

THE OVERCOAT

ISSUE #20



ADVENT 2024

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers, Magi, Carol-singers, Carol-would-be-singers, corner-sitters, ice-cream eaters and all those who are with us,

Christmas has come early with Issue #20 of The Overcoat!

Issue number 20?! That's right, we're older than the preps! In fact, a couple of contributors have left us with some final salutations as they finish their schooling - many thanks to Sean Feeney, Alice Gaskell and Jemma Drew for their amazing contributions to this Advent issue!

Have no fear: some new Year 7s are here! Evelyn and Erica have provided us with the prospect of a sweet friendship in short story that we might say is 'well beyond their years'. We hope they'll have a fresh installment ready for us next issue - what will become of Bill and George?!

Speaking of friendships... Nylah has provided us with a few minor details on the subject - we hope you'll enjoy it!

If you're here for the philosophical we suggest beginning with Emily Buchanan's home-grown 'Little Asparagus', followed by a tapas-style course of poetry by Dane, Milla and Sean.

If you're heading into Melbourne this Christmas, walk the city with Sarah Lough - you won't miss a thing.

And our Advent issue wouldn't be complete without the ponderings and encouragements of Luke Faure and Scarlett Duff-Rickards, who open this issue with some Christmas spirit!

Merry Christmas to you from us!

Team Overcoat

THE OVERCOAT

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On Christmas Decor

BY LUKE FAURE

Decorations signal the beginning of the Christmas season. Lights, inflatables, and more are extravagantly arranged for the viewing pleasure of passersby. But is this costly tradition really worth it?

The short answer, in my opinion, is yes. My family used to walk around our neighbourhood, searching for Christmas decor. When we would find it, our faces would light up, and we would swiftly go in for a closer look. Some may say that big inflatables and dazzling light displays are a waste of money and aren't worth the time it takes to assemble and disassemble. However, I disagree because the joy of viewing these so-called 'white elephants' is unparalleled and far outweighs the cost. In one instance, a house on our street was so marvellously decorated that dozens gathered to inspect the many small details littering the yard. Another household set up display windows using Lego with motorised pieces. It's safe to say we spent over ten minutes marvelling at the intricate designs and technical prowess.

Decorations are one of the many things that transport the celebrators to a new world where they can experience the companionship and joy of Christmas. I fondly remember one property where the front yard was transformed into an experience that people could walk through and enjoy. This coming Christmas, I can't wait to watch my baby brother laugh with delight as he trundles past each painted canvas, the painters of which took on the cost to provide people with that delight.

So yes, Christmas decor is well worth the costly price when it brings a new world into our lives, one filled with discovery and joy. I look forward to my yearly walk where I will tour the local suburbs with a keen eye.



DRAWING BY SCARLETT DUFF-RICKARDS

Yelena Andreevna

BY ALICE GASKELL

Part 1: The Pencil

The train rattled on, taking Yelena Andreevna farther from the estate with every passing moment. She sat by the window, lost in the blur of the passing countryside. In her hand, she held a simple wooden pencil. She had picked it up from the estate impulsively, a souvenir from a life she was leaving behind. As the space between her and the estate grew, so did the significance of the pencil. It was as if it held all the stories she had never told.

After leaving her husband behind to start a new journey, she arrived in a small town, far from anyone she knew. A place where she could be anonymous, or some might say, be forgotten. She rented a room above a bakery, where the smell of fresh pastries filled the air every morning. The room was barely furnished. A bed, a table, a chair. It was enough. Yelena placed the pencil on the table in the corner, staring at it as if it held some hidden meaning. The days passed slowly, the sound of the clock on the wall and the chatter of customers below being her only source of entertainment.

One evening, as the sun was setting, Yelena sat at the table and picked up the pencil. The paper in front of her was blank, with the rays of the sunset reflecting onto the page. She hesitated, her hand shaking slightly. What did she have to say? What could she possibly write that mattered? But the pencil seemed to guide her, as if it had a life of its own. So she began to write. She wrote about the estate, the people she had left behind, the suffocating emptiness that had filled her days there. She wrote about her longing for something more, something real.

The days turned into weeks, and Yelena wrote and wrote, the pencil wearing down to a stub. The words on the pages became her world, where she could finally be herself. The stories she wrote were not grand or important. They were small, quiet, like her. But they were true. One day, she looked up from her writing and realised that the pencil was almost gone. There was just enough left for one last line. She paused, took a deep breath, then wrote the final words with a sense of calm that she had never known before. Yelena sat back in her chair and looked at the pages in front of her. She was no longer the woman who had left the estate. She was something more, something new.

She was a writer.

Part 2: The Newspaper

A year had passed since Yelena Andreevna left the estate. The seasons had changed, the world had moved on, but Sonya's life remained the same. The daily chores, the care for the sick, the endless work that kept her hands busy but her heart empty. She had tried to contact Yelena, to reach out to the woman who had once been her stepmother, and perhaps even her friend. But her letters had gone unanswered, with only Serebryakov replying saying he doesn't know where she went after she left him.

One autumn morning, Sonya went to town to run some errands. As she passed by the small general store, she noticed a stack of newspapers near the entrance. It was rare for her to pick up a newspaper as there was little time for reading. But something made her stop. She picked up a copy, paid the shopkeeper, and tucked it under her arm. Back at the estate, Sonya settled into a chair by the window, the afternoon light reflecting onto the page. Her eyes skimmed over the boring reports and news. Then, a small column near the bottom of one of the pages caught her eye. It was titled 'The Estate' by Y.A. Sonya's heart skipped a beat. She began to read.

"There is a house in the country, surrounded by trees and fields that stretch out like a tired sigh at the end of the day. I lived there once, in that house, though it never truly felt like home. The days were long and dreadful, marked by the creaking of the floorboards and the distant echo of voices. The people there were kind, but kindness can sometimes be a burden. I was a stranger among them, a hopeless figure in a painting. And so, I played my part, smiled when expected, spoke when spoken to.

But there was one who saw me, not as a figure in a painting, but as something real. She was the daughter of the house, a girl with sad eyes and a heart too large for the world she lived in. We were alike, she and I. I admired her strength. She worked tirelessly in the field. She encouraged all those around her. I often wondered if she knew how much she meant to me, though I never found the courage to tell her. She encouraged me to teach, to work, to find a life. Most importantly, she was the one who encouraged me to play the piano again. When I left that place, I took little with me. A few clothes, a book, and a pencil. But I left behind a part of myself in that house, with that girl. If she knew I wrote these words,

would she understand that they are for her? Perhaps, one day, she will read them and know."

Sonya stared at the page, her vision blurring as tears welled up in her eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that the piece was written by Yelena. The words were hers, the voice was hers.

Yelena had been thinking of her all this time, just as she had been thinking of Yelena. Without a second thought, Sonya folded the newspaper, placed it on the table, and hurried to pack a bag. She would go to the town where the newspaper was printed and knock on every door until she found Yelena. The past year of silence and separation would not be the end of their story. There was hope in her heart. She was going to find Yelena and tell her all the things she had kept inside, all the words she had never said.

They would find a new beginning.

Part 3: The Reunion

Yelena sat by the window of her small room, the afternoon light filtering through the lace curtains. Her hand moved over a sheet of paper, a new pencil clutched in her hand. But her thoughts were elsewhere. It had been a year since she left the estate, a year of solitude and reflection. The small town had become her refuge, a place where she could be alone with her thoughts. Despite the success of her stories, there was an emptiness that lingered. She often thought of Sonya, she had been her only real connection at the estate. Yelena wondered if Sonya ever thought of her, if she had read the stories she had sent out into the world. But Yelena had heard nothing.

A soft knock on the door pulled Yelena from her thoughts. She frowned slightly, puzzled. Visitors were rare, she doesn't have any friends in this new town. Rising slowly, she crossed the room and opened the door. Sonya stood there, her face pale, her eyes wide with a mixture of hope and fear. For a moment, neither of them spoke. They simply stared at each other. "Yelena Andreevna," Sonya finally whispered, her voice trembling. "I found your story." Yelena's breath caught in her throat. She felt a rush of emotions. Surprise, relief, joy, and an overwhelming sense of gratitude. She opened the door wider, stepping back to let Sonya in. "Sonya," Yelena said softly, "You came." Sonya answered, "You called."

Sonya entered the small room, looking around at the furnishings, the neat piles of papers on the table, the view of the quiet street

outside. It was a world far removed from the estate, however she had always known she would find Yelena in a place like this. "When I read your story, I knew I had to find you. I had to tell you that I missed you, that I never stopped thinking of you," Sonya confessed. Yelena smiled, a small smile that softened her features. "And I missed you, Sonya. Every day. I wondered if you were well, if you were happy." They stood in silence for a moment. Finally, Yelena gestured to the small table by the window, inviting Sonya to sit. As they sat down, Yelena reached for the pencil, the same one she had taken from the estate. It was worn down to almost nothing now, but she held it up for Sonya to see. "This, this was what I took with me when I left. It helped me find my voice, helped me write the stories I could never tell before." Sonya nodded, her eyes glistening with tears. "And now, your stories have brought us back together." Yelena placed the pencil on the table, her hand resting gently on top of it. "Yes," she said, her voice soft, almost a whisper. "They have."

For the first time in a year, Yelena felt the emptiness inside her begin to fade, replaced by a warmth she had almost forgotten. Sonya's presence, her quiet strength, was like a balm, soothing the wounds that had never fully healed. They talked for hours, their words flowing easily, as if the year of silence had never been. They spoke of the estate, of the people they had left behind. Yelena shared her stories, and Sonya listened with the same care she had once given to the sick and dying.

As the evening light faded, casting long shadows across the room, Yelena looked at Sonya and smiled. "Stay with me," she said, the words coming naturally, without hesitation. "Stay here, in this town. We can start again, together." Sonya's eyes filled with tears, but this time they were tears of joy. She nodded, unable to speak, and reached across the table to take Yelena's hand in hers. It was the beginning of a new story, one that they would write together. Little did she know, but Sonya would become a teacher at the local primary school and read the stories Yelena writes to her students. She would soon forget her life at the estate, having to look after Vanya and the sick. She would start a new life here with Yelena. As they sat together in the light, the pencil lay forgotten on the table, its purpose fulfilled.

Its story complete.

The Little Asparagus

By EMILY BUCHANAN

A little asparagus wanders the forest as it searches for its new roots to settle in. As it ventures further into the woods it realises that it may be looking in the wrong spot. It should be looking in a nice field, where all good asparagus are born. So as the little asparagus turns around and waddles back to the field it originally laid, it thinks, 'Why am I drawn back to this place?' It ignores the thought and continues to waddle. The asparagus becomes aware of the tumbling storms above and tries to waddle faster toward the nourishing crop ahead. It notices that further ahead, where the crop lays, there are no tumbling storms, just glowing sun surrounding the green field.

The asparagus sees a little cove under a tree to take shelter in, but it is already occupied by faded carrots. He politely asks the old carrots, "May I come in, just to stay dry for the night?" They all look at him in disgust, and in response, the wrinkliest, most faded carrot says, "Of course not, we don't share with asparagus. Go away!" And so the little asparagus hurries away back into the storm, continuing his journey towards the field.

As he walks further along the stretch to the crop, it starts to rain very strongly, hitting the asparagus with full force. He tries to stay close to the trees but is still hit with the rain. The asparagus sees a little cottage ahead, and hurries to it. He knocks on the door three times and waits. A plump potato opens the door, and peers outside. The little asparagus politely asks the potato, " May I come in, just to stay dry for the night?" The potato gives him a funny look and slams the door shut. The asparagus waits a little longer in case the potato changes its mind, before heading back into the storm to continue its journey.

He keeps waddling through the storm, determined to make it to the glowing crop. The storm is slowly receding, and the sun is starting to take the dark clouds' place. He waddles a little further and is soon greeted with the glow that shines from the crop. He waddles quickly towards the heart of the crop and finds a perfect place for its new roots to settle in. The little asparagus is only thankful as it slumbers down.

Romans 5: 3-5 says, "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

This tells us that no matter what comes in your path, stay strong in the Lord for you will be crowned with glory once you become true with the Lord.

Illusions

By EVELYN HENDROPURNOMO & ERICA MAXWELL

"How has your day been, Bill?" the nurse asked as he heard her footsteps falling softly on the carpet. He immediately recognised her voice but couldn't quite remember her name... Macy or Lacy or something. Maybe if he saw more than just darkness he could recognize her by her face.

"Eh, the usual," Bill murmured in reply and she seemed satisfied with that answer. He felt her press something small into his hand.

"Your tablet," she said. But he had already guessed from the size, shape, and the time of day what it was. Reaching a shaking hand over towards the bedside he gently felt around and cool glass met his fingers. Bill picked it up carefully and lifted it to his lips to help swallow the medication.

"Nice work. I'll be back to check on you later, okay?" she said and he nodded, even though it wasn't exactly a question. He placed the almost empty glass back on the bedside table and listened to the door quietly creak shut, her padding footsteps retreating.

George sat by the window looking out to the patch of dirt that was meant to be the back garden of the Aged Care Home. Some people a few years ago had tried to plant flowers but the people staying in the home had mistaken it for weeds and pulled them out of the ground and the others had been trampled underfoot. George used to be a writer. He had loved writing, his pen dancing across the page, but slowly his hands had grown shaky, his mind fogged while thinking, and he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Since coming to the home his condition had worsened. He experienced tremors in his hands and arms. He would move slowly, and sometimes while he was walking, muscle stiffness would hold him painfully frozen, unable to call for help.

It was so quiet in the room that you could hear a pin drop, but Bill knew George was silently sitting by the window, often overlooked by the nurses but always there. Bill stood up from the bed and felt around for another chair to sit in, careful not to disturb George. He heard George shift slightly in his seat and tilted his head in the direction of the sound.

"Um...so Jill?" George said quietly.

Bill didn't have the heart to correct him about his name so he simply nodded.

"Yes?" he said slowly when George paused for a moment.

"You are—" George gave an odd little gasp and stopped talking. Bill reached for his friend in concern.

"What's wrong George?" Bill enquired.

"M-Muscle sti-stiffness," George said in a tight strained voice as if the words caused him pain. Bill found George's hand and squeezed it reassuringly. George's hand went limp in his grasp.

"George?"

Minor Details

By NYLAH HOLBROOK

I have rarely been a perfect conversation starter. As a child, my volume was too high and my input was placed at inappropriate times. I grew, and my presence got smaller. I sat just slightly too far away at the table; I stared at bugs for too long, and my headphones over my ears made me seem impolite. But I was always listening to the conversation — the voices were just too loud without the soft wall between them and my ears.

When I started my first day of senior school, I realised I was the only person without friends. I was alone, just me and my fidget toy. I tried to talk to a group of girls on the other side of the locker bay — they were kind, but I knew that when I spoke, my voice paused at strange times and my laughter was uncomfortable.

I don't enjoy being different. My mind knows what to do, and my body never carries it out correctly. But it does make me good at picking things up. I notice when a girl tries to do her hair differently one day, tugging at her braid subconsciously, hoping someone will notice the effort she put in. They rarely do. I notice when a boy wears a new chain — his friends always call it out, but I can always see that he's searching for the attention of a girl at the other table. He doesn't know if she likes it, or if she noticed.

I start saying these things out loud.

I'm tired of seeing people silently crave for love, for acceptance. I tried it myself, for a long time. I figure that if I cannot belong somewhere, I will help other people belong, instead.

I tell the girl I like her hair. Her eyes widen in surprise for a moment, and then crinkle with joy, thanking me happily. The boy is harder to talk to, but when I sit next to him in class, I off-handedly mention that I saw a girl fix her hair when he walked by. He tells me he doesn't care, but his friend nudges him and I know that he's lying.

The more I mention these things, the more people say hi to me. Someone told me they like the stickers on my laptop — my sister told me stickers were embarrassing, but I always knew someone must like them. Boys don't laugh when I talk now.

One night, at Youth, a girl with red hair introduces me as her friend. I'm not the closest friend she has, and I know that. But I'm her *friend*.

I am still not good at conversations. I still pause at weird times, and I still stare for a little too long. But I know that there are people who enjoy my company, and they don't tell me to fix anything about myself. And at the end of senior school, I feel okay hugging people as we leave. I feel comfortable with being loved.

Paramour, My Pain

By DANE NOLEN

O Love, how I made you.
An orchard of orchids in a drought.
You thirst my dear,
But a drouth I am.
Why am I O so?
My love through the desiccated,
Mains strong as through the torrential.
But you, a wilted rose who woes thy.
Yet a wilted rose still has its petals.
And needs no more than water
To return red.

Ode to Acceptance

By DANE NOLEN

I grieve in hue,
As my world in shade of blue.
Why must you leave my day?
I beckon you, please stay.
For more of you I yearn,
But our time must adjourn.
My love to fly,
For you, my final goodbye.

The Great Oak Tree

By MILLA FLYNN

Read to the tune of that one song from "Barney".

I sit at the base of the great oak tree.
I can still feel you staring at me
With your lifeless eyes
And your pale white skin.
I'll never see my love again.

I take my axe to the great oak tree,
Your silhouette still haunting me,
I strike it once,
And I strike it twice.
A few more strikes will surely suffice.

I sit on the stump of the great oak tree.
Why will you never leave me?
All I wanted,
Was for you to stay.
Is it my fault you went away?

NOCTURNA AFTERTHOUGHT

BY SEAN FEENEY

I used to sit by the water there
In the reeds of bird calls and the
 Stagnant trickling sound of leaves.

This was the lull of my routine—my
Intermittent intermission—that
Rolled around in pastures
When it rolled around each day.

As the strip of woods had hidden
My hushed retreat, the swirls of verdant
 Shoots rose up to hem my clomping hooves,
For each would circle the fetlocks where they frayed;
 Red lights entwined their serenade.
The fruits grew above like eyes, untouched, unsullied...

But the forms that floor these halls,
That linger, rippling amid the calls
 This stupor nulls, folding on itself itself,
Insisting on stagnation,
 Waiting with head bowed—vie
For domination—For sound divination.

Committed to an idea—an
 Oppressive idea that gulfs everything.
The grey gulf for which I did everything.
It's coming true is a must—a must.
The fruits of my labour, my naive desire,
On a lure before me, as though suspended
On a hair—on the slight curvature of an expression.
 It was degenerate to smile like that,
He said. I've learned to predict it—to expect it everywhere.
Its everpresence was engulfed by the never-ending

Contempt, which made it apparent;
Made it hidden; made it oppressive, made it scared.

I can hear in the electric air, the mob of the village,
With pitchforks drawn, descending upon the forest.

For it was innately furtive,
This heart of mine—this dream that runs along
The spine of this life.

This form, as does any, never retires—it
Is consistent with the lines, for its kernel,
The dream furnace, slurs its breath in secret.
The seedlings beneath the leather, beneath the flesh,
Vie for nutrients.

To disappear, to poof away,
Abandoned and in love, a sound clambering against its shell...

Sah sah sah...
A form beneath the water—an effigy of drowning.
And if forms would just listen. If anything couldn't be hidden—
Furtive, whereas the words of world are unburdened.
As tears emit from an eye, so does the black hole weep.
I could defend with words what is wordless, unrecorded, and unsound.
As what falls in the forest is silent—all, no less, is quiet,
But I know what I've heard from my grounds.

They weren't joking—they were being discreet.
I can clarify to the wind what I meant by nothing;
Slide my hooves into the dirt and declare it permanent.
Claim ownership by biting down hard.
Rewinding, rewriting, replaying the theory again
And again in the umbra of my absence—
The mantras of the intelligentsia.
One last embrace til the eclipse
Wanes; breathes a sharp breeze through my mane.

Maybe I am in the world, whether by the water or away — but,
Because it's for no reason, I'm inclined to justify
My untethered presence as outside
 The membrane of the world,
Which is hurt and calloused,
Sewn together with a translucent permeable fabric.

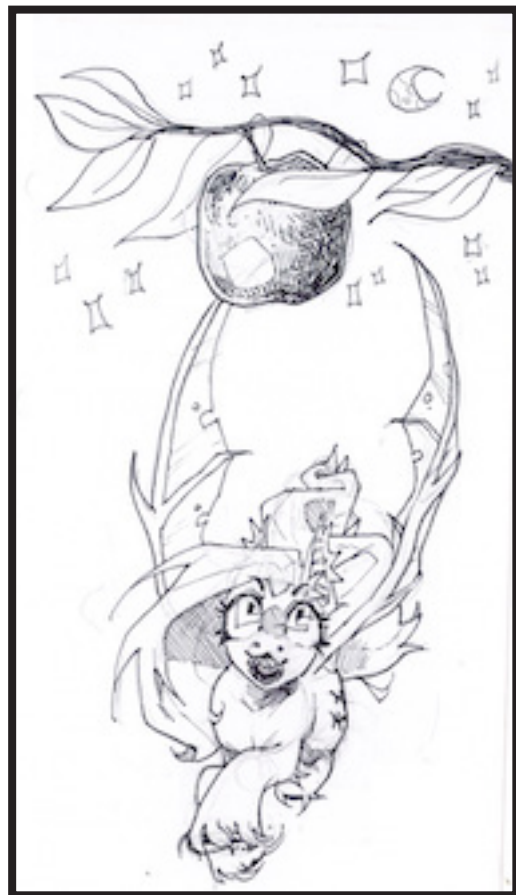
Everything is borrowed, but on the horizon
Of denying this - of being my own
Person - attachment and belonging
Might mean something, and although
I want some things to last forever
Nevertheless—everything,
 I can live without.

The hand that loses itself.
The tongue that won't stop falling out.
The eye that feigns its sight, when spirits move
About the room, the shadows of the could-have-beens,
 Brayed by lurid light—the ghosts of the dead, alive, or retired.
Fear of spirits is indiscriminate, but I can tell the ones that count.
I pray I had no part in their invention—the invocation of the devout.
 This spirit invents its skin-and-bones connection
To the world around itself.

Arborescent cavalcade, trailing up the path to the buildings—
 Shuddering lightning, creeping, caustic feeling.
The brays of dissenters descending upon a pathless garden,
Never sated in their lifetime on fodder effigial deviants.
Their insincere hegemony, the distilleries dot the hills.
The counter-revolutionary, who learned violence from hegemony.
Take my night from me; or my woven rosy cradle.
Take the choked voice that cannot proclaim:
 I have one thing to say.
The silence is broken. It was always this way.

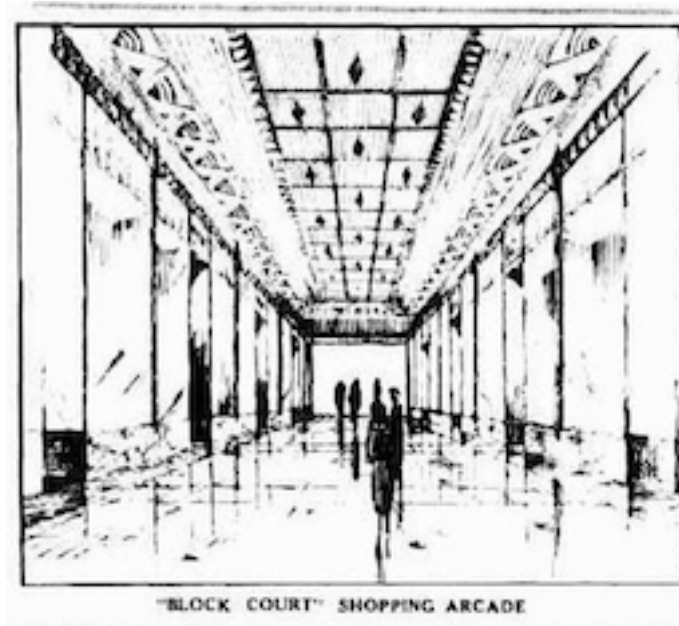
No unbridled foresight; no certainty.
What's next apart from them? Another five years to end?
Another five years ends every minute
 And I haven't said what I mean
Since it found me long ago—
Haven't made my Eden known;
 Haven't told the furtive story
Laid as bare as it lacks activity;
As active as it is asleep; as the world turns fascist in its sleep;
Although, against its will, I squeak sometimes—I guess
This time you caught me.

As my company, like it has already, increases its hostility,
Becomes more radical,
 So does my home get smaller,
Grows conceptual,
Becomes by the water.



A Melbourne Physiology

BY SARAH LOUGH



Sitting so politely, engaged in what the two sitting opposite him were saying. He stands up and walks for a moment before stopping in his tracks as if he had walked straight into a wall. The fairy lights shone so daintily like they would cuddling the branches of a Christmas tree. The fresh scents must be entering his nose as his nostrils begin to dilate - taking in the air. Somebody approaches behind him, patting him on the back. He continued walking.

The path so claustrophobic, yet so open made it feel like home. Taking in the music that the cutlery makes from the awakening cafes and the soft smells of freshly baked delicacies from the artisan bakeries, he continues to stroll briskly along the cobblestone avenue. The frosty morning breeze nibbles at his nose and ears forcing him to pull his jacket up to his neck and put his hands into the pockets of his trousers. How could one pass through here without even taking the chance to look up? He wonders as the people around him zoom past with their head-phones cradling the sides of their heads and their eyes locked onto the screens of their mobiles. This place reminded him of a simpler time, it always brought him back to his past. Outdoor fireplaces are being turned on by workers in aprons and striped clothing, ready for citizens like him to take sanction in their businesses. The morning rush of people begin to flood the street as the sun rises doing its duty of melting frost off glass and dew off dining chairs adjacent to the shade of the awnings. After walking for what seemed like ages, but was only half of ten meters, he stopped again taking a seat outside of a sandwich maker on the driest seat he could see - the electric heater above him warming the tip of his chilled nose.

A waiter approaches well dressed with a moustache as thin as a pencil whipping a tablet out of the front pocket of his apron. "Anything I can get you, sir?" the waiter asks.

NEXT ISSUE:
EASTER 2025



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