10-25-2011

Into Another World

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Recommended Citation

Knight, Cassidy (2010) "Into Another World," Fishladder: A Student Journal of Art and Writing: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 20. Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/fishladder/vol8/iss1/20

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The interior of the building had an octagonal plan. At the center was the cylindrical lobby, both awe-inspiring and symmetrical. A circle of columns led to the front mahogany desk, and marble tiles grounded the room in between. Behind the desk, a broad staircase led to the second floor, where it split into two spirals and climbed to the third level and beyond. The stairs looked up to a magnificent glass dome—a specter of light on the ceiling. Each apartment was identical in plan, but varied in design. The walls brought them to life, gave them individual personalities. That had been Dacia's doing—she dreamed up the blue apartment with marble chair rails and hard wood flooring, the elaborate Victorian suite, and sleek modern studio. Harmonious yet diverse.

But the rooms changed with time. Perhaps it was my fault. I let it go too soon—released it to the uncaring public, who slammed doors and cracked plaster, and traded Dacia's curtains for frayed white drapes. As the years passed, even the red brick faded steadily into the wheezing, smoggy umber of the neighborhood. One morning about five years ago, I found graffiti on the east wall.

That's when I decided to retire. Dacia convinced me to leave our architectural firm to Felix, and we moved back home to Ohio. The Midwest had always been an undercurrent to my heartbeat, and I found myself renewed. I started drawing houses again.

But soon afterwards, Dacia began to leave me. She blacked out and collapsed on the kitchen floor without warning. It was cancer. And it sucked her away from me one cell at a time.

My flight landed in New York after sundown, and I watched the city lights set the sky ablaze. Felix met me at the airport and carried my bags.

"Are ya hungry, Dad? You wanna eat?" he asked. "Cause we can go out, er—"

I could tell my white unshaven scruff and loose shirttails embarrassed him—he wouldn't want to be seen in public like this. Felix was suave. He got his mother's looks, striking dark hair and green eyes that look perpetually teary. Like her, he was always perfectly dressed—his pin-striped suit neatly tailored and his shirt and tie a complementary blue and orange.

"We can pick something up if ya want," he said.

"No, I'm okay. Let's just go," I said. "How far is it to Amsterdam?"

"Listen, tonight's really not good for me," he said. "It's already late, and I've gotta be at the office no later than six tomorrow. Maybe we can head over there this weekend. How long are you staying?"

"I can get on another plane right now if that's what you want," I said. He rolled his eyes and moved to the driver's side of the cab. Clearing my throat, I raised my voice a little. "I need to see it."

Dacia and I met in college at the Ohio Institute of Art and Design. It was September of 1958. She was studying interior design and needed an extra elective to graduate. So she sat down in History of Architecture next to me, a slouching, moody junior, and gave me a half-smile. I was immediately lost. A quiet architect with average grades, I was stunned by her strong personality;
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