

Excerpt from Rooftop Soliloquy

*The narrator finds little Spanish
Palomita waiting at his doorstep...*

(from the 18^h Soliloquy)

Longing to rest and sleep my weariness away, I trudged on my solitary evening walk from the Jardin de Tuileries, up the rue Bonaparte, until I came to the stately apartment-house facing the St-Germain Cathedral where I worked much of the time. A sturdy elevator took me up to the top floor. When I came down the hall, I heard the stirring of some critter near the door where I was headed, and I saw plopped down on the floor, a tiny blonde girl in a bright-yellow dress. I looked at my watch, it was nearing seven o'clock.

“Aleksandre, you’ve finally come!” The tiny girl picked herself up off the doormat and wrapped her arms around me. She smiled a great big grin. Her mouth was plush red like a painted doll and her cheeks too were made-up. Her cropped yellow hair sprang on her ears as she leaped on her toes to kiss me.

“Hello, little gypsy! What are you doing here?”

“Waiting for you!”

Her name was Palomita. She’d come from Andalusia to study fashion in Paris. I’d made love to her a few times here in this apartment, having only recently met her; and now she felt herself welcome to slip in through the security-door and sit on the doormat and wait for me at any given hour. She had been waiting with her box of colored pencils, and there were sheets of paper and pencils thrown about the hallway. The papers were filled with sketches of fashion models dangling purses and wearing evening dresses. Like a child with a mouth full of sugar and hands full of crayons who sits on the stoop as she waits for her parents to come home from work, eagerly thinking they’ll arrive at any minute with parcels and groceries in their arms, so was my little Spanish dovelette

sitting in wait for me this early evening with her sketches and her childish dress. It was truly a ridiculous sight.

“I’ve been waiting here for over an hour!” laughed Palomita, pushing her tongue into my mouth. Our lips pressed each other’s and our tongues entangled. After the kiss, I set her down and turned the key in the lock started inside and she followed after me.

“But *why* have you been waiting here? And did the neighbors see you spread out on the mat with your coloring pencils like a little latchkey-kid who’d forgotten her necklace before school?”

“My girl-friend, Marina, who’s letting me stay at her place, she doesn’t want company right now, so I have nowhere to go. I wandered around St-Germain for a while and then came here to see you. Why do you look like you haven’t slept in forever?”

“Because I *haven’t* slept in forever. Sleep is a stranger to me, Palomita. I have a lot of work to do, so you can’t stay long. But we’ll drink a coffee.”

“Are you happy to see me at least?”

“Of course I am!” I picked up Palomita’s skinny little body and glided her across the room, and set her finally down on the bed beneath the window—a window that let in bursts of wind, now warm from the summer day that’d passed, now mild from the evening to come.

After we caressed each other’s skin and felt the moistness growing from tender places in the softly dimming night, I went and brewed coffee. Then retrieving a well-strung guitar from the corner, I began plucking a wanderer’s song. It was a gypsy ballad I wrote back when I myself was a wayfarer of a youngish age—a traveler who was no more than a boy, who knew nothing of the future, and cared only for the songs in his head, the colors of the trees on the landscape, and the feeling of a highway beneath his youthful soles. Palomita perched on my bed and listened to my gypsy song as she sipped the coffee I had made for her.

“I like that song. Why did you stop? . . . You know, if I don’t get into fashion school, I have to go back to Sevilla to my parents’ house.”

“Nonsense! You could stay in Paris and join with some other little gypsies like yourself. You all can run around Paris in colorful dresses picking pockets and telling fortunes. Tell me the future, my beautiful Spaniardess, and I’ll furnish you a fine Parisian mansard with a high roof, and enough precious gold to allow you to live with high morals.”

“I don’t want morals. Why do you need to know the future?”

“I’m nearing the end of my hero’s tale, dear girl, and I need to know if my hero, having returned home from his journey, rejoins his culture and society and finds bliss in domestic life—loving his wife, tending his flocks and working alongside his fellow men—or does he set off again with his wandering ways: flitting over the sea and traversing hefty continents, a warrior of men, a lover of women, a stranger of many alien tongues and myriad tricks, a man given welcome in all lands, a man-of-the-world? You know, little blushing Palomita... one thing is for certain is that my hero’s words will live long after he is dead. Likewise, these words we are speaking now shall live after the sun has set on the landscape of our souls, casting shade over our eyes. In the ruins of our great cities, these words...” ...rambled on and on without care for where they went, and seemed as though they’d never stop dropping out of my mouth, skipping this- and that-away, and soon my poor little dovelike Palomita, having had suffered enough, blew a familiar name loudly in my sleeping ear...

“Aleksandre!”

“Eh ?! Quoi ?!”

“Wake up, Aleksandre! You’re not listening to me! You’re mumbling about strange things. You were thinking about something else this whole time!”

“I was?”

“Yes, I was talking about my fashion school, and you were mumbling something about the Dardanelles and some buried cities that no one’s ever heard of.”

“I was?”

“Yes, now please listen to me or play a song or something, but don’t bury your head back in the blankets.”

“My dear Palomita, I think I need to sleep. Run along for a while, I need to sleep. It’s been a long life so far. I feel like a hundred decades are dangling from my eyelids on chains. If you’re still in Paris in a few days and haven’t joined the gypsy-wagon, come and see me and we’ll travel to the Dardanelles together. I’ll introduce you to a girl I know whom you will like. She too is the color of pollen. We can stay at her house in the desert. You’ll like her. You two will laugh.”

And so the sweet night fell. As I listened to the soft little sounds of Palomita’s feet as they stamped across the empty square of Saint Germain below the windows of the room to which I held key, and where I lay; the sky and the summer stars inhaled and exhaled, blowing upon the night. It was the type of night that makes lovers of wanderers and puts heroes to sleep. And so I slept. For three days, I slept. And when I awoke on a late July morning, I felt as a newly-grown youth ready to lace his sandals, drink from a basin the water of life, and leap high into the sacred day.

(end of excerpt)