One Night in Paris

By: Stefano Ballesteros

Their shadows danced through the night. A dance so rehearsed it had become something between perfect and routine. Still they continued to meet, at the same time, at the same hour. Always at her place. The Eiffel Tower shedding bright golden light over the city of Paris.

It was not the Eiffel Tower, Paris was gone along with everything they had ever known. It was a nostalgic memento of the world they left behind; for her a sweet reminder of who they had been, for him, a cruel statement of who they were now. But Deja still had the feed looping on the massive wall-sized screen. The world as it had been repeating every six seconds with a few layers of digitally added snowflakes that created the illusion of a live feed timed perfectly so that it was nearly impossible to see the moment when it looped. Her very own city frozen in time. It existed only in that moment, over and over.

Killian could not help to think of himself as he followed the same snowflake across the screen for the second time. He had never seen a real one, but he knew no two were identical. It made him think of their life in the spaceship: a really well-crafted illusion, but if you looked close enough you could spot the looping snowflakes. They all bought into it, it was easier that way. He pushed the snowflake to the back of his mind--it had become a natural reflex--and decided to focus on the small details the ship could not fake. The faint smell of grapefruit on her skin or that sweet and salty taste of her lips. The way her collarbone sneaked through her skin from the base of her neck to the edge of her shoulder. From there he could get lost following a drop of sweat creeping slowly down her back just to disappear under the bed sheets.

Deja reached gently for his face, demanding the attention of his dark eyes. A caress that meant much more than the point she was trying to make.

“Hey” she whispered with a smile. She always whispered, as if this was their secret and nobody could find out. It was their one night in Paris. Over and over and over again. They would always have Paris.

Big green eyes stalked him from behind blades of sleek black hair. Her dark skin got lost in the night, leaving just a seductive outline highlighted by the tower’s light.

“Hey,” Killian smiled back. He kissed her, closed his eyes, and lay on his back. At that exact moment the air recyclers groaned in protest of the heat and contaminants generated in the room. It was the finishing melody to a passionate night. Killian wondered if it was that sense of accomplishment what made him feel content more than the fact that without the recyclers they would die. He had lived most of his life to the music of the recyclers. It was easy to push them to the back of his mind. They were the kind of thing that you don’t notice until it’s not there.

She pressed her head against his chest and put her arm around him. She was looking straight at the Eiffel tower and tried to remember when she last saw it. An involuntary sigh escaped her lips.

*That world is dead, we will never walk on it again*. He wanted to say, but instead he caressed her shoulder with the back of his hand and asked, “You wish you were there?”

“We are not gonna talk about our feelings now, are we?” Deja shot back. She shifted away from his chest and with her elbow on the bed she held her head on her hand.

“Oh yeah,” Killian said “because that will just make things so…” he struggled to find the word that would express the appropriate level of sarcasm “…normal.”

Deja laughed as she hit him with a pillow. “Oh! You’re such a jerk!” She said. “But I wouldn’t have you any other way, bro.” The last word came in a forced lower tone, more like a grunt. She lifted her hand in the air and laughed as Killian completed the high-five.

It was that lightness, that easiness about her that he most enjoyed. He had known her for years now, yet this no-strings-attached, fuck-buddies arrangement was a relatively new thing. He thought back to the night when it all began. A knock on the door that woke him up. His hand display pushing away the darkness with a faint blue glow that read 2:30 am. Muffled sobs coming from the other side of the ceramic door. She was a mess. Heels in her hands, her eye makeup melted into black scars, giving her face a sinister expression. It was the only time in twelve years that he had seen her cry. She threw herself in his arms. She was soaking wet. To this day he hadn’t figured out how she could possibly get soaked in the ship. He never asked. He just held her in his arms while she wept. No Eiffel Tower on the window. Only stars.

“I was born there.” Deja finally said, half lost in thought, “I know it’s weird, but… I remember it.” This was the first time she had shared something so intimate.

“No way!” Killian answered, almost laughing at the thought. “Nobody remembers.” He had a talent for saying the wrong thing when it really mattered.

Deja sat up on the edge of the bed, her back turned towards him. The silence was deadly.

Killian looked out to the Parisian landscape. A boat slowly crept its way up a river. Lights moved sideways along a wide road. Golden light radiated from tall buildings. It had been there every night he spent with her, but now he really saw it. A little bit to his right, shining above every other structure, a monument in gold against the black sky, the Eiffel Tower.

He turned back to Deja and grabbed her gently by the waist. He pulled her back to the bed. Her hair was on her face. He pushed it aside and stared deeply into her eyes, the way he usually did. That way that meant he was there with her and nothing else mattered. The way that made her feel safe, happy, confused, and made her hate herself for loving those eyes and loving him. The way that he looked at everyone; it came so natural that it meant nothing to him.

“I know,” she began, her voice barely a whisper “I don’t know if I remember, or if I think I do.”

“How old where you when…”

“Five- Four, almost five… You?”

“Six.”

Deja sat up on the bed, her knees up against her chest and arms around her legs. She seemed lost in a long forgotten memory. “I remember green grass. Real sharp and long. I remember my dad holding my hand. It was so hot and bright that day, not a cloud in the sky. We went up and up. I was so scared, but my dad picked me up and held me tight. His shirt was purple. I loved that color. Always reminds me of him. Then I remember metal railings and we were on top of the world. I felt as if I could just fly away.”

Never before had Deja spoken like that to him. She was not the feelings type, never to get caught in the past or dream about the future. But this memory she cherished above anything else. She must have reached the depth of her loneliness. With nothing to say, Killian turned to the window and tried to imagine.

This time the silence was gentle.

“I was born there.” She broke the silence. She was smiling now but her eyes were glassy. “Paris.”

Killian thought long and hard the next words “It is beautiful.” Not his finest piece. “And still I’m sure the feeds don’t do it justice.” That was more like it.

Deja smiled; this time with her eyes. “No they don’t,” she said. “What about you? You’ve never told me, where are you from?”

“I’m from here.” He answered.

“Shut the fuck up!” She said as she hit him with a pillow. “Where were you born?”

Killian never thought of Earth. No point to it. They were gone. They would never see it again. And he liked it here. He liked the stars. No point sticking to a rock once you’ve broken free from it. He would have gone mad had he been born a hundred years ago. But he didn’t. Still he couldn’t change the fact. “Boston.”

She jumped out of the bed and tapped her hand a couple of times. Her interface woke up with an orange light. “There we go…” She said as the image of a large industrial city on a bay replaced the feed on Paris. “Boston.”

It was nothing like Paris. It looked so new. Hundreds of bright blue buildings thrust through the sky. Their surface blended with the background. It seemed as if they were see-through. Killian could hardly make out the streets. That was where he was born.

“It’s beautiful.” Deja gasped in awe as her hand reached outward towards the feed. She laughed and turned to Killian with a huge smile on her face. But he felt nothing.

“What’s wrong?” She asked when she saw the blank expression on his face.

He really didn’t want to talk about it. He thought of her excitement, her love for Paris, for Earth. He had never felt it. It was just a story for him. Earth was a rock. He was glad they were gone. Yet he learned to keep those feeling to himself, part to avoid the contempt they caused on others, part to avoid a painfully large explanation and the argument that followed. Somehow it seemed that everybody had a say on his feelings about his home planet. They carried the memory of Earth like a trophy. It was the ideal that pushed them. More like the ghost that haunted them, the dead they could not let go. But not Killian. Earth was gone; nothing more than loop of identical snowflakes. The ship was home now. And he liked it that way.