lost in the pitiful mists of our collective memory.

It was close to Christmas when I received a call from an unregistered number. A gruff, distant voice asked to speak with me; the type which can only come from an elderly person who no longer feels comfortable handling a phone. It was Don Esteban. I struggled for a moment, wondering how he'd gotten my number.

“Good evening Don Esteban. How did you get this number?”

“I heard you did everything in your power to find out what happened.”

“Yes, I’m sorry sir but none of it ever got published.”

“Yes...Yes... I know all that. But how far did you get?”

“I just heard you didn’t receive a book through the post on your last birthday. You got something else...”

“Would you like to know what it was?”

“I would.”

“First you must tell me why. You are no longer being paid. It’s of no interest to you personally.”

“I don’t know. It’s just in my nature to try to find the truth, even if it doesn’t make sense to everyone else.”

“Enough. You have answered like a journalist, not as I hoped. Still, I’m a man of my word. It was a postcard... from here...”

Don Esteban hung up before I could ask any more questions. I was still able to

sense an emphatic joy in his last word through the vastness which separates a story from its humble reporter. For a moment, I considered setting fire to my room. Instead I thought about all the letters I'd received up to that point and decided to postpone it.



**518 Albany, U.S.**

**12/19/2002**





It's taken me quite some time to reply. I agree fundamentally with most of your conditions, though I've made some minor changes. I'm sure there are some things you'd like to ask me, even if it hurts.

1. The meeting should be transcribed by this third party, so we can focus on the matter at hand. This implies the third party should be someone discreet, a good listener, and be able to type with a decent speed.
2. I would prefer an outdoor café in a secluded location, where said party could sit a table over and listen to our conversation without disturbing us.

3. No problem there.
4. Ask what you came to ask and I'll do the same, should it come to that.
5. This is also fine.
6. It would be rather hard to bring champagne with a blindfold on.
7. See point number one.

I hope you agree to these changes, until then.

## **Two Cappuccinos**



That is the key: to leave a little uncertainty when saying goodbye or stumbling about to say hello. In the former you must walk without looking back. It's all right to have your hands in your pockets and stare at the ground.

The important thing is to remember all that was said in those few hours. Put it down on paper if need be. That one album or book which moves said person, the reasons why they continue to travel...even what the two of you ordered and where you chose to sit.

Don't fret over why you met or what could have prolonged this special time in which you shared so much. Go home and turn more lights on than usual. Play those silly songs you only listen to when alone. You may not see this person again but are fortunate to have seen them at all.

## **Budapest Bridges**





Every bridge has at least one forlorn story to tell. It has also occurred to me that every bridge along the Danube has its own personality, though I can only attest to the bridges of Budapest. Is this personality a direct reflection of an architect's will? Does history also have a hand in our perception of what a given landmark means to its neighborhood, city, or nation?

Such are the questions I often ask myself while I cross the Danube, walking from Pest to Buda and from Buda to Pest. The answers are never so important. I walk just do so, to gaze at the river and the city; its

ancient glories tucked away in the Castle District which towers over the various promenades. Sometimes the seagulls gently soar above while other times they merely spiral out of control.

There are four bridges I usually cross, mainly because they are the closest to where I live but also because I've grown fond of them, in the way familiar objects have a way of providing us with reassurance. I once thought of what single words could be used to describe each of these bridges. My list went something like: Margaret Bridge, functionality. Chain

Bridge, opulence. Elizabeth Bridge, grace.  
Liberty Bridge, strength.

I would say that the Elizabeth Bridge is probably my favorite. Maybe I associate it with modernity or it reminds me of a seagull. It's also less crowded than the other three and appears to function more for road traffic than sightseeing purposes. The handrails along the sidewalk also seem lower than recommendable, though this could be attributed to the vertigo I often feel when crossing large bodies of water.

The truth is that some days I only crossed this bridge to feel this metaphysical rush. It's almost like those rare flights where you begin to question everything, how you and a hundred other people have basically surrendered all control just to reach a given destination. The difference is that you have your feet when you cross a bridge. I'm still unsure if this makes it any easier or all the more terrifying.

It was on a day like this when I got mentally prepared to cross my favorite bridge. That's when I saw him, just as I began to take those first uneasy steps. I

saw a man with a similar overcoat as mine, a black overcoat that seemed too big for him, too tattered at the sleeves. His hair was longer but his steps just as unsteady. Surely he must be a writer, was the first thing I thought.

We were on opposite sides of the bridge, separated by a steady current of cars. My initial instinct was to wait on my tiptoes, as if this could help me rise above the buses and trucks which blocked my view. I could still see him (or sense him) walking until he stopped at about the half-way mark of the bridge. I moved a bit ahead

and watched him cling strangely to the railing. His hands might have been shaking or maybe it was just my knees.

The man looked down at the water for what seemed like a few minutes. I could not move. I like to believe he eventually sensed someone was watching him because he finally turned around and looked in my direction. We exchanged several embarrassing glances across the bridge and continued with our walk. Eventually we'd made it back to Pest and went our separate ways.

## **Spirits**





## I.

Every once in a while, I remember her footsteps, that unrehearsed spring she used as a goodbye. I think about the paradoxical nature of her fears often intermingled with desire. I know she cannot read this. It does not make forgetting any easier.

1. "I think I'm dead inside."
2. "There are so many things you do not know."
3. "Have you ever been to a play? Ok, now...was there any instance in which you decided to step outside

during the intervention? Did you ever run into members of the cast having a smoke? Can you recall their expressions? That's me all the time."

4. All of the above.

We were in an elevator once. It wasn't that long of a journey but something collapsed within and I couldn't keep my tears inside. She asked me what was wrong with me. I decided to write the note you see above and handed her a copy the following day.

"Is it number four?"

“I want to say no.”

“No.”

“I want to mean it.”

“Do you know even know why actors feel  
that way?”

“Maybe they feel miserable offstage.”

## II.

“I think you confuse admiration with  
understanding.”

“You used to look at me differently.”

“Like a frightened schoolgirl?”

“Stop.”

It was a strange time for the both of us. We knew how to be horrible without ever crossing that fine line which...no, we were just horrible. I can still hear those footsteps. Sofia, remember to feed the fish in the evening and know that I was wrong in not saying sorry for leaving when I needed you the most.

### III.

In a bus: He kept looking out the window. I don't always expect words but his silences did not provide any sort of comfort. They

were more like a thick fog which enveloped our seats and made me feel dirty.

At this shitty Chinese restaurant: Glanced at the waitress nervously while I decided on what to order. I took a bit of extra time on the drinks, not because I didn't know what tap water tasted like, but just to see how much more nervous he could get, to see him open his mouth and close it, as if the words were about leap valiantly off a cliff.

? : General aloofness, likes absolutely nothing, hates exaggerations, carries a Hungarian public library card in his wallet

(along with a picture of a sheep), and tells me he plans to leave the country soon in search of better food.

#### IV.

“Such is life” – Don’t ask me that again.

“I didn’t get a chance to do it” – Don’t ask me to elaborate on it.

“Time will tell” – Don’t ask me to talk about my expectations.

“We’ll see” – Don’t expect me to be held completely accountable if this doesn’t work out.

“I don’t know how to answer that” – Don’t.

“Maybe/Probably/It’s possible” – No.

“I’m not sure” – Yes.

V.

“I think you have a hard time letting go.”

“I know.”

“Say what you need to say.”

“I just...I try to imagine what that would be like.”

“Is it really so hard? We were different people before all of this. I even remember that first impression when I saw you from afar. This has all been a surprise.”

“A surprise?”

“Yes, what comes next will also be one...”

“I’m not so sure. That’s what frightens me the most.”



## VI.

I often thought about how life can make us cruel, mainly towards ourselves. My goals were set in stone. In many ways, I'd come to expect they involved me ending up alone since it would have been cruel to carry someone else along my solitary crusade. That was precisely what I refused to admit at the time. Dusk has made me wiser. When I die, perhaps I'll have a chance to smile and say you were right.

## VII.

“Now” – Something from two days ago.

“Listen,” – I pretend most things I say aren’t important so I emphasize certain conversation topics from time to time.

“I hope you remember this someday” –  
Death scares the shit out of me.

“It really is no problem” – This is the time to flatter me.

“I think about that sometimes” – It keeps me up at night.

“Ok” – Ok.

## VIII.

I enjoy hearing the word no but have a hard time saying it. The things which matter most to me are the ones I never talk about. My favorite question is ok. The people who know me best know nothing about me. My dream is to run out of dreams. I can only say sorry so many times to no one in particular. Life is short but it takes forever to get there.

## IX.

A few days ago, I found myself walking by the old bus stop near the train station. It

was as if I knew precisely what had gone wrong with me. Buses came and went, doors opened, doors shut. Still, I wanted to see you driving away in someone's car. Deep down I knew watching this scene unfold for a second time wouldn't have felt the same. Such is my fondness for diminishing returns.

X.

“I missed you” - O

## **Daybreak**



It was only a few hours before dawn and the public could admire his craft. The labyrinth maker stood before his masterpiece. Although he could not see the entirety of his work from this vantage point, the maker knew the precise age, size, and roughness of every slab he'd used. His design was just as painfully chiseled in his memory.

The labyrinth maker felt a soft breeze, imperceptible to anyone else, so he closed his eyes and followed this whisper deep into his creation. Each twist and bend pierced through his wordless reverie as the

sun began to rise and the breeze became even fainter.

*Dead ends,*

*No.*

*This way,*

*Turn, turn, turn.*

All at once, the breeze came back and swept the labyrinth maker off his feet.



**10977 Spring Valley, U.S.**

**28/6/2011**



The changes are fine, I just wish we could make this happen sooner rather than later. A lot of the things happening around me don't make any sense. There is an ex-con living in the house I rent a room in. He sits in the front porch all day and once ate one of my bagels. I think he is a good guy at heart but I don't spend much money on food. I also don't like picking up garbage every day on my summer vacation. I keep envisioning this magnificent end goal and nothing comes up. I come home and hear the couple next door fighting, so I spend my free time writing unsent letters, reading

all the Russians, and turning up the music to forget myself. Is this normal? Do you know if there is anyone else to blame?

## **Locations**



The sound of faraway sirens seemed to hollow out the wind. I felt safer underneath the quivering shadow of a tree. This was a different silence than the one I often called home.

I sat on a bench next to the lookout tower. I could hear the rusty wind vane creaking above. All I needed to do was climb up a set of steps to reach the highest point in Budapest. No one could say I was smiling.

A small bird flew into a nearby window. It made two soft thuds: one as it hit the glass and another when it reached the ground. I waited for what seemed like hours until it

took off once more, asking the poor creature to carry me away.

It is times like this when I say exactly what I mean. I close my eyes and summon different people just to have someone listen to my monologues. Most of them happen to be women. Most of them have seen me walk away in shame.

I believe it takes a certain kind of charm to disappear with grace. Your warnings must be subtle, almost presented as abstractions. Maybe you can even give unrelated examples like how you have the



bad habit of leaving movie theatres only twenty minutes into a film.

There is always a catch to these things.

Leaving is easy if you can readily come

back and also simple if you are being

kicked out. But to really leave without

properly saying goodbye, to depart in such

a manner that is both cowardly and brave;

that is a cruel art form worth mastering.

\*\*

The problem is that any departure involves

a destination. This idea that each of us

belongs somewhere is problematic,

especially when we are led to believe this somewhere also happens to be a direct consequence of our choices. By this logic, I chose a long time ago not to have a home.

It seems much simpler to envision yourself as a place others can visit, though it helps to have a specific person in mind. This approximation must be performed coldly and designed using your most recent social interactions. Feel free to round up to the nearest month. Let's begin:

*You stand before the ashes of a forgotten casino. The floor is covered with moldy cards and broken chips. All that remains is*

*an unlit sign which reads: the beginning of  
the world...*

Not a bad start, but who in their right  
mind would frequent such a place? I am  
not denying the cultural value of ruins. I've  
just never met an anthropologist.

\*\*

Maybe the sun has gone down though it's  
too cloudy to tell. I'm not quite sure why I  
still choose to sit under a tree. I shouldn't  
say it, but I want to run into someone,  
preferably you.

Stephen Malkmus is right in singing everybody wants a shady lane. Could I really stand it though? The knowledge that people recur to you under certain weather conditions and leave you stranded during gloomy days such as this one...Perhaps it is best to be a place that is of some use to others.

For example, next to Parliament there is a bronze statue of a man sitting down on a few steps overlooking the Danube. Tourists visit the statue every day and take pictures next to it. Some locals also sit on the steps and wait for sunset. The statue's

convenient location also draws crowds during winter.

The problem is that a statue feels too definite. Meaning is literally inscribed to you. I also wouldn't like having people dangling from my neck while taking a picture. Solidity and being stoic have never been any of my qualities.

\*\*

“What about a nice little book café?”

“Little and nice?” I would like to hear her reply.

“An attic room in an old building overlooking the city?”

“You don’t like attics.”

“A lighthouse built at the edge of a glacial lake, serving no purpose but to help you swim in the evenings?”

“The water would be too cold and that’s creepy.”

“Maybe a secret hotel room by an old port, where there’s no room service and you can stay as long as you’d like.”

“Have you ever even been to a port?”

“Please remember me...Is that something people say anymore?”

\*\*

The roads to solitary souls are insufferably winding. Now it is dark and I've tired myself with this latest summoning. A bird has joined me at the bench in search of cookie crumbs. Maybe it is the same survivor from earlier on, ready to carry me away, though I still don't know where I'm heading off to next.

Perhaps that's it. I can stay here a bit longer. This bench has been good to me. I'd

like to offer the same to someone else: a place to wait, to think, to catch your breath, to get yourself prepared for the rest of the climb or wherever else you intend on going. I can only hope I've already done so.



**PHIL 328H**

*In Loving Memory of Jack Roberts*



## **Unofficial Log #1: January 19<sup>th</sup>,**

**10:56PM**

Classes begin tomorrow. Last Friday, Dr. Harris summoned me into his office via email. In this brief correspondence, he outlined the “need to discuss a delicate subject.” My immediate overreaction centered on what I considered a shocking turn of events concerning my ascending star in the Humanities Department.

But after a cup of milk with vanilla extract and various mental skittering eased by my vanity, I realized just how unlikely that was. My student feedback had been

positive as far as I knew. Most of my colleagues respected me or at least my work, and I was just on the verge of finishing a hopefully successful second book which revisited Unamuno as a predecessor to existentialism. It wasn't a truly new concept but still.

Instead I went into Dr. Harris' office and found his usual three-day stubble whiter than I last remembered. He looked weary but happy to see me. After putting on his glasses and closing the door, he cleared his throat and said: "It's about our friend David."

David was one of the oldest members in the Department. He was a Mexican philosopher from the UNAM specialized in a vast range of subjects, most notoriously the liberation theology. He was an established speaker in the Latin American conference circuit and got published at least twice a year in well-known journals. No one knew anything else.

The legend was chimeric across faculties. Some said he'd been in Cuba during the Revolution. Others concurred that at some point he abandoned a Jesuit sect in order to marry and try his luck with sports

gambling. The truth was that David's private life was truly private, forcibly imposed as such on others, and no one could doubt his qualifications.

Dr. Harris tore off a post-it note, began scribbling on it, and passed it over with undisguised annoyance. The note read: *PHIL 338H Azúa, Nietzsche, and the One-Minute Song*. He almost smiled at my confusion but his lips seemed stuck in place, smirking.

“This is the name of David's Honors class for this semester. He was adamant about the title and not discussing the content. He

dismissed it as inter-disciplinary course and asked me to respect his seniority. I couldn't say no. I want you to please sit-in, maybe the Tuesday after next, and send me a log of what you see. Can I count on you?"

Of course, I said. Now I just have to work on my log format for next week.

**Log #1: Tuesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 9:50AM**

I received an email earlier in the week from Dr. Harris notifying me that David missed his first two classes. They'd been in touch and he was definitely coming today. I

arrived at the classroom ten minutes earlier, having finished my own lecture, right as an accounting class came to an end. Once the room cleared up I chose a seat at the back row.

At 9:50 only three students had made their way into the classroom wearing hoodies, what looked like felt boots, and sweatpants. Ten minutes passed and four more students came in with similar attire, albeit one wore jeans. A couple of minutes earlier I'd been asked whether or not I was a sub, which I politely denied. At 10:15 I had no choice but to call off the class,



apologizing on behalf of their fabled professor. I gracefully accepted their grumbles and dirty looks in order to revise this log before sending it off.

**Log #2: Thursday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 9:50AM**

David called in sick on Tuesday about two hours after his class was supposed to end. He also requested a ground-floor classroom to make the walk easier for him. Dr. Harris agreed and notified the students. His distrust grew, given the circumstances, and so he asked me to sit-in once again. My lecture dragged along more than usual

for reasons that are neither here nor there.

I luckily made it there at five to 10.

I found the same group of students chatting happily in a much smaller classroom. It didn't surprise me since the number of Philosophy majors doesn't exceed the low thirties, a number which can only diminish when taking into account the Honors aspect of the class.

David was nowhere to be found.

What I did spot was a scattered pile of assorted miniature chocolates on the large desk, right where you'd expect to see scattered paperwork. I greeted the class,

found a seat at the back, and read a chalk scribbled note on the board which said:

*“Went to the restroom. Take a chocolate as a token of my sincerest apologies”*

I gave the room a brief scan. The students had indeed accepted the token and then some. But before I opted to do the same, David came back into the room. Streaks of silver hair hung above his forehead like numb pine needles. He wore a navy suit and white collared shirt, coffee tainted at the chest, and unbuttoned near his hairy belly button. The khakis had been ironed

at least. After giving me a brief a nod,  
David began his lecture.

“Hello class, feel free to call me Dave. I can see you all accepted my token. Thank you. You’ve saved me the difficulty of letting perfectly expired sweets go to waste.”

Visible panic ensued along with a prolonged and painful silence. I don’t think anyone made a real attempt at calling on their gagging reflexes but the intentions were surely there. David let out a short, hollow chuckle, resembling the crackling of firewood.

“Relax, I’m only joking” he said. “Surely you felt though a strong level of disappointment mixed with revulsion, and possibly even hatred towards the source of this simple deception. Now, I want you to think about what you felt and look into your earliest memories for a comparable situation. Write a brief summary to present to the class in fifteen minutes.”

Mumbles ensued and I considered asking David to step outside. He merely winked when we established eye contact. I wasn’t his superior or even a true colleague in terms of experience so I inwardly shrugged

and thought about his assignment. Silence confirmed the entire class had done the same. It was probably my fifth birthday party since my parents were still together.

We had a piñata in the garden, pizza, and I invited my best friend from kindergarten.

The real attraction was the magician though. It was almost a religious experience and at the very end of his act he pulled a rabbit out of his hat, just for me. Unfortunately, once the party was over my mother said I couldn't keep it because of my allergies. Did the loss and tears scar

me? I don't know. It certainly didn't make an animal lover.

Over twenty minutes passed. David pointed at the student closest to him and the expositions began. Someone talked about having received an M-rated game for Christmas and not being able to keep it. A lucky pet experimenter talked about the time Spot ran away from home. Another person mentioned their trading cards being stolen in the cafeteria during their first day of school.

But there was one student who was very hesitant. She was the only one wearing

jeans and a puffy brown jacket which made her a likely commuter. Her paper almost audibly rattled in her hands. David sort of straightened up and his complacent smile turned into an expression of attentiveness. The student began to speak with a soft, yet clear voice which in no way implied fragility.

“It was early March and I was six. My parents had called the babysitter. I remember crying because my babysitter wouldn’t let me have any ice cream after dinner. My parents promised they’d be right back. Both of them had been music



journalists when they were younger, which is how they met. It was their first time going to a gig in the city since I was born. I remember waiting and waiting in my bed with the lights off. The roads had been slippery on 9W. They didn't make it to the show. I kept waiting.”

An invisible rift seemed to separate David and the student from the rest of the class. They stared at each other as if in search of something buried long ago. There was nothing to say. The other students turned their attention towards me as if expecting

me to intervene. I could only bring myself to do a strained throat clearance.

David looked up as if reemerging from a cold pool and said, “Right, I think that’s enough for day one guys. I’ve posted a couple of chapters from Azúa’s *Historia de un idiota contada por él mismo* on Blackboard. Please print them out and read them for next class. We’ll discuss some of his ideas. Sorry again for the absences. I promise there’ll be no more chocolate jokes next time.”

Once all the students were gone David seemed as disheveled as before,

disappointed it was me who stayed on after class. I explained my role as an objective observer, voicing the concerns we had in the Department about his prolonged absence, and expressed a desire to be of any service to him. He kind of looked at me as if I were a channel on the verge of being changed and said thank you.

**Unofficial Log #2, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1:34AM**

After an unsuccessful search through the Spanish Lit section, word-of-mouth badgering among a few colleagues, an intra-library loan request to Baruch's Spanish collection, and a week-long

waiting period, I've finally received and blazed through Félix de Azúa's novel; an easy feat given the book's brevity and directness. Although it can easily be labelled as unorthodox teaching material, there are some true metaphysical gems and a few chronicles college kids can enjoy.

Among them I can include (roughly translated by yours truly) Azúa's Idiot identifying his entry into university as an opportunity to "meet the specialists on happiness." He also refers to casual sex as "a conversation between the deaf-mute"

and love as a “synthesis between political happiness (collective, ethical, and dogmatic) and sexual happiness (individual, aesthetical, and heedless)”.

It is unlikely Dr. Harris had a chance to search another misplaced copy, seeing as he’s having me sit through another lecture the day after tomorrow. Oh wait, it’s already Monday. I really have to stop reading with the lights off and the T.V. on mute. It’s kind of fun finding the right channel to serve as a stable light source. The home shopping networks work best. Time to start planning mid-terms.

### **Log #3, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 9:50AM**

I was late once again. One of my students stayed after class to ask me whether or not the cumulative mid-term would include everything we've studied so far. David's class seemed a lot more surprised to see me this time around, as if I was an intruder, rightfully so perhaps. David himself gave me another wink and motioned me to an empty seat. He looked a lot cleaner, but he was wearing this black Christmas sweater with a bridge of smiling gingerbread men sewn across his chest.

“As I was saying, the first lecture given by Nietzsche on the future of German education remains controversial because he questioned the necessity of education being extended to the masses, portraying it as an erosion of education itself, which in his eyes would become just another element of the capitalist market.

I would assume there are no idealists left among you who see philosophy as a source of intellectual fulfillment. I’m paraphrasing here but in Nietzsche’s parable, the philosopher tells his student that a rational man wouldn’t rationally pursue

being cultured if he knew just how alone this pursuit would leave him. For the rest of you hoping to make a career out of this, well, bless your hearts.

Now, please remember we have a mid-term scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup>. Yes, go ahead, check your virtual calendars. It is two weeks from today. I can't guarantee the Azúa chapters will be included, but you definitely have to read Nietzsche's lectures. Be prepared for anything my friends.

As I said before, an important engagement awaits, which is why I've called the great Professor Lima to fill in the rest of the



lecture. Is the show obliged to go on? It should, because if it didn't you'd be sitting here with a dumb look on your faces. I will see you all on Thursday. Thanks again Ed.”

Nice. I fumbled a mixture of monosyllables with the intention of having a word with David but he was out the door before I could spew the semantic equivalent of mystery meat. I felt I had two viable choices, which manifested themselves during an excused trip to the restroom.

I could either end the class early or go on an improvised rant on Nietzsche, a

philosopher I'd only read about in modern publications. We all have our calculated limitations. I looked in the mirror, brushed those few chosen strands of hair remaining on my forehead, thanked them for their bravery, and made my way back to class.

“Thank you for your understanding. You aren't the only ones who still can't get used to these surprises. It wasn't so long ago that I had to sit through similar ordeals as a student. The worse thing someone can do is try and bullshit you. Yes, I said it. Some professors may say otherwise, but your time is precious.

Some of you have jobs, others like working out and practice sports, I don't know. In the end, I'm sure you'll find something to do. Enjoy the rest of the day. Again, I apologize for my colleague's irresponsible behavior. It will be notified to the appropriate authorities."

**Unofficial Log #3, February 14<sup>th</sup>,  
11:49PM**

It's nice to have nothing resembling romanticism on a Valentine's Day. Of course, I've been asked to sit through

David's midterms. It's nice having all of these books on my lap. It's getting to the point where I might even go for a poem. Wait, never mind. Must be the milkshake.

**Log #4, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 9:50AM**

I love it when my students feel the need to ask for extra time on an entry-level philosophy course, as if it could make up for all the unread texts and absences. I was late to David's class, a fact which will surely be omitted from my final report. After making my way downstairs I heard the music in the hallway. I almost crossed my fingers. It didn't change anything.

All of the students had the same look on their faces, listening, or simply staring at what appeared to be a blank piece of paper in front of them. Well, the exception was X. the commuter student whose name I will omit out of respect. She was the only one doing any writing, almost furiously so.

An old battery powered boombox sat on David's desk; the kind everyone is now too embarrassed to admit they used to bring to the beach. His hand rested on a small pile of exams. He motioned me to a seat once again and handed me a sheet, which read:  
*"Why do you think an artist would compose*

*a song as short as this one? Use the material discussed up to this point.”*

I realized David would rewind the cassette tape every two minutes or so. I realized there were tears streaming down through David's wrinkles, reminiscent of clear fjords meandering through brown ravines. I realized there was some sort of reaction expected of me. I realized the song had arrested every visible reaction.

Song is perhaps an inadequate description. It was more of a ditty which began with a sequence of alternating bass lines. Then came the soft sound of a synth, maybe a

Casio, I don't know, music isn't my thing. But what hit me the most was that French horn, like a battle call after a horrible defeat, isolated, withdrawn.

The rest of the students eventually began to tackle the exam. I probably would have done the same; not for the grade but just to show that I cared. I did get up from my seat and tapped David on the shoulder and asked to have a word outside. His back almost recoiled. His whisper ventured through his phlegm and whatever was keeping him around.

“I have to watch the tape.”

It was all he had to say and it was enough for me to pat him on the back before making my way out the classroom. I could always make the argument that the examinations for the Honors kids were historically a bit on the symbolic side so I went outside even though it was freezing. A student was smoking a cigarette by the door. I asked him for one and found myself humming the one-minute song.

**Unofficial Log #4, March 24<sup>th</sup> 7:43PM**

David vanished shortly after the midterms. Well, that's likely to be inaccurate for all I know. The facts are that he never came



back to school. He also got rid of his cellphone and put his small house in Piermont up for sale during the first week of March. His emergency contact was a Salvadoran poet who hadn't seen him for over a year. It was clear that he left willingly though, or at least it was easier for everyone to think so.

The rumor mill around David's myth has been circulating savagely ever since. The words "persecuted anarchist" and "drug addict" have been used in the same sentence. Some of the blame also landed on me for interrupting his lessons and

being a Dr. Harris' mole in the Department. His PHIL 328H was merged with a sociology class and everyone will likely receive an A at the end of the semester, barring any further catastrophes.

**Unofficial Log#5, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 9:28PM**

I really didn't think these logs would continue, but chance, or whatever it is we regard as such, would have it otherwise. I ran into X. in the library basement, sitting cross legged on the floor at the Spanish Lit section. She no longer had the puffy brown

coat and took a while before recognizing me.

“Hello, I don’t know if you remember me but I’m Dr. Lima, I was asked to observe your Philosophy class a bunch of times.”

“Yes, I do remember you.”

“You see, I really don’t mean to bother you but there’s been something that’s kind of been troubling me, given all of the recent developments surrounding David. I sort of have a question to ask you, but it’s alright if you’d rather not talk about it.”

“What is it?”

“Do you remember the day of your mid-term?”

“Yes, what of it?”

“Well, when I first came into the room, I noticed you were the only one in the class who was doing any writing. All of your classmates sort of had a blank look on their faces but you seemed to really know what you were doing. Is there a reason for it? Like, did you find it easy or...”

“It was the song.”

“The song?”

“Yes, I knew it.”

“How?”

“It’s from the first Neutral Milk Hotel album. My parents used to play it a lot before the accident. It was one of their favorite bands.”

“I see. I’m really sorry about what happened. I know it is probably the wrong time to be asking this but I wanted to know if you talked to David about this song or anything like that? It’s okay if you don’t want to talk about it.”

“Well, you have to promise to keep this between us.”

“I will write it in my diary. That is all. You have my word.”

“Okay. The song David played is titled Avery Island/April 1<sup>st</sup>. The album is also called Avery Island. He said his wife’s middle name was Avery and she hated it. She also passed...The song reminded him of her.”

“I see. Did he by any chance say he was leaving?”

“No. But I like to think he went sailing down to Avery Island. It’s actually a place in Louisiana you can also access by road. Maybe he’s travelling down the Atlantic, bordering the tip of Florida, and into the Gulf, playing that song, reading his crazy books, and letting his tears hit the ocean.”

“I’d like to think so too. Thank you, please call me Ed, and feel free to talk if you need anything.”

“Thank you, I’m X.”





**Anonymous**



It was my first Thanksgiving abroad. Even the rowdy Spanish tennis players from my dorm had been invited to spend the holidays in a home. My initial instinct was to travel somewhere remote, gray, an ocean of sorts. I was broke.

The entire campus was a combination of empty parking spots, fallen leaves, and lingering breaths the wind had not felt the necessity to carry away. For once, I felt free to roam around.

I saw you pulling into your building's driveway. You walked with your head

down. I could still see the bruises on your  
face. I'm sorry.

**Antiguo Cuscatlán, El Salvador**

**7/11/2017**



I need you to understand that racism and bigotry are real, as real as the art and hope you always resort to. It's easy to raise yourself up and pretend to be able to judge another person. Look inside, choose to overestimate your faults and learn to say thank you more often than sorry. I know you often think about you know what. Let this weight go. You are not so alone, so different, so cold.





## **Repertoire**



*An Introduction of Sorts:*

**The Fool** - His affectation was transient, determined by moods. To walk into a room full of people was easy. To walk out of the same room alone was the hard part. His explanations didn't explain, merely scratching the surface for the sake of entertainment. It didn't matter if people laughed or showed their contempt. His was a disappearing act. Applause meant he did not have to answer any questions.

**The Professor** - A connoisseur of mostly nothing, unsteady in his steps, and openly dissatisfied with dissatisfaction. They

watched him enter a room and expand without ever leaving his predetermined corner. He only spoke at great lengths about things he knew nothing about. From Tuscan wine to Žižek's jokes, he couldn't care less if they said distasteful things behind his back. No one could say he was either the life or death of the party. But he was there, as himself and no one else. It was thankless task in which he often said thank you.

**El Viejo** – “This experience has taught me a lot about how weak I've become. I respect life (or at least its providential theme) less

than most people. This doesn't mean I am not grateful to be here. Sometimes I need to sit in a state of silence and darkness to face the truth. Then I go to sleep and wake up the next day knowing I have not done much. I have nothing to teach you."

**The Sprite** - "Adolescence taught me one thing: I belong on a stage. The problem was that my sensitivity made me wary of the spotlight. I felt safer hovering about behind the scenes, putting things together. Life has now become my theatre. My aims remain modest. My gestures are dictated by an absence of meaning. This lends a

universal dimension to my affectation. I  
can still dream.”

*To the one who got away?*

**The Fool** – I believe you will see this and  
think of me fondly. I still believe in your  
good will. It’s not as bad as you think. See?  
You are already smiling.

**The Professor** – Rilke had this whole thing  
about solitude, how it is something worth  
safeguarding among the people closest to  
us. Perhaps there is nothing wrong in  
taking some time for ourselves, to cherish  
the fleetingness of what we had.

**El Viejo** – Hmmm... (pretends to be exhaling some form of smoke)

**The Sprite** – Friends are people you never have to see again.

*Late night, no one around, Mac Demarco's playing in the background...*

**The Fool** – Don't worry about me, really. I like to wait in silence and listen absentmindedly to the sound of my desperation. It's really not a problem. I'll just sit here like this for another song.

**The Professor** – Thing is... solitude really does make you insufferable.

**El Viejo** – Shit.

**The Sprite** - ...

*What makes you tic?*

**The Fool** – The sight of you walking  
away...

**The Professor** – Perhaps it's not so much  
the fear of an afterlife as the fear of life  
itself.

**El Viejo** – Learning to let go.

**The Sprite** – A dusty bookshelf, the smell  
of bergamot, bike rides in Vienna, Central  
American rum, all things cured.



*Write a 3-5-3 "haiku"*

**The Fool:** Life was wine / I learned how to  
drink / Never threw up

**The Professor:** Smoke drifts above / Each  
night we must march / Dreams ablaze

**El Viejo:** Seasons undress / You once  
chose to forget / Forget this

**The Sprite:** In a storm / Wear your  
dancing shoes / Wait for me

*Preferred apocalypse setting*

**The Fool** – A Turkish bath house.

**The Professor** – Kien's library.

**El Viejo** – My mind.

**The Sprite** – Among friends.

*How to say I'm sorry*

**The Fool** – I'm sorry.

**The Professor** – I'm sorry.

**El Viejo** – I'm sorry.

**The Sprite** – I'm sorry.

*Famous last words*

**The Fool** – When I die, I want you to remember something. I just can't

remember exactly what that is. Perhaps it is best if I let you decide.

**The Professor** – My regrets simply mean I've done something right, though this is perhaps only a consolation prize for a notorious onlooker like myself. I don't care much for natural causes. I just want to be able to say I have done something different, something which few people have striven to do. I want to believe there doesn't have to be any value for sticking up for what I believe in.

**El Viejo** – Just play Chopin's fourth ballade.

**The Sprite** – Amé.

**“You don’t have to go abroad”**



There are those who arrive at a party with an umbrella in their coat pockets. There are those who will purchase wine and beer for others to consume. There are those whose preparations for said gatherings involve lying in bed for a few hours.

Julian wanted to come back home with a few people who'd fill his apartment with joy. He knew attractive apartments had to be moderately clean, possess basic furniture, and smell like coffee. In his case there was even authentic artwork on the walls.

The fog outside his door slowed him down. Even from this distance, Julian could hear the hands on his bedroom clock ticking. It was half-past nine. Sleep meant dreams, meaningless experiences, alone. No, no, and no.

What was the key word for this night? Resolve...Bravado...Sisyphus...Come on. As much as he prattled in silence down the stairs, Julian could not help but feel the sweat sliding down his ribs.

Buses, trams, steps, incongruence. Julian simply felt smaller the more he walked along the Museum Quarter. He also felt the



need to praise his shadow for being more than he could ever be, simplicity reacting to light.

There were always similar things to say. I am from San Salvador, you know, Central America, sort of by Mexico. I know Z from Sociology. Of course I like music.

Now he was there, much too early, just as empty. Julian felt stripped of a vital shell as he removed his coat. It was necessary. The host deserved a firm handshake. Here was the alcohol. There is the fridge. No questions asked.

Nadia played the oboe and studied in a Hamburg Conservatory. Julian's name initially proved difficult; at least the way he pronounced it. Maybe it was his accent, maybe she knew he'd come on a mission. Maybe he was no longer deceiving himself.

-“What I like about Mahler is the feeling. You know...technically speaking my knowledge is limited. I just know his undeniable angst and a real quest for truth. Does that sound strange? I'm sorry. I'm rather ignorant in classical music.”

And Nadia stared into his eyes as if he were now the sort of man who could be

relied upon. She went into the bathroom to look in the mirror. It had been a while. Should she ask him to come in? But in the realm of beer bottles and smoke, Julian had attracted the attention of two more students: younger, stoned.

-“I love it here! There’s just so much to do. Are you going out with us after this?”

While Julian struggled conducting a four person conversation, her words rang out like keys rattling inside a cave. It was always this echo, ghost, scratching away: *You don’t have to go abroad.*

She wasn't there to see him go out into the cold once more; maybe from above.

## **Pillow Talk**



I once tried to justify my existence to someone I'd recently met. It was close to midnight and we weren't drunk. The question posed went something like: "But are there really other people like you?" A whirlwind of faces was summoned before me. I could not feel their depth and inhaled them in a single breath. Naturally, I burst into laughter.

I wanted to put everything in a single sentence; a line I could perform and master for the rest of my life. It had to be less pure than a poem, more asymmetrical than a haiku, and without the complex

associations of a name. Maybe a simple:

“I’m afraid of not being alone.”



## **Questionnaire**



I decided to mark with an X the option which said: I'm not sure. I also wasn't sure if an X would suffice or if I should use another type of indicator. My answer surely wasn't definitive, but it also wasn't lacking in certitude. Alas, it was faithful reflection of my personality.

I didn't have any major problems with the rest of the questions. The silence which reigned over the waiting room helped me to focus and I never felt the receptionist rushing me. Still, it felt strange looking back at my life in this fashion. I would have liked to have a cup of coffee at hand.

When I finished the questionnaire, I returned to the question which was giving me trouble. I did not want to leave anything undefined, especially in this last instance. But I was also tired and knew my perfectionism wouldn't postpone the inevitable. I got up and went to the receptionist's desk.

“Good afternoon, I finished with the questionnaire but there's just one question which gave me trouble. The truth is I don't know how to answer it correctly.”

“Let me have a look. Which question are you referring to?”

“It’s the one about the personal cause of death. I’m not sure if it has to be the same as the official cause of death.”

“Not necessarily. Did you suffer from a natural death?”

“No, I was shot.”

“I see. And which is your country of origin?”

“El Salvador.”

“I thought as much. People from that region always have difficulties with that question. Don’t worry about it, just step

inside. The important thing is that you are here now.”

“Thank you very much.”

My hand began to tremble while I handed her the questionnaire. I thought about the concept of distance, what it meant before and what now seemed more like the recollection of a dream. I did what I could to express this through a smile. Then I continued with my journey.

## **PAPSS**





The Post-Anarchist Party of San Salvador (or PAPSS) had just received their first donation. It was an unexpectedly generous sum from an anonymous source. When the founding members of the party first created a Kickstarter site, they did not expect such an immediate response, let alone a fulfillment of their \$7,749 goal.

The figure had been set with an underlying sense of humor. How could their family members and friends explicitly support

such a peculiar cause? But there it was; they had reached their fictitious goal in one go, even though there was an uneasy feeling about who PAPSS could be theoretically answering to.

PAPSS' current Secretary, Alex, oversaw the running of the site and kept tabs on its progress. He'd been originally cynical about this enterprise. Now they were a 'thing' with funds. There was a real opportunity to make their idyllic proposals

into realities. He informed PAPSS's current President straight away.

\*\*

PAPSS had initially been an unofficial university group comprised of a handful of students from the humanities faculty. These students shared several classes, ages, genders, and more importantly, cultural interests. They weren't precisely friends, but possessed a sort of intellectual camaraderie which brought them together.

Their initial meetings and anti-establishment activities were held in empty classrooms. They would seize them without permission along with the remotes to the overhead projectors, mostly on Friday afternoons. They would close the doors and use secret knocks. Curious janitors and other onlookers would be brushed away under rather creative pretenses.

The group was drawn closer by afternoons spent deconstructing the ending to *Savage*

*Detectives*, poetry related affairs, film appreciation sessions, all things Spencer Krugg, and visits to virtual museum galleries. Secret knocks became codes and an interest in anarchism was radicalized by an unexpected event.

\*\*

It was mid-April, just a month into the spring semester. The corresponding campus authorities met with a few student organizations to present an important new

legislation under consideration. It was one which had already been addressed by the corresponding national authorities after meeting with a few non-profit organizations and so on...

We are talking about the recent regulations regarding tobacco consumption in public spaces, which infuriated the members of the group beyond the languid demeanors they customarily adopted. Smoking indoors, even in their hijacked classrooms,

had been a group pleasure; now being  
forcibly taken away to please faraway  
bureaucrats.

Eloisa, a psychology student who adopted  
a discreet position of leadership within the  
group, called for an emergency meeting to  
discuss the matter. After a series of  
confusing email threads, she summoned  
everyone to a quiet green area overlooking  
the university sports complex. They could

bring along a microwave and eat there for all she cared.

\*\*

It was a beautiful Tuesday afternoon.

Vultures circled over the field and slivers of clouds unthreaded themselves across the sky. Eloisa waited on a picnic table, scribbling on her notebook a list of ideas she wanted to discuss. Everyone arrived late, though mostly everyone arrived nonetheless.



Eloisa made it clear she was not trying to be a leader. She simply wanted to get everyone together as soon as possible in light of the recent developments. She took out her pack of mentholated cigarettes and slammed them on the table, saying a series of “incendiary” remarks.

There were various personalities within the group, including the sort of people who speak their minds animatedly precisely at times when it is not required of them. It is

relatively unknown if there is a secret pleasure which motivates these individuals to act this way. Rest assured, Iván had a smile on his face.

\*\*

According to Iván, the smoking ban was created under a fundamentally flawed assumption: most of the student body and staff were against second-hand smoke. Not only was the university rector an avid smoker, but so were the deans. Iván

proposed a smoker's strike. They would spread the word of the strike through all the social media networks possible, along with the more classical methods.

The Smoker's Strike was to take place on a Monday during noon, when everyone was theoretically free from classes and other academic activities. The plan was simple for there was none. They were supposed to meet in the cafeteria and encouraged to

bring along other people to join in the movement.

Eloisa arrived half an hour earlier and joined two empty tables right in the center of the cafeteria. She was waiting with a half-bitten torta and a grape soda, tapping her foot indiscriminately out of sheer anxiety. Only five people (herself included) seemed to have received her message which had been sent multiple times so that nothing was left to chance.

Iván was the first on scene, choosing to sit directly in front of her to discuss a ska gig he secretly wanted to invite her to. Alex was next, dragging along his current boyfriend, a communications student buried in his smartphone. And then there was Martín, an aspiring lawyer too mature for Dostoevsky and anyone pre-Pasternak (save for Gogol, naturally).

Eloisa was the first to light her cigarette.

Everyone else had mysteriously forgotten

their lighters. The mentholated cigarette was passed around like a burning potato. The group then seemingly began to break their personal smoking records. The scene could have passed for an intricate choreography, a series of flexes and lung work, frenzied in their timing.

\*\*

No one gave a shit, harsh as it may sound. Eloisa was the last to put out her cigarette on the table. There were some dirty looks

thrown their way, most of them well-founded; none of the future PAPSS members had actually controlled their aim when exhaling. They were too busy coughing, looking out for security guards, and cursing the day they ever disclosed their passion for the arts.

It remains unclear who was the first to stand up when they finished their cigarettes. Iván was definitely the first to shout something along the lines of *¡Nos*

*vale verga!* (the equivalent of *We don't give a fuck!*). Alex's boyfriend meanwhile, flicked his cigarette up in the air. Alex himself was the first to run, later claiming he spotted the university rector making his way over for lunch.

Martín was the only one who decided to stick around for another smoke; that much is clear. The rest followed Alex, who set a furious pace, like an unexpected breakaway on a mountain stage. After



finally catching up to him, they all stopped for a second, looked at each other, and decided to call their breakaway a success.

They were right. Their shadows had given up the chase, so they came together in a big hug and decided to celebrate with a Big Mac, breaking their ban on multinationals for this triumphant occasion. They also completely forgot about Martín smoking his reds.

\*\*

Martín was unanimously named President of PAPSS the following day after an emergency meeting. It took place at the site of the Smoker's Rebellion, as they called it after one too many French fries. Eloisa was selected Vice President while Alex propped himself up to Secretary (a post he was to serve with the help of his man, Leo). Iván unwillingly became the Head of Recruitment.

The rest of the old group was unceremoniously sent *¡A la mierda!* (To the *shit!* if directly translated from the original). Iván even considered setting up a makeshift tribunal in an empty classroom to create a romanticized purge, though it wasn't necessary. Everyone outside of PAPSS considered the group something like a distant side of your family you never really want to run into, even in funerals.

Leo was the first to suggest a Kickstarter page, making the case that it would be an easier way to connect with other anarchist movements. Iván however, was adamant about anything relating to the States, while Eloisa was concerned with being just another anarchist group; there were already enough of them in San Salvador. Everyone admitted just as much.

They agreed to be a new force sprung from the revolutionary core of their university,

willing to stand up to anything for any reason whatsoever. A new cause with no principles, models, or equals: the first Post-Anarchist Party of San Salvador.

When the Kickstarter funds eventually reached their joint bank account, Martín knew where to strike first.

\*\*

Martín, unlike his fellow PAPSS members, only took the bus to school when he felt particularly self-destructive. In most

occasions, his mother simply dropped him off on her way to work. Unlike his fellow PAPSS members, Martín could fit snugly inside that dreaded b-word his more radical professors liked to talk about regarding class struggles.

Martín's father managed a large chemical conglomerate while his mother was the director of a prominent boarding school.

They lived in a gated community with at least 15 armed security guards working in

a single shift and all the safety related comforts which came along with it. Being able to jog outside is a luxury in a country sporting the highest homicide rates in the world.

But when it came down to it, at least Eloisa's mind, Martín was a source of legitimacy. He'd been the acclaimed taste maker in the original group, who scoffed at dubbing when it came to English and French speaking films, and was the only

one who bothered to read the likes of Goldman, Foucault, and Bukharin. He also didn't rub it in, so his voice mattered, especially at this crucial juncture.

\*\*

If there was anything in abundance in Martín's neighborhood, it was the *muchachas* (or domestic workers as they are correctly regarded in most places). In a combination of laughable minimum wages, contradictory affluence, and general



laziness, *muchachas* are the hallmarks of middle to upper class transcendence.

Martín made the case that it was important to note the power these employees held over their work places.

Just think of your household's deepest secrets, the wellbeing of your children, all in the hands of someone making less than minimum wage. Martín considered this an opportunity pull the most essential cog in

the bourgeoisie apparatus from the inside out.

A syndicate was required, the first of its kind in Martín's mind. Then, a flat-out strike right outside the gates of his residential complex. The big question loomed ahead. How do you form a clandestine labor union in an enclosed area under constant surveillance and with women who spend most of their days doing household chores?

\*\*

For a few minutes, PAPSS became a battleground over the uses of the Kickstarter fund. Then, the group members reconvened, adhered to their inexistent principles, and displayed a degree of bravery few can relate to post-anything. Martín came up with a plan consisting of an inside woman, large bribes, secret meetings around swing sets,

and civilian news reporting on social networks.

The plan started with Delmy, Martín's lifelong nanny. It was hard for Martín to admit the existence of such exploitation in his own household, but the elephant was out, as he would say. All the PAPSS members were allowed into his opulent three-story home. His mother even left him money for pizza. Eloisa was the only one

with an open look of disillusionment,  
unnoticed by all, save the host.

Martín continued with his plan: Delmy knew several of the more popular maids in the complex, the ones with the most influence in a hierarchy of social interactions which took place around sandlots, basketball courts, and outdoor pools. Delmy would be in charge of bribing these community leaders to call for a strike on May Day.

The PAPSS members argued over the integrity, wastefulness, and plausibility of these measures. Deep inside, they all knew these women worked over twelve hours a day with no benefits, bringing home leftovers and ill-fitting clothes, whilst raising someone else's kids. A little bonus wouldn't hurt. In the end, they agreed that a \$100 per woman was fair.

\*\*

Iván, a well-documented drunk, managed to syphon off a small part of the Kickstarter funds to finance a thorough reconnaissance of several affordable brothels on the Thursday night before the strike. At some point during this regretful evening he called Eloisa, professing his love to her, whilst an older woman smacked him in the buttocks with his red handkerchief.

Eloisa was stoned out of her mind by the time she received Iván's call. She put the phone on speaker by mistake and then just tossed it under her bed. Martín was lying next to her, with three gummy worms hanging from his mouth. They laughed as quietly as they could while Iván cried about a forlorn dream in a white ocean where he and Eloisa came together in a single shadow.



Alex and Leo spent their entire evening on the phone with each other. Neither of their parents wanted to admit how openly gay their sons were. On campus, it was a different story altogether. For now, they whispered to each other from two distant corners of the city, exchanging fears and insecurities.

Delmy managed to convince her husband not to put his hands on her by giving him the \$300 she received for her services to

the PAPSS cause. Some of the other women who accepted her bribe were not so fortunate. They did not call the police or report their stories to anyone. They simply washed their faces and went to bed hoping for a better day.

\*\*

None of the PAPSS members had morning classes that Friday. Alex drove his boyfriend and Iván to the meeting point. The latter was crestfallen to find out Eloisa

had slept over at Martín's. He may have even thrown up a little because of it. There was no time to react since the strike had begun. It was evident before they even reached the gates of the residential complex.

Pots and pans were beaten as fiercely as battle drums. Around fifty women marched up and down the street leading up to the main gates, chanting, and blocking all traffic with Delmy at the helm. The

security guards manning the gates floundered about, receiving a volley of plastic sandals. A long line of cars and minivans honked in response from a kilometer away.

Alex was forced to park a few blocks from the entrance. The other two PAPSS members in his car were also at a loss for words. They behaved like someone who witnesses a raging fire for the first time and worries exclusively about the health of

their lungs. Martín and Eloisa caught a glimpse of their car as they drove away, strangely coinciding with the arrival of the anti-riot police.

The two held hands and sat on the curb while the crowd turned its attention towards the officers wielding truncheons and guns with rubber bullets. At this point Delmy came to rescue her little boy with blood splatters on her apron. Martín smiled at her in the only way he knew how.

The three of them were momentarily  
together and that's all that mattered to  
him.

## **From a Botanical Garden**





Wind stirred through her wounds under the shadow of an oak. Mosquitoes drew closer, as if awakened by her smile. It was one of those smiles which sought to convey nothing. The afternoon no longer seemed to end in disappointment. How odd it felt to remain in place! She never really meant to harm anyone, except maybe herself. Even the mosquitoes seemed to notice.

After a few minutes, the voice of the world finally spoke to her, saying something like:  
*You were right, you know... about everything. All those times you felt special and insignificant; it was for a good reason.*

*Carry on with your solitary crusade.*

*Shadows also have to rest, remember why  
and how you left.*

Her first instinct was to sing, having  
listened to what the world had to say.  
Clouds began to form warm bridges above  
and she wondered how far they could take  
here. She was still afraid, uncertain about  
the full extent of her hollowness. In her  
defense, she whispered back: *Perhaps.*

**1078 Budapest, Hungary**

**4/7/2026**



I've made friends and assume some will forget me. Is this okay? Their faces sometimes glimmer along the Danube. I still think about destruction but recall the way they were kind enough to laugh with me, how they listened most when I didn't make any sense, and those rare moments in which we embraced our understanding through silence. This silence means different things to each of us. So do these words. I sit alone and watch the seagulls glide along the promenade, just a little longer.



**Rest**





“Don’t expect me to stay up here.”

We’d been hiking on a solitary trail overlooking the Hudson. Winter was coming to an end. Our steps echoed among dead leaves. It was still cold enough for me to catch hold of my breath.

“I just need to rest a bit.”

My plan was simple. I’d brought along a poem by Pessoa and a few snacks. The sun was already going down by the time we reached the scenic overlook. It made sense to sit down and wait. Was there a better way to pass the time?

“Is this another one of your games?”

There were several games she may have been referencing. Most of them involved some sort of play-acting, with increasingly indifferent outcomes. The truth was that I didn't trust myself enough to offer anything more than sheer entertainment value.

“I'm not quite sure how to answer that.”

That was in fact one of my favorite lines, though I usually saved it for desperate occasions. My mind wandered to the final verse of the poem, which compares life to

wine and how it makes you throw up.

Suddenly, I felt something had come undone, began to shiver, and blurted out:

“I’m sorry.”

This time I meant it and couldn’t look in her direction. Another shiver managed to escape. I felt too tired to play it off as laughter. Perhaps it really was another way to laugh and a more natural one at that. I was grateful when she pretended not to notice.

“I know. We can do this again some other time.”

We looked at each other briefly, even though it probably hurt. I thought about the way our breaths were disappearing together and our memories would eventually follow after them. I could only bring myself to say:

“Some other time sounds fine.”

## **Viszlát**



Spring arrived without any further explanations. The Danube adopted a green hue, reflecting its surroundings in bloom. Even the cloudiest days seemed to have something to say. I waited and waited for nothing at all. My journey continued in spite of myself, a seagull in motion kissing the water. The sound of my tear ducts coming to life. I listened to silence and said my goodbyes.





**Somewhere, with a park**

**Unmarked date**



“Tell me one thing.”

“What would you like to hear?”

“Is there something you regret?”

“Overall?”

“Sure, but I really want to hear something more specific, like a sort of noise which keeps you up at night.”

“I could have been kinder to certain people. I could have chosen to face them or to apologize in person for my indifference, which has always been a sort of self-defense mechanism.”

“Is that it?”

“No.”

“Why did you choose this place?”

“It’s quiet at night and there are plenty of things going on during the day. The public transportation system is quite good and the location is centric enough to be able to travel to bigger cities. I like the way the water looks when the sun sets. Do you not find it agreeable enough?”

“I always saw you more as a coastal town retiree.”

“Perhaps, it doesn’t make much of a difference now.”

“No, I guess not.”

“Did you learn anything in general or specifically as you say?”

“I’ve become a better listener.”

“That’s good.”

“It’s a bit chilly now.”

“A bit.”

“Is that her?”

“Yes.”

“I want to keep learning...even after...”

“Please, let’s hum something nice.”

“Like that time?”

“Exactly.”

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