

Leftovers

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Fiction

Pavel, previously of Mala Strana Platz apartment number 10, arose to his pungent odors wafting from the multiple layers of clothes. The life of a vagabond required layers to shield him from the bitter nights. It was a moment before Pavel realized his Ikea bag was gone. Patches of dried blood encrusted the salt and peppered hairs under his nose. The villain, Vaclav, had taken advantage of his liquid stupor. The losses were not substantial he was craftier than to keep the essentials in a big blue open bag. Prague's early morning light was hesitantly seeping through the buildings. Pavel stretched; his backpack always made an excellent cushion against the cobblestones. The hoard of empty Pilsner cans disappointed him as a security system. The homeless Czech man had become a connoisseur of his country's home brew. The body spray retrieved from an outer pocket rang hollow. He had degradingly snatched the travel-sized bottle four months ago. There was little hope to dab the nozzle on his neck. The cologne was more for himself than those who would surround him. Everyone's watering eyes could see that a shower was long past due. Pavel's last shower was two months ago when he could afford a public bathroom shower. Chimes from a grand old clock rang in the hour; time to go to work. Pavel shuffled his few belongings and made for the old stone bridge in the view from his alleyway. The sun was barely gracing the horizon causing the Vltava River to blush. Faded orange, dusty yellow and pale pink sky brought adventurous tourists and aspiring photographers across the Charles Bridge.

They were going to be fruitless in attempting to capture the storybook charm of the capital. Pavel rested under a stone depiction of the Saints Barbara, Margaret, and Elizabeth always praying that at least one of the three would watch over him. It was then he spotted the first idiot assembling a display of caricatures. His dominant hand ached.

The whisper of wet paint on canvas was a personal sym-

phony. The brush was just an extension of his fingers; apart of him. He was always precise with the fluid motion of his bleeding soul yearning to be created in the real world. The finished product became a tangible expression of himself.

Once upon a time, Pavel dreamed of dragging an easel through the stumbling tourists to capture all of the Saints supple silhouettes across the bridge. Pavel took to his knees, sloping downward in an arch, and cupped his hands. He got to twenty cobblestones before coins began to sprinkle down. Tourist donations came in heavy, and light as the Czech Koruna always bewildered them. For hours the voices seamlessly meshed together even the man constantly muttering from the cheap jewelry stand to the left fell into an incoherent rabble. Two hundred pebbles in Pavel quietly muddled through a walking tour with a visit guide who exuded charisma through pop culture references to make up for his sketchy knowledge. He groaned inwardly as the tour guide announced he was only going to explain one of the thirty heavenly depictions adorning the pedestals. A young apparently American woman ogled over St. Barbara's statue and its intricacy. She wanted to ask the guide about the three women but restricted herself. Pavel gave her a weak smile as they met eyes.

A gentle trickle of coins came down to him from the young lady's pocket. With her contribution, he had enough to purchase a modest afternoon meal. Pavel waited for the group to leave before collecting his things. The overcast sky was a mirror to Pavel's personality, and if only he could capture it.

Sailing gray clouds laid in layers on the two-dimensional surface. Pavel's brush remained stagnant as if any movement would resurrect the demon landlord's rants outside the blockaded door. Despite the societal dreariness associated with rain bursting clouds Pavel always preferred painting them instead of an entirely sunny landscape. Clouds were useful, and that was all Pavel endeavored to be in life.

A fist full of koruna's bought a cheaply made sandwich. Despite the close eye, the clerk kept on the disheveled man a peach fit superbly into the palm of his hand. The food angered his body with each bite. It was as frustrating as it was nourishing. He always

wanted more, and despite this desperate want, Pavel wrapped a quarter of the sandwich for later. Back through the gaggle of foreigners, Pavel could see that his morning spot taken over by Jan Paul, a good kid, so he didn't mind. The only place remaining to him was directly left of the most popular statue on the bridge. Saint Jan Nepunmuk was tossed to his death on the spot where his representation now stands after not giving away the queen's secrets. The position came with regular donations but stepped on appendages as everyone scrambled to take photos. As the noon-day sun cooled off into pre-evening musicians began to flood the crowded six hundred and fifty-nine-year-old passage. The soft emotional violin rose above the need and greed transactions of the bridges proprietors. Pavel knew a vast majority of them had no idea what Saint they were taking a selfie with, nor the significance of the bridge to Praha. All Czech people treasured the bridge, and the visitors barely bothered to learn its history. The merciful beauty of the sun left the capital ushering in the nightlife. Usually, Pavel would have packed up, but the late afternoon donations were less than to be desired. The evening brought out everyone's suspicion towards Pavel's kind. At night he didn't count any stones, but he listened with closed eyes. Sometimes he prayed, but mostly the nightlife was entertaining as the moon took its dominion in the sky. Young people raced towards nightclubs, river cruises, and pubs while the bulk of his Czech companions scurried home from work. The interior of Pavel's stomach became querulous. It was then the Saints decided to grace him with their mercy. A cardboard box was placed next to him labeled 'pizza.'

"Dekuji! Dekuji. Thank you!" Pavel's voice quaked as his stomach rejoiced.

"Prominte," a demure foreign accent replied.

Without a proper thought, he jumped to his feet to inspect the food; its donor not three feet away. The girl from the tour guide stood before him with an inquisitive and angelic expression. It was only a momentary eye connection, but Pavel hoped his face had conveyed enough gratitude before she returned to her friends. In the box were half a pizza and a finely quartered calzone. Now Pavel could mollify his body. The capital's glittering lights was a far

better sight than the same cobblestones over and over. He became composed, and the patrons of the bridge smiled upon him as one of their own. The Czech people were always pleasant. Other than Vaclav, Pavel could not recall a time he had seen two Czech's lay hands on each other.

Begrudgingly Pavel opened the apartment door effectively stunning the landlord into a murmuring simmer. He held out in a fist the only korunas that belonged to him. The owner never made good on the many threats that spewed from beyond the door. This was until Pavel's fist became a trap for dust and lint. Even then the landlord placed his few possessions neatly on the curb with a note that almost destroyed the man. All of his paints, canvases and the pieces of Pavel's bearing soul were to be sold off to pay his debt.

Pavel didn't wish to think of history with the warm breeze gently passing through. He sauntered away from the vein of Prague that spilled into the rest of the city. Pavel's alleyway lay between a five-story nightclub and a family run food market. It was one of the best possible locations. The market would throw out their interpretation of expired food, and wasted university students would drop their wallets. Behind the markets disposable bins Pavel snapped a Pilsner with mild enthusiasm. The wheat in a can would sop up the greasy Italian invention. Pavel nestled next to the markets exterior wall, fell asleep full for the first time in months wondering what would be leftover of his life.