

## I. Ile De La Cité

His shoes scrape the old stones as he trudges listlessly, a few steps behind me. Even though he doesn't say a word, his limp shoulders and exasperated expressions shout out for him: We're in Paris. The tourists here outnumber the pigeons! Millions of clicking cameras descend upon this city every year. What could possibly have escaped unrecorded? The silent accusations feel like constant pinpricks, but I fight the urge to respond. A landmine lurks underneath each unasked question. One false move and the delicate balance between us would blow up in smoke.

With every passing moment, his impatience becomes increasingly palpable and soon the weight is too great to bear. I clench my teeth and bite my tongue, but the sound of his dragging feet grates on my nerves until I want to scream. Instead, I plant a smile on my face, turn around and ask if he would like go on without me for a while. In a tone as pleasant as my own, he suggests we meet up an in hour. I nod, and he sets off immediately.

Tension disperses with each brisk step he takes, but his eagerness to escape cuts deep. Only a year ago, he would have been perfectly content to wander aimlessly with me from sunup to sundown, and now each of us finds the other's presence stifling. What changed? We have never been one of those couples who agree on everything. In fact, with the arrogant confidence of new love, we looked upon such people with condescension. We prided ourselves on how our differences enriched our relationship, how – between us – we had two perspectives on everything. These views complemented each other, we thought, like the distinct images formed by each human eye; it is the combination of the two that allows us to perceive depth. We came to think of ourselves as two-eyed giants in a world of Cyclops, able to see a dimension that remains invisible to most others.

As it turns out, that feeling of superiority was short lived. While it lasted, however - while we still got high on the idea that we saw more than those around us - we talked incessantly, discovering each other, comparing points of view. When, as often happened, we described the same experience in vastly disparate language, the contrasts seemed charming and compelling. We looked upon them indulgently, chalked them off to the vagaries of a fixed reference frame. We learnt to step into the other's shoes and look at the world through a new pair of eyes – to perform a coordinate transformation, as we called it. It became a game, sifting through the distortions of our personal preferences and biases, picking out the universal statements upon which we could build a mutual understanding. We were searching for invariants, we laughed.