

— Derelict Hearts —

Chapter III
Seaside Voyeur

Draft 2



--- Narrator Switch ---

It's a strange time again. Another year and another month, a nondescript day that came and that will go again, to become a memory for a moment within it, that will be stored somewhere to most likely never be unearthed again.

But this day feels a little different, in that I want to do something a little different from my usual attempts at clawing to a comforting routine. Today I will simply drive for a while, go back to a coastal town I used to live near to way back. There's some wonders I wish to have there, some memories to relive, some places to be in for a little while again.

The sun is still rising at 7 AM. No coffee right now, I'll have one somewhere else. Spend a little money to make a shifting memory, to wonder somewhere where I used to simply exist in, at one point; or rather multiple points in time. It's been many weeks since I properly talked with someone face to face, so maybe there's some curiosity towards my fellows that pushes me. Something I miss, even though I dislike to have it most of the time.

Start the car's ignition, and off we are for a long drive to an old port town. The road itself I feel is familiar yet unfamiliar, with sights I recall, and most of it as much of a nothing as anywhere else. So, I guess, as much of everything and anything as anywhere else. Mountains or hills or plains, it's all the same, at the end of the day. Sense of beauty and novelty, sense of adventure and extremes, all done and gone. Perhaps I buried my youth in some fashion, and driving through these roads again reminds me of these times. Nostalgic memories that go a decade back, remembering when I first started to stray away from normalcy in many forms. When I used to escape for half a day or an entire day, to walk away into empty fields and hiding in forests, to simply stroll around the towns I used to live in, as I was starting to hate them. To take the bus and just go around aimlessly. Eventually to take the car and spend fuel for a nothing. But that nothing had meaning to me, yet I knew; only to me. The guilt there was towards my expenses, something I still have trouble admitting. I guess that, actually like today, I don't want to admit that I'm wasting fuel and money.

What is the goal of this thing I'm doing anyway? Just to Be, somewhere else? The journey to get there is a bother by virtue of it being required to be there in the first place, but I guess it's fine if the destination has worth. But this worth, even to me, I don't quite understand it. What will

it bring? Should it bring anything? Why would it bring anything? It's all selfish, eventually; considering I only think of me and myself for this sort of thing. But whatever, I'll just say that everything we do is ultimately a selfish endeavor. Still, it's not just to Be; it is to think and to see things I would not usually. To be closer to the people that, in some way, maybe keep me alive. In some way, that make life a little interesting. I guess I want to entertain my thoughts with clarity. I know I will feel cold all day, but in a way that's pleasing. As if my spirit will be stuck on a loop of a 10 AM seaside coffee. And, that's also what I want to do, so of course I'd rather stay there — whenever I'll get there.

The road is long, but it feels mellow and sweet to drive on. Memories, maybe. Eventually I arrive at the coastal town. I won't try to go find a parking space in the center of it, I'd rather walk through the streets, up and down however it was built on cliffs. I wonder how durable all of this is? I guess they're not thinking about erosion much, but what do I know, I'm no engineer nor geologist. Just a curious idiot, I suppose.

Pulling to a nearly empty parking lot, I'm quite glad to see there's no ticket to get. Whatever, not like I'd have paid to get one. I don't know if the police here patrols the lots to fine unticketed cars, but I'll take the wager. Plus I guess it's something to see as a donation to the police force, and here they've always been pretty alright as far as I can recall in my past, so I wouldn't mind.

Getting out of the car, I close to door and stand there for a moment, looking at the horizon. Altitude-wise, I seem to be looking down, and the ocean appears: sparkling blue, reflecting the cloudless sky. I breath in deeply. It does smell like the ocean is near, and just brings me back to both childhood and young adulthood memories. I wonder if it was silly of me to go live in the plains, but I guess I like it there quite a bit, too. The countryside sounds seem to be kinder than that of the sea, now that I hear its distant sights again.

Walking down the old town, the beach sand and the colors of the houses and humble buildings parallel each other quite well. I wonder if they chose to have this color scheme on purpose, or if it was because it made sense to use whatever materials they wanted to use. I mean, seems that a fair few of these places aren't painted, but that's probably just me wishing that it's not. Whatever, it's pretty, so that's enough for my eyes to be happy.

The streets are empty, almost eerily so. There's the occasional passerby with a smile; old person, usually. We make eye contact, smile and say hello. I forgot how kind strangers were to each other in this place. Not as warm as in the mountains, but who cares, it's nice nonetheless, I think. Could count the passing cars with one hand. In a dozen minutes of walking, I'm surprised... What day is it anyway? Spring? Hm... Maybe this is one of these vacation weeks a lot of people have. Makes me curious though, why there wouldn't be tourists or just travelers coming here? It's nice, clear sky, beautiful ocean, aesthetically pleasing place; but I guess it's a little too cold for most still.

And now... Here we are. The seaside bar I used to enjoy spending part of a morning in, albeit quite rarely. But fond memories of solitude were made here, so I'd like to make one again.

The place hasn't changed, and I don't remember how long it's been since I came here. Dark wood, blue hues, white accents. Nice enough, cold enough. Invites introspection, maybe? Or perhaps that's just me.

Going to the waiter who's cleaning glasses behind the bar, it's time to order some coffee. The man speaks first:

– “Hi, welcome! Anything you want this morning?”

– “Hi. Yeah, would like some coffee. Large cup. Though I wanna ask to be sure, how large is a large coffee for you?”

– “It's...”

He grabs a cup off the counter, which doesn't seem very large
“... about this big.”

– “Alright, I'll get three then, please.”

– “Big coffee drinker?” He smiles politely.

– “I guess so.”

Smiling back; although mine may come across as more genuine. I wonder if it's fine.

As the waiter clicks buttons and turns switches on a large coffee machine, there's a question that pops up in my mind.

– “Say, it’s a pretty day today, but I haven’t seen many people outside.”

– “It’s been a slow week here, people are gone on vacations and all. The usual at this time of year.”

– “Right, I figured it might have been that. You ever wonder why people don’t stay here?”

– “Home is nice for them, but they want to go somewhere else. I guess it’s a way for them to escape work itself? Lots of folks dislike their jobs, even here.”

– “Wouldn’t that be because there’s the industrial sector not too far off?”

– “Probably. I’m lucky enough to enjoy my job to be waking up most days without sighing. Anyway are you from around here?”

– “Yes and no. Used to live in the region for a few years.”

– “I see. Nostalgic trip?”

– “You could say that.”

– “That is nice. I hope you’ll enjoy your time.”

– “Unless the wind gets harsh, I figure it will be fine.”

– “Then you’ll have a nice day.” He smiles as he puts the coffee cups on a trail, and gives me the note to pay. ‘Got some leftovers coins in my jacket’s inner pocket, so I count them to closely match to total, and give them away.

Then, the usual thanks, the exchange of money, finally asking if I want to keep the ticket... to which I say no. And as I’m ready to move away, I ask one last question:

– “Is it fine if I go sit outside?”

– “The umbrellas aren’t opened, but sure.”

– “Thank you kindly.”

I make my exit with the small tray in one hand. Pushing the door to the outside balcony, I sit on a table, positioning myself to the side of the ocean and the building I just came out from. Adding some sugar to the cups, twirling it all with the wooden stick that nearly fell off earlier when I turned away from the bar. I grab a cup, turn my head to the left, and look at the azure horizon. Closing my eyes, I breath in, stay the line, and breath out. An albatross can be heard not too far from where I sit, and the waves crash softly on the sand. It is a beautiful day, today. A rare thing to appreciate, and something to appreciate because it is rare. I wish we could simply enjoy every day like this one, but routine always takes away the magic of things. So maybe it’s better this way, as sad it may be. But it’s not very sad, is it? Sitting here, not having to worry about anything but my own mortality. If that’s the only thing I get to complain about, then what is there to say? Lucky me, I suppose.

A tinge of guilt creeps up, as I look at what seems to be a worker on the beach. Technician, which I assume is taking readings for the surroundings. Wonder if they work in a lab or some NGO type thing? Maybe a contractor for the local government. Look at them, orange vest and some iron contraption in their hand. Do they like what they do? Do they care? I guess they would have to care, to be alone there. Unsupervised work only works for those that are dutiful, after all. Or so I would think. Sometimes I recall some fellows who have been trusted with tasks, and they just took advantage of their newfound situation to fuck around and not really do their job. But whatever, eventually it’s always getting found out, and they get disciplined and removed from their position.

Finding trust is difficult in many places, but I don’t know why that is exactly. I figure that it has to do with the innate selfishness of the human, modern or not. If you don’t like what you’re doing, why can’t you change it? Easy question, difficult situations. Always the same story anyway, and who can blame them? Family matters, financial security, “just to fit in”, that sort of thing. Choices forced or not, rarely the balls to say no and move away. It’s too dangerous, their life as it is, is always too fragile and they are too attached. Choices made out in a distorted idea of clarity, shackling themselves in a way they thought was consensual, in a way they thought was

respectable.

That is not a critic, for I would be a hypocrite, and I try not to be. My shackles are lighter than theirs, is all there is to it. I envy them, to be truthful. Often I wish I had some part of my life that was akin to those that I see, smiling with their loved ones, laughing during the nights, sharing food and drinks, making memories in communities. I'm a voyeur in that sense, but it isn't like I didn't experience all of this. They bring memories back to me, whenever I see it. I wonder if it's a perverted thing to observe like this?

Here, breeze caressing my skin, clinging onto the simplicity of life as if I were a modern-day monk. Yet, I am not that. I wish I could be that, too. I wish I could be but me, until I realize that to be me is fine enough today still. I wonder why I would want to be what I am not? Always needing to keep these weird unfounded desires in check, remembering to plant my feet firmly on the ground I tread on. I am lucky and thankful to exist in the way I do, to have made all these choices that permit me to be here today. To be closer to my own soul, and to see the world as it presents itself, as well as seeing what hides beneath its carcass. To exist removed from the world in some ways; many ways perhaps – as well as to exist embedded into this world, unable to retrieve what it really means to be human, except in acts of spying onto a fragment of someone's day. Observing, voyeurism, whatever it ought to be called.

Whatever it is that I say, I also wonder, if that truly is what I think, or just posturing of me? Of all the experiences I had, now all I do is hide, afraid most days to take another step; afraid of death, and of Time passing by. But still. The day is beautiful, and most days are pretty. And maybe that's fine, too.

Already now on the third cup of coffee... Time has passed, and I don't want to look at the sun's position in the sky. It's a little warmer, though.

Trying to take in the calm atmosphere, I realize the technician is gone from the beach. Now it's empty... almost empty. I spot a group of people in the far off distance. Three... four? No, three. One has a robe... For some reason. Some kind of religious group? Maybe a group of travelers? Hm. That makes me wonder... out of eight billions souls in the world, what is the importance of one in the midst of this giant number? And why do some clump together to form groups and communities, walking alongside one another for a moment, sometimes loving enough to form couples that know

now of the skin and flesh of someone else? It's odd. Just... the whole thing. This drive to be with others, this drive even to exist in a way that can be seen as worthwhile or to have... whatever, it doesn't matter. And that's probably the thing I'm attached to, personally: it doesn't matter. They're making meaning out of meaninglessness, some of them despite the absurdity of what it is to Be; knowingly so. But I... can't. No matter how much I try, it always comes back around to the same place. And it's a desert I've yet to visit. I want to go there somewhere someday in that place. To know. I want to know what it is to not know because there's nothing to ever know. Probably one of my most stupid ideas to date but, I'm still alive and there's nothing else I care about except the weak hit of "well-lived" days. Which, ultimately, are very few and far between. I guess today is one of them? I don't know, maybe I'm giving meaning to it... hm. Maybe I'm a hypocrite, after all. Whatever. If all is bound to be nothing again, guess I don't have anything to position myself as, so... What value is there here? I don't know.

And what value is there to this coffee? A little joyful moment, a little comfort in a familiar that can be had and shared across the globe. Warms the spirit a little bit. Finding comfort in the uncomfortable fact of existence. Striving towards things that make us forget of the pain of it.

I don't know why I think about this in that way. I already know of it. Already thought of it multiple times, and I forgot how many times by now. Is that comfort itself? To rework what was already sorted? To re-discover what was already discovered? It is confusing.

Sighing, I finish my coffee. Sitting here, arm holding my head, looking no more at the beach, but the seemingly infinite horizon.

I wonder what the people on the other continent way over yonder are doing? Are they sleeping? Are there going to be fisherman dying today out in the sea? It's calm here, but I don't know what's happening in the middle of blue nothings. Let's hope for them to be safe today, least I can do, I guess. Hm. Maybe. Whatever.

Now standing, I bring back my tray to the counter. We exchange pleasantries once more with the waiter, wave our farewells, and I here I am, now outside again. The wind blows still, the waves can be heard albeit a bit more faintly. I look up at the sky. Few clouds, with blue memories embellishing their trails. It makes me question, what does it mean to exist beneath these cyan hues? A question that I often wonder about, with no

beginning of an answer. A simple void wonder that may never be more than pondering a substantial nothing. I recall again this worker on the beach. What made them be there on this day? What path did they take in life to end up in the position they are in? Did they want to do this, or was it a bridge between obligations and desires? Although I suppose it's always a bridge. Always a little sacrifice of something, so that one can find a little hope in what they do, or something along these lines. I'm not so sure. Never found hope in work, nor joy in leisure, personally. The waves of time emport my soul to the reaches near a swallow, but I do not hate it either. Maybe there was hope at some point, but now it's just the fear to die, and maybe even, the fear to exist itself. Hiding behind beautiful tellings and pretty half-truths, a reach for a divine touch of something; anything really. I'm not sure, though.

What with this sudden melancholic mood?

Never the matter. I turn my head around towards the right of the street, the road to the beach. I see the trio from before... but I swear I could see a quartet, not a trio... It's just... very odd. A woman, a man, and a... skeleton. A skeleton. Okay. Were the coffees spiked with something? What the hell. What the fuck. What is this shit. I'm panicking a bit now. Is this real? Maybe I'm dreaming. Let me count my fingers... 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... Not dreaming. Am I to die?

They approach now. They noticed me staring. Close enough to say hello, at least.

Lixi – “Hello!”

--- Narrator Switch (*back to Lixi*) ---

The other two wave, including Oudis. The shocked man quickly finds the will to wave back and mutter a soft “hello” under his breath. I smile, understanding of his sudden realization. To stay here and explain things is always a bother, and I’m guessing we might have a bunch of people just stare at us. As we walk further up to the old town’s residential area, we’re now far enough from the man, who I can see as I turn my head back, is scratching his head and looking at a wall in front of him. It’s kind of funny to see, honestly.

Oudis – “Did you notice?”

Lixi – “Something the matter with the man there?”

Paragoria – “Yes, did notice.”

Nekrichta – “He did not notice me.”

Lixi – “Huh.”

Of all the Manifestations to be able to see, Nekri would be the one I assume is most likely to be real to everyone.

Paragoria – “I’ve rarely seen someone not recognize Nekri’s existence before.”

Nekrichta – “The hopeless with no dreams left, moving in a hazy sea of existence...”

I see. Perhaps, eventually, if we are to succeed... or even if we don’t; I suppose that’s how Nekrichta will cease to exist.

Lixi – “Are you okay with this, Nekri?”

Nekrichta – “Sweet Lixi, don’t you worry about me. I am here.”

That means yes, I guess. What a strange thing still... It is like slowly sitting through euthanasia, is it not?

Nevertheless, Oudis seems to want to speak:

Oudis – “Here. I recognize the house. Let’s hope someone’s home. Do you remember what you have to ask for?”

Paragoria – “Yes sir: We are from an independent research institute interested in looking at [name’s] work, and we would like to see, if possible, if there are any papers and studies that he has not published, that you kept.”

Oudis – “Perfect. We shouldn’t have to craft a lie more than that, people usually acquiesce with ease. So hope this is the usual again.”

Did he... I guess he’s used to that sort of thing. Are we doing something we shouldn’t be doing here? Hm... a bit late for that, considering the goal of this whole thing.