

Kim Farleigh
Buoying Things Up

THE ROOM WAS WHITE: WHITE WALLS. WHITE ARMCHAIRS. WHITE SOFA. White, metallic ceiling lamps leaving distorted shadows on white. White Chinese lanterns hanging from the ceiling in corners. White, diffused beams burning brightly inside the lanterns.

The paper-like lanterns with metal skeletons were long and almost of human form and fragile, their lights like self-belief burning within. The problem: How to keep the bulbs burning amid lantern fragility?

Other lamps, moveable upon metre-long metal stems, dotted the room, each lamp's bulb unique, like individuals of the same species with different brains glowing orange amid white. Each brain's filament convolutions were distinct, but all equal in their sunset glows amid white.

Sunset orange exudes delight, things causing delight "truer" than things that don't, in popular imaginations.

The lantern beams shone like self-perception, like righteousness ignited by accusation.

Ten people surrounded a dark-brown table, dark brown controversy's colour. The hotel above the room had a bar. Chatter clattered down from the bar.

The black, cotton rectangle decorating a wall created a sharp contrast with white, black like random adversity amid purity, random adversity what many hoped was a temporary anomaly that goodness would finally crush.

The people met there each Sunday to discuss different themes.

David said: "Insults don't bother me. They're just uninformed opinions. And you can usually say that about compliments as well."

When he was putting people's cups and glasses onto a tray he had bought down from the bar to take back upstairs after the discussion had finished, Cristina said: "I don't believe you're not affected by insults."

"I don't believe it either," Carmen said.

Trumpet music boomed from above.

Cristina had short hair like a helmet made from strains of blonde and brown. Her eyes sang with sincerity, this white-noise passion sometimes blurring her view of reality.

David ignored comments that included: "I believe" or "I don't believe." They were "self-projections soothing reality's rough sea."

He went upstairs, keeping the tray horizontal. We fight destabilization.

A waitress in a tight, black skirt said: "*Gracias.*" *David would have loved to have been horizontal with her. Her tight-fitting, black apron evoked sensuality. Its open rear exposed buttocks held firm in tight jeans, an opening highlighting perfection. Her beaming, bone teeth matched her shirt's calcium hue.*

"No problem," David replied.

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He had merely done what had to be done to protect the group's reputation. He didn't want the group to be evicted from that room by the hotel's management. He had acted in his group's interest; therefore in his own, accolades unrequired.

He went to a bus stop. A South American's face in the bus stop blazed uncertainty, David also wondering if the buses were operating. Sometimes demonstrations cut the service.

Demonstrations here, David thought, help people feel wonderful about themselves, like pumps inflating self-analysis. Too many people here smile during demonstrations, instead of displaying fury.

He turned to see if a notice announcing a service reduction had been placed on the timetables on the stop's back wall. Another man entered the stop and said: "The service may not be running."

A notice sat upon the timetables.

"It started again at one-thirty," David said, pointing at the notice.

The South American said: "Yes. True."

Relief coloured the South American's voice, now nine in the evening. He hadn't realized what that notice was, a sign he was new to Madrid.

The other man translated the notice into English for David's "benefit." David's back faced "the translator." David had just seen his bus approaching.

The short, plump "translator's" long, sharp nose probed the notice, a proboscis absorbing facts, his concentration like one performing greatness. A multi-coloured backpack hung off one of his hunched shoulders. His grey hair and black-framed glasses suggested academic vastness: A man determined to be helpful when help wasn't necessary.

He fled the bus stop, saying: "Get your passport to hell."

David thought: That reminds me. I need to get my passport renewed.

The foreigner had presented an opportunity to magnify self-perception; but that foreigner had rejected kindness! That scum had besmirched goodness with his disdain for assistance!

The South American's ebony hair glinted silver-blue. Raising his ebony eyebrows he said: "Strange."

"Such is life," David replied. "He who believes in hell believes anything."

Amusement's silvery sheens filled the South American's dark-brown eyes.

"Ignorance certainly stimulates invention," he said.

"In popular imaginations," David replied.

He boarded the bus, the driver smiling at the boarding passenger's brilliant smile.

David caught the bus to where he had to get another one. Entering the second bus he felt good luck's soothing clarity. A seat was available; he was going to get it.

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Moving up the aisle, he saw the “translator” who was sitting beside the free seat.

David sat on the free seat. The “translator” said: “You were in the bus stop.”

His tone was inviting.

“Yes, I was,” David replied.

He realised why the “translator” had referred to hell: “The Translator” had a book called *Sagrada Bibilia*.

“Are you American?” The Translator asked.

“No, British,” David replied.

“What do you think of Brexit?” The Translator asked.

“It’s a facade to protect British tax havens,” David replied. “Politicians run tax-free businesses from those havens. The money British politicians receive from companies goes into those havens.”

“The same old story,” the man replied.

“Yes,” David said; “the law of the jungle in civilised form.”

The man’s head-nodding reflected his distaste towards political larceny.

“Have you been living here long?” he asked.

“Twenty years.”

“So you know about our politicians?”

“And about politicians generally. They differ according to how well they cover their tracks.”

The man’s nodding sped up. Rueful acknowledgement energises nodding.

When rising to leave the bus he said: “You’re nice and kind.”

That doesn’t sound so corny in Spanish.

David smiled and said: “Thanks.”

He wasn’t flattered: the man’s knowledge wasn’t sufficient to reach conclusions about his character. But David wasn’t complaining. His entry into hell had been delayed. Probably guilty, he thought. And maybe permanently so. A childhood thing? Hence the need to offer unnecessary help to buoy up self-perception? A hypothesis. I’ll have to ask people about this and see what we come up with.