

The Cafe: Robert Costa

I was in the spring sunlight, absorbing its generous warmth, seated at a clean square, blue-painted metal table, slightly unsteady as it rested on the uneven cobbles, draped in a gleaming white tablecloth covered in a thin sheet of brilliant white paper. There were many tables, each one the same, adorned with the same salt and pepper shaker, a white bowl of sugar and napkins neatly folded. They changed the paper. It was once smooth white but now has an embossed finish. It didn't matter, though, because the sun shone, filtering through the olive trees surrounded by those rose campion underplanting. Light flickered and dabbled with the warmth of a breeze. House sparrows cheep cheeped their song, fluttering amongst the branches.

It was noon.

I ordered and waited for my coffee and wondered who sat in this very spot. It is not as though the thought was random. It is as if I were someone needing to explain to another sitting with me that I knew the type of people who had sat at the cafe before and who the cafe was for. I knew it was for people who scribbled, designers. I knew it was for people like me and those fascinated with the signs and symbols of all things. But it isn't easy to write or explain something that is not there and not see what was there. I imagined conversations, laughter, love, and scribbles shared over coffee. I pictured people who were strangers here but left as friends. I thought of how many stories had taken place in this same spot and how many more were yet to come.

I sat up straight, startled from my daydreams as the coffee and brioche arrived just in time, without fanfare but with religious efficiency and reverence by the wait staff, completely in tune with the moment's significance. After all, it's a stimulant. But it's also quite delicious, and I would order more, but I wondered if I should.

This was my secret place, visited by countless others. Within the well-dressed crowds, a solitude. It is not silence that lacks noise, but it is a way of thinking about the things around you. And how those things affect each other. How atoms dance together as one. How matter diffuses outward like a river. Like a drop of blood in water.

I had escaped to this place, and I was free.