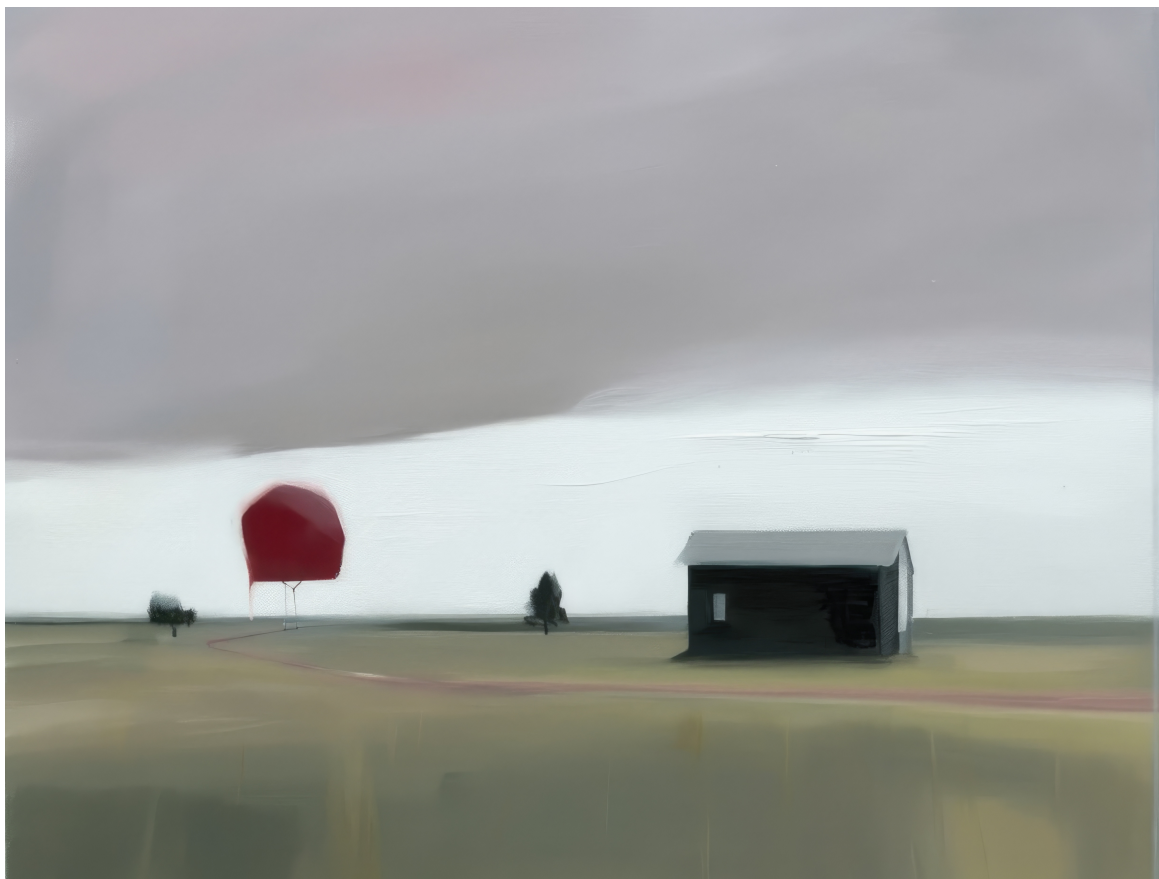


## **Derelict Hearts**

by Achanes Outis

— Derelict Hearts —  
A Fleeting Life



<< A droplet forms  
To perfection, it must be said  
Then  
A droplet falls  
And the swan dive  
It has grace  
We watch, and breath in  
And then we breath out  
Awaiting our own turn  
For what else can we do?  
Some paint pictures of what happens next  
Blues, reds, sunshine, happiness  
But what would they know, really?  
A droplet forms  
And a droplet falls  
And if we are lucky  
We have grace >>

*- A Fleeting Life, by Max Cooper and James Yorkston*

I woke up today again. I don't remember when was the last time I didn't state such an obvious fact. It's not that I fear my health will fail or anything, it's just that... there's something that saddens me in a strange way about seeing the sun rise after the moon took her turn to drive her shine into the night sky.

I guess... it's been months now since I saw Oudis or Nekri. Pariah... he hasn't paid me a visit in a few weeks but... what day of the month is it? Sometime in autumn... I guess if we're at the end, he'll come by soon enough. Not sure entirely why he keeps checking on me in person, he could just call, but I don't mind his old fashioned way of doing things. Though, thinking of that... Oudis is even more old fashioned, he doesn't even want to speak on the phone. Hm... actually, I wonder if that's because he's a Manifestation and does not exactly produce soundwaves that can be translated through the phone. That would be pretty wild if that were the case. Although Nekri can... sometimes I do get her on the phone whenever she calls from Pariah's phone because he's been out of the house for hours and left his stuff at home... at least it's not as difficult for her as the first time we met. Or at least she says, and maybe that's because now I'm here if she needs an ear... but still. It's something.

I go to the kitchen, taking coffee from the thermos prepared yesterday. I keep making way too much coffee for one person in one day, though maybe that's because I used to drink that much before. Habits die hard.

Hm... of course, the coffee is at room temperature, not sure what I expected. I can't be bothered to brew another batch, so I'll just... put the brown liquid in a mug and pop that in the microwave for a few. It'll be that. Wake up, wake up, morning self. Wake up, wake up, the feathered bipeds say. Probably, anyway. I guess I should at least open the windows around here.

Oh, thinking of them... there is a bird, chirping at my door. I wonder if it is just curious, or if it wants to be warmer. Does it know it is warm inside? But it isn't warm here. I guess it must be nice, having feathers, flying under the sun.

All these... oddities of poetry, probably remnants of Nekri. All that I'm saying and all that I said, all that I've done and all that was thought: now I spend day to day in a blindingly comforting, pleasantly thoughtless limbo. Sometimes I spend some minutes thinking about whatever I used to think about, understanding a little thing about the world that perhaps I would not have if I still was hanging around with the others... but these understandings, do they matter at all? A little bit of civics, a little bit of economics, maybe even a bit of mathematics or strategy, things so self-satisfying and useless in my case that this is akin to some trivia, except probably more for what many would consider "boring people". And maybe I'm boring, waking and walking in the same whatever square meters of living space, sleeping and dreaming of things I don't ever remember anymore in a bed I hardly find the fatigue to fall asleep in anymore. I'm tired without being tired, it's all quite strange, but at least I guess I don't fear the next day, or the next year... next decade or my end. I just go and live day by day as if, many would say I'm certain, "wasting my life away".

All this done just so I don't have to think about what I should be doing. And I don't want to think about the pros and cons of ending the whole of existence before its more natural hour. Though I guess it could be said that, if a creation from nature births its own end, then it is as natural as time passing by. If that is true, then why do I still hesitate, and why do I avoid it like the plague?

As I ponder about this question during a brief moment of clarity, a knock at the door is heard. It must be Paragoria. And I don't want to hear it in some ways, I'd like to be alone for weeks on end, maybe months or even years. Just to forget and be forgotten in this cocoon of a grey peace. Yet, I know I will enjoy the light this man brings, even if his is shrouded in doubt and fear, as there is a reason why he and Nekri are lovers.

Going to open the door, I straighten up my posture and quickly fix whatever my hair may be like, to at least look a little presentable. Maybe I do this unconsciously normally, but now I got to be conscious because... it's probably better to not let him know I'm in a weird place at the moment.

And indeed, it is him. Wearing an eyepatch today, he looks to be rather happy as well, it is nice to see.

*Lixi* – “Pariah!”

*Paragoria* – “Hey. How are you doing?”

*Lixi* – “I’m doing... fairly well, I’d say. And you?”

*Paragoria* – “Nothing new since last week, so it’s been rather fine.”

*Lixi* – “Really? I guess that’s nice then. How’s Nekri?”

*Paragoria* – “She’s doing alright. Might come by next week if you wanna see her.”

*Lixi* – “Hm? Why would I not?”

*Paragoria* – “I’m not sure, as you’re the one who left.”

*Lixi* – “That’s true... I guess it’s hard to explain at least a little... maybe I was too hasty. Anyway, come on in.”

Pariah takes a step in, his worn-down coat on, an old checker-pattern vest underneath, and grey jeans on with unwashable painting spots on. As he gets off his jacket and hang it up, I close down the door behind him. Luckily, I do not have to remind him to take his shoes off.

*Lixi* – “I never noticed before, but you wear your past on you.”

*Paragoria* – “Hm?”

He’s always been a man of rather few words, but I appreciate that, as communication is simple most times with him, no need to adorn every step with a hum, though I do like that too... I guess he does as well.

*Lixi* – “I mean your clothes. They’re all coming from different places you were in your life, it seems.”

Paragoria looks down and up on what he’s wearing, as if he didn’t pay attention when he put them on in the morning.

*Paragoria* – “You’re correct. Pants were from construction jobs, I recall being asked to paint in white some... whatever, I can’t even remember, that was a while back. Vest must be from when I used to help my folks with firewood, it’s a gift from my late mother actually, she thought it would fit.”

*Lixi* – “She thought well.”

*Paragoria* – “Didn’t she? And the vest is the one I’ve been using since meeting Nekri.”

*Lixi* – “I guess that’s unsurprising. You’re wearing this for her, I’m guessing?”

*Paragoria* – “Some of that, and some of I don’t need to replace it. It keeps warm inside and rain outside. Why change?”

I squint at it, trying to find something that’s off with it, which shouldn’t be too hard given the coat’s age. While he looks at me with a strange look, I end up fairly quickly finding faults on the fabric, and I point to the multitude of sewed lines to the tall man in front of me.

*Paragoria* – “That’s...”

*Lixi* – “It’s okay, you don’t need to say anything. I’m still amazed by your bond with her. Maybe I said it at some point in the past, I can’t remember, but if so then I’ll just say it again: I’ve never seen people like you two, and it’s... incredible.”

*Paragoria* – “Thank you. You know at this point I don’t think I’d be able to live without her. I’ve been with her longer than half my life.”

It’s odd, this feels like *déjà-vu*, but maybe that’s just what I expected him to say.

*Lixi* – “That’s beautiful. Anyway, I’ll go brew you some coffee. Sugar?”

*Paragoria* – “A bit, thanks.”

*Lixi* – “I don’t know what a bit means, I’ll just bring you the cubes.”

*Paragoria* – “Fair enough.”

As he takes his eases around the house again, he moves to the living room. The kitchen here is a little space with a counter to separate it from the rest of the place. I guess it’s set up kind of like an apartment in some town somewhere, except here the

previous owners decided to just destroy over half the wall to have this little thing here. They did a pretty neat job, too. Couldn't tell it wasn't made like this initially. This little history of the place, it makes me wonder why the choice was made in the first place, and what did it bring to the place. Did it make it special? Did working on it make it more homely to those that lived here before me?

As I grind the coffee beans to pour it in a cheap, pale beige colored, filter-based brewer, Pariah looks around my place, as he usually does whenever he comes. I guess he's trying to gauge if I'm doing well by analyzing if there's anything out of order.

*Paragoria* – “There's more dust than usual around here.” He slides his finger over the table, looks at it and rubs it, then flicks his hand.

*Lixi* – “Your military days are over... ‘could do without the reminder. I'll clean that at the beginning of next month, don't you worry.”

*Paragoria* – “I do worry, though. Noticed your place has been getting a little more messy each time I could around. How are you doing, mentally?”

*Lixi* – “Wow, didn't know I opened my door to a free therapy session.”

*Paragoria* – “Not so free, you're bringing me coffee.”

*Lixi* – “Hm. Guess I'll get some tea for me as well, then.”

He smirks.

I transfer the ground beans into the coffee machine for brewing, pour water in its tank and turn it on, I move to prepare myself some black tea. Nothing fancy, just a thing I like to get that I forgot the name of. Can't even bother to read the label, I know its rough shape already.

*Lixi* – “Guess I've been more or less fine. Just not really doing a lot or thinking a lot, you know?”

*Paragoria* – “A little unlike you.”

*Lixi* – “I don't think so. I've always had my long moments where I would do things, and long moments where I would do nothing. You've only known one part of me: the not lazy self.”

*Paragoria* – “Are you really not doing much of your days?”

*Lixi* – “I couldn’t tell you what I did three days ago. Can’t even think properly.”

*Paragoria* – “Maybe you don’t want to think properly.”

*Lixi* – “Honestly, I don’t think I want to, yeah.”

*Paragoria* – “I don’t blame you. I’ve been trying to ignore the whole thing, and truth be told, Nekri has as well.”

*Lixi* – “Or maybe she knows it’s heavy for you too, and doesn’t want to talk to you about it because of it.”

*Paragoria* – “Possibly that, yes. As for Oudis, he’s been in and out of the place, his usual self.”

I feel a tinge of guilt forming in the back of my throat, my eyes unforcibly shifting to the lower right.

*Lixi* – “I see.”

What is there to say? Nothing. I can’t admit this feeling in front of my guest.

*Paragoria* – “As he would do before, checking on Nekri and caring for her if I were to be away for a bit. Though these days I’m more at home compared to before. Figure I should be spending more time with her, you know.”

*Lixi* – “I get that.”

I’ll always remember when we first met, how desperate in her temporary loss she was, it’s as if she was grieving a loved one that died some days ago. Maybe Pariah saw that it wasn’t in her best interest to get money for them, when all Nekri wanted was him, and I’m guessing, all he wanted was her, too. It’s hard to get over how romantic these two are, I can’t help it. And yet... now I’m not sure I would desire something like this in my life. Maybe it’s too late, maybe I’ve been living by my lonesome for too long to accept another human close to my life. And maybe that’s for the best as well. Holding the secret of the fate of life in my hand... or so I’ve been told. But nothing stops any of the Manifestations of doing that, except their self-righteousness and odd moral standards. Or maybe it’s not self-righteousness, maybe it’s just the righteous conclusion to existence, given who they are. Maybe it’s just that.

*Paragoria* – “I don’t blame you, if you never want to make the choice. If you ever want to just live your life this way until your passing.”

*Lixi* – “Man, even Oudis is getting to you with how you speak.”

*Paragoria* – “Hah, he probably is, yes. But really, I’m not joking. I’ll keep on visiting you if you want.”

*Lixi* – “You’re making me feel like a grandma. Not sure many a woman would like that.”

*Paragoria* – “You know that’s not my intention.”

I smile and gesture a dismissing hand wave.

Pouring coffee in a mug, hot water in another filled with loose tea in a tea filter, I grab both recipients and carry them to the living room. Sitting down to discuss this time of the month again, I begin by turning my head to the open window, and staring at the landscape beyond the glass separating us two, and the world outside.

*Lixi* – “Does it not scare you?”

*Paragoria* – “What?”

*Lixi* – “When you think outside your immediate self. When you look from a vantage point, and see so much. Does it not scare you?”

*Paragoria* – “I try not to think about it, so no.”

I’m a little saddened by his answer, but I am not surprised. Who would want to stare at the ground from the sky for longer than curiosity allows?

*Lixi* – “Ah.”

*Paragoria* – “Is that why you’re locking yourself up in this... safe haven?”

*Lixi* – “I suppose so.”

There’s nothing scarier and more grandiose than mountains, real or metaphorical. Hm, maybe the idea of Time and the countdown to inexistence is scarier, but couple that with the former, and those two just create terror... so maybe that’s that, actually.

*Lixi* – “Actually, I’m terrified.”

*Paragoria* – “What scares you that much?”



I look back at my conversational partner. He's drinking his coffee, looking at me. Or one of my eyes? The fake one or the real one?

*Lixi* – “The whole of everything. The significance of insignificance, how simultaneously everything is big and small. That sort of dichotomy, its implications to life and meaning – they all scare me. All that just forms... a sphere, something so bright that swallows you and you can't look from inside back to the outside unless you untether yourself from the shackles you were given. Maybe those you gave yourself... I guess like you did... and I guess like I used to have. Or maybe I still have them. I guess I still have them, otherwise maybe I wouldn't be hiding. Or rather could it not be the point of being scared and to be “unshackled” per say? How can anyone live when every waking moment is a wide-eye walk of an existential angst and scare. I don't know.”

Pariah is silent in response. I guess I overshared, but... didn't he ask?

*Paragoria* – “Damn, Lixi.”

*Lixi* – “It's just... I look at people doing whatever they're doing, and I wonder why they do so, what pushes them, and so on and so forth. I find it incredibly difficult these days to find the drive to do anything, even breathing seems absurd when I think about it. I'd ask you how you do it if I didn't already know.”

*Paragoria* – “But you still did all these things in your past, and went to spend months with us, trying to help Oudis, caring for Nekri; going above and beyond what would have been expected for anyone else.”

*Lixi* – “Yes. I hoped there would be something there, and you do have to try things to know for certain if they're worth doing. That itself sounds ironic, probably because it is. I'm not really sure what to do next, but just... kind of be here.”

*Paragoria* – “That's not really a side of you I knew of. Why did you keep it hidden for so long?”

*Lixi* – “Would you not have if you were trying to figure things out? People keep to themselves even when they're out and about, do they not? What secrets do you keep from other people? Nekri being Nekri, she doesn't count. I know you can't keep secrets from her.”

*Paragoria* – “Hm. You're not wrong.”

*Lixi* – “And it's all so much little nothings. Sometimes big nothings, too. Then

death happens, but those that are still alive have to deal with departure, and sometimes not, and just go on living trying to remember what used to be. Many can't really let go of the past, and perhaps most can't. I don't know about that for sure, but experience tells me that's how it is."

*Paragoria* – "Especially in the countryside."

*Lixi* – "Especially in the countryside."

*Paragoria* – "So what do you do then all day? Just sit and do nothing"

*Lixi* – "Sometimes yeah. But a bored brain is an active brain, so I don't even get the chance to sit still often. Gotta do something, not think about the meaninglessness of it. It's dumb, I think, but that's also comforting. And that's dumb too, yet I can't blame it. There's joy I find in these distractions. Like we all find the same little things in so many different clumps of clay."

*Paragoria* – "What about the future, and the legacy of your achievements?"

*Lixi* – "If I cared enough I would do a little more than I do for future beings on this planet. At least, cared enough for them to live happily for eons to come until the universe comes to an entropic inert."

*Paragoria* – "I understand you don't talk about your family much, and I don't want to push you to answer that. However, you wouldn't even want for your friend's families to be happy?"

*Lixi* – "We all would want that."

*Paragoria* – "I don't understand you."

*Lixi* – "Sometimes I find myself hard to understand as well."

A moment of silence fills the room as the wind blows through autumn leaves.

*Lixi* – "I wish living wasn't so painful all the time. Trying to mask everything, distort reality to make it an anodyne moment at most times... even the brain tends to erase distressing events, less our chemistry... well, that's another can of worm entirely."

I scratch my eyes and look at the ceiling, wondering for a moment if I should at least mention what I think. Paragoria seem to expect me to follow-up, so I might as well.

*Lixi* – “That’s kind of why I don’t take birth control pills. Considering I don’t even care about that sort of thing, I sure was glad when I learned about all these side effects it had. Makes me think about all these people that were on it their whole life, never knowing about all these alterations that happened to them, how they grew dependent on something that distorted their beings so wholly they never could be their ideal selves, or to be who they were; just a remnant of human’s cruelty that can’t ever exist wholly. But that’s not the first time it happened, and it won’t be the last.”

*Paragoria* – “Many things like this. We all find ourselves ensnared in one trap or the other at some point, it’s a whole another story to get out and stay out. We both know how it’s like, but haven’t you found yourself in another trap?”

I sigh. Not out exasperation, but more out of an obvious reflection that I should have realized. A little sigh of disappointment towards myself, perhaps.

*Lixi* – “Probably. Maybe. I don’t know, actually. I don’t see a way out of this.”

*Paragoria* – “I shouldn’t be the one to say this sort of thing, it should be Oudis’ role, but consider what you said you would do.”

*Lixi* – “What I might do, I never promised anyone.”

*Paragoria* – “Look, I don’t know whether or not you did, I’m just assuming considering how far you went. I still don’t blame you for backing down; none of us do. But if this brings you some answers, perhaps you should reflect on it again.”

*Lixi* – “I might. I’d just like to be a ghost for a while, though. Wonder without wondering exactly, and just somehow find a strange contentment within this... er. Waste.”

*Paragoria* – “It’s not a waste.”

*Lixi* – “It feels like it no matter what you say.”

*Paragoria* – “Based off your definition? Everything is a waste.”

*Lixi* – “My definition is one of existence, anything below that is of no consequence.”

*Paragoria* – “Then why not just end it?”

*Lixi* – “Because I’m a coward.”

*Paragoria* – “I didn’t mean that end. The other we’ve been working towards.”

*Lixi* – “I still hold the belief that none of this should be a decision I can or should make. There’s deep cruelty in this and I don’t think I can stomach it.”

*Paragoria* – “Odd, I thought that everything was a waste. It shouldn’t really matter should it?”

*Lixi* – “Pariah, I’m not sure what you’re trying to do. Even Oudis would stoop so low as to try to use my words outside of their context and portray me as someone I am not.”

I look at him sideyed, then break eye contact. Didn’t expect him to do that sort of thing.

*Paragoria* – “You’re right. I apologize, I’m just upset you’re in the state you’re in. The Lixi I know would do whatever it took to achieve whatever it is she want, and she would care for other people with compassion and empathy.”

I go grab a smoke from my tobacco stash and just light it up. The whole thing takes around thirty seconds, during which no words are uttered.

*Lixi* – “I seldom still do that, it’s just not my calling. Nothing is. I just observe and try to lessen the suffering of the people I may encounter sometimes... somewhat. Sometimes it fails, but that’s probably because I get involved improperly. Not sure.”

*Paragoria* – “Isn’t all that you do about lessening suffering. And, I guess, yours as well?”

*Lixi* – “Yeah. I know what you’re trying to say, but just, no.”

*Paragoria* – “Alright. I’ll stop talking about that then.”

*Lixi* – “Appreciated.”

*Paragoria* – “So... what kind of things do you do now that you got... I guess, nothing much going on?”

*Lixi* – “Nothing much.”

*Paragoria* – “Meaning..?”

*Lixi* – “Look, I already forgot what I did last week. I kind of go and maybe create some things, maybe draw a bit, write whatever, listen to music, watch random things online, just overall letting time pass by however I feel like letting it pass. Does it really matter how I spend all this time? Actually, why is it called spending time? I’m not spending anything, I’m just Being.”

*Paragoria* – “You could go and finish working on your bathroom.”

*Lixi* – “Can’t be bothered. It works as it does, it’s just aesthetically unappealing. Which I don’t care for, and it’s not much of a bother for the people that come here anyway. Besides you, no one here is regular or even irregular. Hell, really, you’re the only one that comes by.”

*Paragoria* – “You don’t seem to care much about that either.”

*Lixi* – “Why should I? How can I explain why it's safer just to be alone?”

*Paragoria* – “You don’t strike me as one to care much for her own safety.”

*Lixi* – “Got me wrong. The world scares me, and as much as I enjoy being in the middle of nowhere, nature scares me too. I’m just... I’d rather stay somewhat warm in here. I don’t know.”

*Paragoria* – “I see.”

Both of us look at our drinks. Or the container that used to host a warm liquid inside. Usually our chats were more friendly than that, more nonsense being spewed for some time. Just nice things you could forget about two days down the line, holding a positive image of a friend or an acquaintance. Same thing in this case.

*Lixi* – “Maybe I should sell my stuff and go live off in a more secluded area. What do you think?”

*Paragoria* – “How are you going to pay for everything once you’ve moved in wherever? You can’t just stay there without getting money in some way. You’ve got a plan?”

*Lixi* – “I could just go back to the working force. But... I don’t know.”

*Paragoria* – “You’ll have to find some way anyway. I’m happy to help you out on

some months when you make a financial mistake, but your unemployment benefits and savings can't last you for much longer. I'd think selling your things will just leave you what... a few months more at most?"

*Lixi* – "I'd like to stay that way until I die – I think that sometimes."

*Paragoria* – "Hm... just sometimes?"

*Lixi* – "Okay, most of the time. You know it's nice, not having to really worry about anything."

*Paragoria* – "I won't be telling you how humans are social creatures, I'm sure you already know of this, and at this point it's clear enough to me that you're not quite well in your mind. Or at least, not well compared to most people I know. Do you even have a vice, besides smoking?"

*Lixi* – "Smoking isn't a vice."

*Paragoria* – "What do you mean, it's... oh. I think I get it."

*Lixi* – "What?"

*Paragoria* – "You want to get something from smoking, and not cure it. It's your escape card, isn't it?"

*Lixi* – "Wouldn't call it an escape card, but sure. Yeah. It's not surprising, is it?"

*Paragoria* – "Kind of, honestly. You didn't strike me as the suicidal type."

*Lixi* – "I'm full of surprises like that."

*Paragoria* – "I guess you are. Makes more sense, now, why you are the way you are."

*Lixi* – "That a negative?"

*Paragoria* – "Not for me, you are who you are and I'm not gonna try to change that. More because I'm guessing you've been that way for a long time, and I don't really want to try to change you."

Should I be grateful or offended at this? On one hand he's kind enough to not want to make me who I am not, on the other he says he doesn't care enough to try. I'm

just confused and I don't understand what his true intention is, here. That said, it's not like I'd get offended either way... not anymore, anyway.

*Lixi* – “Alright. I think... thank you? Not sure.”

*Paragoria* – “It's just that I'm not a therapist, makes it difficult to help anyone besides some general life advice and on specific things. What you're dealing with and the questions you wrestle with, I'm familiar with them, but I chose to see the world differently than you. And I don't think you'd accept my viewpoint, is all.”

*Lixi* – “Okay. I guess your viewpoint is about how life is beautiful and all that?”

*Paragoria* – “Kind of. How the world, once you see what it has to offer, you realize it's not that terrible of a place. People make the world, and they're beautiful. Not all of them, of course, it should go without saying. But those you meet and keep close, they make a world of your own, and you become part of their own world, and I think that's just what life is about.”

*Lixi* – “So... you have to ignore the parts of life and the world that are terrible for it to say “it's beautiful”? That doesn't sound like facing reality.”

*Paragoria* – “Never said this was reality. Just that this is the world I choose to see. If I have to lie to myself, then so be it. You know how my life went, I already know how horrid it can get.”

*Lixi* – “But that's... like repressing memories. Like you don't want to see what you saw. Doesn't sound like it's the right call.”

*Paragoria* – “The right call? There's no right or wrong way to see life, I don't think. Nor the world, for that matter. Even if there were, moral judgments on them are not really ours to make.”

I stay silent while going to prepare more tea. Grabbing the kettle and gently shaking it at him while he looks. He nods, although I didn't ask him what kind of tea he'd like. Probably wiser to just make green or white tea at the moment. Or maybe... why not red tea? That would be nice.

*Paragoria* – “So, what do you think?”

*Lixi* – “While I maintain that to believe the world is beautiful is to blind yourself to the world, I don't blame you for doing so. Maybe it's one of the few ways to live at peace, or happy, or I don't know what. Something positive towards the spirit and body,

some would say.”

*Paragoria* – “I take it you’re not going to go the same route.”

*Lixi* – “I’m already too far gone my own.”

*Paragoria* – “You say that now, but later...”

*Lixi* – “You sound like a dad, or a teach, or something like that. Although before you sounded like Oudis, so there’s that as well.”

*Paragoria* – “I tend to get that first comment every now and then.”

*Lixi* – “Hm... not interested in having kids?”

*Paragoria* – “I’d like to.”

*Lixi* – “I take it you can’t.”

*Paragoria* – “That’s about it, yeah.”

*Lixi* – “You must have thought about it long enough, so I won’t bother you with suggestions. But... have you made your peace with it? Sorry if it’s a little weird, not sure what else to say. Don’t want to say ‘sorry to hear that’; sounds fake.”

*Paragoria* – “No problem. I’ve yet to completely be fine with it, truth be told, but I reckon eventually I will be. I must be, really, otherwise I’ll go to the grave with regrets, which I don’t really want.”

*Lixi* – “Fair enough. Hope you’ll get there, then.”

*Paragoria* – “Thanks.”

Seems that I was able to go further into the topic of my descent or ascent into whatever; whichever way it is seen, wherever I may be going. I sincerely hope Paragoria gets to die happy, just so that he can say on his deathbed that he had a lovely life, something that was worth living. I know I may not have that, though even now I have doubts on whether or not life is worth it. In some ways, I guess life can only be worth it, given that’s the only thing that exists consciously; or at all organically, really.

*Paragoria* – “Got a question for you.”



*Lixi* – “Guess it’s your turn. What’s up?”

*Paragoria* – “Was thinking about why we go and hang around mostly with our common friends instead of anyone else, and how they chose us more than the other way around.”

*Lixi* – “They were easy to like though, so it’s hardly one-sided.”

*Paragoria* – “True, but that’s not the point.”

*Lixi* – “Sorry for interrupting.”

He waves his hand dismissively with a side nod. ‘No problem’, he mimes.

*Paragoria* – “Point is, we never really talk much about culture, do we? Or even the people we intimately know. Never really of our friends or families.”

*Lixi* – “We don’t, that is true. Family we both have, that much I know. Never heard you call them or anything though.”

*Paragoria* – “Yeah, not my thing.”

*Lixi* – “Not your thing? Did they reject you or was it the other way around?”

*Paragoria* – “Could have been both.”

A little surprised, I finish preparing the teas and get ready to bring them. Lots of drinking today...

*Lixi* – “I see. And as for the culture thing... are you talking about growing up, being part of a cultural heritage, consumption as culture or something else?”

*Paragoria* – “All at once.”

I glance at the ceiling for a moment, quickly analyzing past and present, how I always ended up somehow a misfit no matter how much I tried, even if I ‘bettered’ myself and lead on to greener pastures sometimes, how nothing really felt warm or homely amongst the people surrounding me anywhere I went; even if I was looked up to, liked, or rarely even loved. Home is people, but I guess mine never really had foundations to begin with. perhaps that’s also why I was able to depart so suddenly and without issues from my friends.

*Lixi* – “Yeah.”

That’s all there is to say. He said it, he knows it, he knows that I know, so there’s nothing else to say. Plus, he probably won’t want to talk much about it anyway, knowing him. Does that mean I’d like to talk about it? Hm. Maybe something to ask Oudis next time we talk... but I’ll likely forget about it by then.

*Lixi* – “Say, you think Nekri or even Oudis will end up getting a phone at some point?”

*Paragoria* – “Tough luck, ask again in a decade or something. They got to get used to the idea of it.”

*Lixi* – “Guess so. That reminds me, you ever saw Oudis use a computer? He’s slower than a grandma, though at least he kinda knows what does what.”

Pariah laughs, likely at the mental image of a tall skeleton hunched over typing slowly on a keyboard.

Right as he regains composure, though he never really lost it, the tea is served again.

*Paragoria* – “I’d like to see that, must be pretty funny.”

*Lixi* – “It is, I don’t watch what he does on the rare occasions he’s on these machines, it’s a little infuriating, but maybe that’s just me being a young and impatient; not sure.”

*Paragoria* – “For something that demands efficiency and is efficiency, it’s not something you can hold against yourself.”

*Lixi* – “Yeah, that’s probably true.”

*Paragoria* – “You ever looked up his search history?”

*Lixi* – “Like once or twice. He doesn’t know about private browsing or deleting his browsing data, so yeah.”

*Paragoria* – “And..?”

*Lixi* – “History.”

*Paragoria* – “Oh.”

*Lixi* – “Our boney friend does not, in fact, wants to bone out.”

*Paragoria* – “But searching History-related things... he must be zone out.”

*Lixi* – “Half the day he’s here and half the day he’s not quite there anyway – um, sleeping aside.”

*Paragoria* – “True enough.”

We go on a crack a few observations we had on Oudis, then Nekri, then ourselves. We go from topics to tangents to forgetting what we were originally on about, things and nothings said, nothing remembered, except for the pleasant time being engraved as an additional idea of an aspect that is this friend of mine, and him of me. Or so, for the latter, I hope so.

Funnily, already an hour that felt like half that has gone by. It’s been a little while since a conversation like this made the time flew by. It is nice, like being under a warm little sun in spring, as birds chirp under a blue, kind and clear weather.

*Paragoria* – “Lixi, I gotta go back to the house soon. Next time I’ll grab you some coffee or tea, whichever you prefer. Still never paid you back for that coffee you brought us, remember?”

*Lixi* – “Oooh wow. Yeah I remember, that was a while back! Thank you, but don’t feel obliged.”

Pariah gets up, gets his cup to the sink and gets ready to walk to the bathroom. Guess I should go soon too, we’ve been holding it for a while. Feeling it now... sudden discomfort.

*Paragoria* – “Then see it as a gift.”

*Lixi* – “Hmpf. Fine, just take whatever you usually take for coffee, or for tea you can just... take whatever seems nice to you. Nothing expensive though, you hear me? I know you don’t have that much money and you got to take care of Nekri.”

*Paragoria* – “Don’t worry about it.”

*Lixi* – “Whatever you say.”

I never worry about him, but I do care what he does. I don’t understand why he goes the lengths he does for me, I don’t think he goes on to hang out with me on

request of anyone, but I don't quite get why he enjoys me company. Though I do enjoy his.

Hm, I'm now reminded of the times people have come to spend time willingly with me, just chatting and doing whatever. I guess when we were kids it makes sense, but even into adulthood, there were folks like that. Never really did I consider that they genuinely liked me, because... well, I guess I didn't care. Rarely called back, and if I did it was just to get news but never to go do things, even eat together. Or go to drinks or parties, like I used to do, even if it was rare.

Things aren't the way they used to be, looking to be who I was not, and maybe I'm not who I am now, but I don't know that. Will I ever know that? Hm. A question without an answer. Would be odd, if I wasn't so familiar with them. The question then reverberates for a little bit in my mind, and disappears, only to be asked again sometime later whenever, like I never asked it before. A subtle déjà-vu that does not feel like one, yet unconsciously I know it was asked, until I consciously knows it, but by that point it becomes an inside joke to myself.

Paragoria comes back from the bathroom, hands wet, flicking his wrists and dropping drops around the place like nobody's business. He never uses towels, for some reason.

We are making our way to the entrance. I forgot what time it was, but the sun is still up; quite high up still, actually. Is it normal? Whatever.

*Lixi* – “So, same time next time?”

*Paragoria* – “Sure. Just might be early or late by 12 hours or so.”

*Lixi* – “Okay funny man, just send me a text or give me a call. Got no plans for a while anyway.”

As I open the door for him, he grabs his coat around his arm.

*Paragoria* – “If you ever need some money for food, just tell me.”

*Lixi* – “I appreciate the gesture, but the earlier gift was enough. Keep your money here, I think you'll need it more than me. Plus, don't you already donate regularly to a charity?”

*Paragoria* – “How did you know?”

*Lixi* – “Come on...”

*Paragoria* – “Right.”

For a moment he seemed shocked that I knew this. I guess he never told anyone but Nekri. Usually folks would gloat about them helping others, even by proxy, like donating to a charity. Interesting.

We say our goodbyes for the day, or week, or month. And that is that. A smile on both our faces, and mine doesn't seem to be going away even a minute after he left. What a nice day. I wonder what the next one will be like? Oh, but shouldn't I just stay on the now of today? Let's just keep smiling for now, it'll be gone soon enough, after all is said and done.