

Excerpt: The Girl & The Cemetery

By Todd Leeloy

I sleepwalk. For years I have lived with episodes of flying and falling, hurtling East at subsonic speed to land somewhere in the future for a few hours or days before heading back in time on my return trip. I cannot sleep in a strange bed, so I often walk when my clock is off, stumbling through deserted, moonlit streets with a camera. When I do drift off, dipping gently into that dark stillness, I drown. Disoriented by waves of ideas, images and sensation, a swirling tumble made of dream and memory, I wake, wondering,

“Has the past, passed?”

There is a woman who I have loved for years, who lives across the planet, who I have only just met. I first, and only once, saw her 20 years ago in Buenos Aires when, heartbroken, I sat in a cafe across from a cemetery in the heart of the city, taking in the pleasant evening air. It was early December 1995, Summer in the Southern Hemisphere and she walked past. She did not notice me, but I could not take my eyes off of her. I wanted to know who she was. I wanted to walk up and introduce myself, but I didn't. I did not speak the language, did not know what to say, did not... it does not matter what the excuses were. I did not know her, and knew that I never would.

But the ghosts of La Recoleta knew her. She lived nearby and passed this way daily. She had played in that city of the dead as a girl. Her father was a respected journalist, to whom Neruda had dedicated a poem. When Jorge Luis Borges died, his nephew gave her father a piece of his furniture that he used as a desk. At that moment, the book of Neruda's poems and Borges' desk were perched against a window in her mother's apartment, overlooking both the cemetery and my table. So, it's not a stretch to believe, if you choose to believe in ghosts and magic, that they knew her, that they saw me watch her pass with her easy smile and my broken heart, and sensed that she might be important to me. And so I believe the ghosts would not let me forget her.

In the days, months and years to follow, I could not get her out of my mind. The ghosts haunted me with that fleeting glimpse of her and the angels in the architecture of the city. I remembered her, dreamed her, knew her as the woman in Neruda's poem "Morning". I named her Miranda. I sketched her in hues of indigo and shades of

gray, envisioning the particulars of her character. I fell in love with her. Then I wrote a story of love and loss, of ghosts and memory.

So, I knew “Miranda” for years before I met Cecilia from Buenos Aires in Los Angeles. When I told her the story of the girl and the ghosts, showed her my travel journal and the photographs I had taken on my walk; on a map she showed me where she lived at that time, which happened to be across from La Recoleta cemetery, just around the corner from my hotel with its outdoor cafe. Then she showed me a photo of herself as a young woman. I recognized her instantly. It did not take long for her to believe that she was the girl I saw that night, and that some strange magic bound us together.

Now I know that this reverie may feel conveniently like “The Fantastic” literature of Argentina; but the truth is that in that moment my heart felt at rest. In that moment, I realized that I had been unconsciously scanning crowds, searching for her in airports and city streets for years, somehow sensing that she was close.

We are both travelers, gypsies by trade. In time we realized by chance that we had in fact been in many far flung foreign cities at the same time; sometimes only a few hours from our paths crossing again. We have been searching for each-other through space and time, missing each-other, yet knowing in the back of our minds, that we would one day meet again, for the first time.

“What now?”

In “The Wait” by Borges, the narrator (a gangster on the run, hiding in a foreign city) turns back to sleep when he is awoken from a recurring dream. He turns away, as he has innumerable times before, believing that he is just dreaming; not realizing that his destiny has finally come to greet him.

In our lives, she left LA for Barcelona and within hours I boarded a flight to London. Our lives vectoring off in different directions, once again.

But the dreams and the ghosts remain.

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