

The gargoyle's account

Anthony Goertz

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Andy Goertz

Her name was Francine and she had red hair. I don't know if that was her real name, I just heard that name called in the streets. She was a nun, so I wonder if she chose the name Francine, like the new popes do. And I wonder if she chose it after Francis of Assisi, the nature-worshipping saint who said things like "no one is an enemy." He once rode to Egypt to try and convert the Sultan, in an attempt to end the bloody crusades. It didn't work, but he made it out alive and went on to be the first person ever to have the stigmata: the person spontaneously get holes in your hands like Jesus. It means you're closer to him or something. I can't get stigmata because I'm a gargoyle. A grotesque, actually, but everyone knows us as gargoyles. Gargoyles are the ones that spout water, but it doesn't really matter.

I never had a name but if I could choose one it would be Peter. It used to be David. Before that, I really liked the name Ed, if you can believe it.

Francine walked past me every single day for seven years. She was studying in the convent and would usually sing when she'd walk by, often in German. Always softly, quietly, like she was embarrassed about her voice but loved the songs too much not to sing them. I liked it best when she sung in German, if you can believe it.

Sometimes she'd whistle, and I'd wish beyond anything that I could whistle too. I could picture it in my mind, the exact notes, and I could think of harmonies too but they stayed in the stone. Seven years I watched her get older and never name me, though she did see me once. A few other glances here and there, yes, especially at first. But this one time in the beginning she came around that corner there and she looked right at me, right in the eyes, and it scared the shit out of me. She saw me, like really saw me, like, her eyebrows changed and she slowed down and everything. It was brief, a few seconds or a thousand years, and all I tried to do for the next I-don't-know-how-long was try to get her attention again. Nothing felt better than that moment. I promise you, as crazy as it sounds, we really connected.

The point of my story is this: I don't smell much up here, and when I do, it's usually unpleasant. But when she came around, I tell you, friend, there were flowers in January. Or something like flowers. I remember thinking "flowers" but I'm not sure anymore. It was something sweet I think, and tangy. Tasted like overripe fruit. And because she hasn't been back here for more than three hundred years, I've forgotten. The smells are certain in my memory. Now, every scent, sweet or not (it

can be curries sometimes, or roast duck): it's her. Dying tulips on a cart, a new cake being baked nearby. It's all her now. It's all always her. And I don't know why I was even given that drive—the romantic love thing, I mean, that seems pretty fucking cruel doesn't it? To be literally made out of stone and have these intense feelings for someone who has probably been dead for like 250 fucking years? So basically Francine is why I can't believe in God and why I absolutely must.