Mia Poletti

Palshaw

English IV

21 January 2019

Urine and Cigarettes

The pungent smell of urine greeted the woman’s nostrils as she walked through the Parisian streets, the city’s perfume sprayed with periodic bursts of intensity. With each lull in the odor’s ebb and flow, her nostrils were comforted by freshly baked pastries--pain au chocolat, croque-monsieur, crème brûlée.

The woman walked carefree through *les rues*, the streets, her elegance in one hand and her cigarette in the other, the smoke catching in her strawberry blonde hair like a helpless fly in a web. She held the cigarette as if it were an extension of herself, another finger that came naturally at birth, one of which her friends might be envious.

Her features were pleasingly monochromatic: strawberry hair, strawberry eyebrows, a darker shade of strawberry lips. Even her eyes fell victim to the conformity of an objectively beautiful face. A rebellious blue and white striped shirt hung loosely around her collar bones, the hint of a necklace drooping toward her belly. The shirt did not conform directly to her figure, but instead gave her room to breathe, defying traditional norms of european fashion.

The lipstick and lung-tarring device were the few signs of maturity that graced the woman’s youthful features, with a button nose to match her Shirley Temple-bob. Striped shirt paralleling the symmetric cracks running below her feet, the lady in blue blended into the culturally suave cobble-stoned streets.

Cigarette butts blended with gutter leaves, suggesting a cigarette tree shedding in the summer heat.

As she walked close to the road, european drivers weaved in and out of each other, each one acting as if they owned the road, each one barely dodging death as they flew past with a honk and an aggressive “Merde!” It was a wonder each one didn’t crash into the verticals of architecture bordering the city.

The Parisian heat forsaked its reputation as a nice place to vacation, invisible heat strokes and heart attacks chloroformed by the government, shielded from wandering tourists thrilled to be in *La Ville de Lumière*, the City of Light.

Even in the midst of day, perspiration was foreign to the strawberry-haired woman. She outwitted the natural laws of homeostasis and instead used the shade of her self-made smoke cloud to keep cool. Continuing to people-watch, she let passersby be fooled by her innocent complection and never-suspecting wandering eyes; they wandered to parted lips making way for the throaty, Indo-European language that entered her ears. Some spoke in love, many spoke out of it.

The boredom that accompanied the liberation of a plan-less day never left her face, even as men whistled and stared as she passed. A twitch of her groomed brows suggested the slightest hint of irritation only detectable by *les moustiques*, the mosquitos, that droned in her ears.

She ignored the coos and cries of children pulled along on a summer vacation they didn’t want to be on, keeping a steady pace and inhaling mixed scents from historic *viendries, fromageries, patisseries.*

To keep occupied, escaping the monotony of repeated motion--*step, step, step, step*--the woman took a drag from her cigarette, long and life-giving. Replacing her oxygen with tobacco, her bored expression gave way to one of instant relief. The corners of her mouth upturned, almost a reflex from societal acceptance of tar and tobacco.

With each inhale, the poised parisian created a new rhythm in her gait. Her hips swayed in conjunction with the movement of her diaphragm. Together, with the wailing of french sirens and the beat of each cobble-stoned step, the woman began a waltz with her cigarette.

*Step-drag-step, step-drag-step. Un-deux-trois, un-deux-trois.*

The woman’s feet moved seamlessly, a dance she executed without pause. She had a look of intense enjoyment accompanying her with each step, eyes of addiction concealed by her beauty. She danced this waltz at least five times a day, but her partner never seemed to know how to end, always bringing her back for another *pas-de-deux*.

The woman danced a slow, steady aria, taking her time with each puff, expanding her lungs to the widest capacity like they’d been devoid of movement for far too long. Other times--one less day, one less drag--the woman would dance a quick Viennese Waltz, leaving no time for each step to be exact. The cycle would repeat like a prolonged concerto, temperamental in nature and unstoppable once initiated.

After all packs were smoked and a permanent scent of tobacco was laced within the woman’s skin, the waltz was followed by a cadenza, a solo for her to sing with the comfort of her cigarette long gone. At times like these in the midst of her solo song, she would look up at the sky that had jaundiced along with the whites of her eyes. She stood looking up, the Eiffel Tower directly behind her--pristine, rigid, permanent--juxtaposing her frail stance.

The woman’s pace slowed, the drag in her step matching the drag once in her mouth. Without much warning or discretion, it started to rain. The fickle Parisian weather--now hot and wet--dampened her cigarette. The ambers pleaded to stay alive, but ultimating succumbed to the water’s suffocation. Her last waltzing partner had finally gone.

As soon as it had come, the rain vanished, the only trace of its brief existence apparent in dew drops lacing the woman’s halo of frizz. She stopped amidst the deathly drivers, wandering tourists, and mocking metal tower, standing with her first moment of noticeable uncertainty. Lines of thought wrinkled her young face; Shirley Temple no longer looked content.

She stood for a few moments.

Her destination, at first unknown, became clear. She would walk to the nearest *supermarch*é and buy a pack of cigarettes.