

Arctic presence

Massimo Buzetti*

I woke up. Fourteenth of January. It's been a week since that uneventful yet important day. The sun was shining with its seasonal blaze. In spite of the rising temperature, I have only felt cold ever since that day. Are the sheets not warm enough? Has my skin lost its sensitivity? No, that is not it. There has been something off in the apartment since the seventh of this month. There were no traces of her in that room, no surprise there; it was only me and this subtle cold draft, its source otherworldly. I couldn't get her out of my head... what had she said that day? She had moved her lips before vanishing, I was certain that words had left her mouth yet no sound had reached my ears.

Sulking in bed all morning was out of the question, memories of a year ago used to be happy and I did not want to darken them. I needed to go on, no matter how grim it felt. Out of bed and into the bathroom, I tried to wash my face with freezing water to test this feeling. I could feel it alright; the cold wet snap, though it was somehow different. The water was indeed cold but it was tangible, the chill running down my spine was ethereal. Gazing at our toothbrushes did not help to calm me down; it reminded me of how we had parted ways, each in opposite directions- mine, with little to no experience, and hers, having gone through a lot. What else would remind me of her this morning? Last night, it was the couch, the day before it had been the bookshelf, and on the eleventh, the cutlery.

Oh, it was breakfast time already. My analogue clock said so, it was twenty past seven. At that moment, it seemed like a mirror to me rather than a clock. I wiped my face off putting on a smile that could beat "ten past ten" and went straight to the kitchen. I could see it from here, there was a wraith on the living room couch. The air was freezing and the coldness struck me despite my closeness to the toaster and its heating capabilities. I burnt myself while frying an egg; I needed help since my cooking skills were fit for a circus freak show, yet I would not be able to ask her for who knows how long.

With my burnt egg and charcoal bread, I now had to get to the couch; even with her presence, I needed to sit next there. I took my place next to the apparition and turned on the TV. The background noise of the news channel had no way of beating those ghostly whispers. There was no way of avoiding her at this point, so I valiantly turned to her and tried to appease her. She froze my lips, pierced right through my eyes and opened her ghostly mouth:

"Come on, drop the act. You've been playing the victim for a week, but it was you who forgot our anniversary".

* 1ra Mención – Concurso Literario USAL en Lengua Inglesa – Categoría cuento (2025).