

## The Savant's Oblivion

The paper smouldered, forming a cylinder on the filter tip. He looked deep into the dark distance, a glare she had, once upon a time, adored as profound and mysterious. She now saw him for what he really was, or perhaps what he struck her to be: a cynic, caught in a fable about how everything was better in previous centuries, despising his students for following what he couldn't understand, or for still being juvenile and flexible enough to be a part of it. "Rome is burning..." he mumbled after another supposedly meaningful silence. She had come to find the prolonged lulls in their conversations remarkably annoying. There she was, she thought, on the cusp of her maturity, savvy and willing enough to drink from every faucet dripping the sweet elixir of life, held back by this token of a time long passed, this revolting fucking cliché of a man. "What am I doing here?" she exasperatedly whispered to herself, for once joining in the professor's thousand yard stare. He did not hear her: he often didn't. He tossed his fag and turned back around to face her and just now picked up her air of discontent, a stench that had been lingering and growing stronger with every visit. The odour of dismay was reflected on her countenance, her expression not one of dislike, but of disgust. She sat on the sunbed with her arms crossed. "Darling," he said, quasi-concerned, "what is the matter?"

The professor had been a staple figure of the university. Young, decently read minds from all over the country flocked every year to enrol in his literature class.. A lifelong love for the craft had given him a nearly encyclopaedic knowledge of his subject and his passion was clear as day in his lectures. She remembered being enthralled by the conviction with which he described his heroes' works, how he too lifted the ordinary toward the divine. Here too lied the problem: he was a monologist. The first time they had lain together he had filled the post-coital, uncertainly quiet air with an Ode to the fleshly desires. Something of his own creation perhaps, she did not know. He had been successful: this too was received as charming. It was all so exciting to her: a travelled, cultured man of age had taken an interest in her and the power it gave her was hers too wield alone. She did not tell a living soul. She had grown more reluctant in keeping her peace about him, as he could be quite a nuisance. What she needed was to dish from time to time, to discuss his foolishness with a friend and by extension with herself. A lack of articulated reason was what had kept her coming back so long, she concluded. That and the mutual understanding that loose lips sink ships. As much as this soon-to-be-tenured scholar could be ruined by such scandalous news coming out, she knew he knew of her other man. They were in a Cold War disguised as a fling. His supposed interest in her as a blooming wordsmith, as a shimmering droplet springing from the fountain of youth and as a gorgeous representative of the archetypically feminine had all made way for his true intentions, which were egotistical in nature. The veil had been worn down to a flimsy, transparent film. With this unspoken shift in their dynamic the nature of their coupling had changed too. At first he had been loving and gentle. He would move over her with languid strokes, taking her in as much as possible. Now, a few unenthusiastic and seemingly mandatory minutes of missionary would be followed by a stern tug at her side, indicating she should lay on her stomach and finished with a greedy dozen or so seconds wherein he would excitedly bring himself to his end. The whole thing left her with a sour taste in her mouth.

He lit up another cigarette, squinting at her, trying to make out what had dissatisfied her. His view of the world was one filtered through a thorough assumption of superiority. He saw himself as a token of virtue and rationality and though this often meant he worked as hard as possible and helped his students wherever he could, it also meant there was an unbridgeable gap between him and any person outside of

himself. His ignorance created as much as it destroyed. "Fetch us a scotch, would you darling?" he said, after a moment's hesitation. Her anger was boiling beneath her skin. She could feel it burning at her fingertips. Yet her composure remained unchanged. "Of course." She spoke curtly, but not unkind. Nothing in the way she carried herself revealed her seething temperament. She tiptoed gently, her bare feet quickly untouching the cold marble. The oak liquor cabinet contained just two bottles: a '68 Glen Garioch, broken in just for tonight and an '88 El Dorado. She took out two glasses and the Glen Garioch and walked back. She was unsure what to do next. She knew at some point he would pay for his egocentrism, for his disregard of her as a full being. Sunken in thought she wandered back. There he laid, twitching, grasping at the floorboards, attempting to hold on for dear life. She exclaimed a short scream and dropped the bottle and the glasses. The crashing of the glass startled her. She shrunk into herself, hiding from everything, unsure what to do. His face was sagging but his eyes were still sharp: they were prodding at her, imploring her to *do something*. He was not ready. This was no way for a gentleman to go. He struggled away from the light for a moment, expressing a fear he had never shown and had never examined himself: the fear of death after a life poorly lived. The horror plastered on his wrinkled face revealed the light scared him. And then, as suddenly as his attack had started, his rushed breathing stopped.