

Shopping in San Miguel

A Celebration of Independence Day

On a warm July day in San Miguel de Allende, as we come out of a shop on Insurgentes between Reloj and Loreto, my mind wanders to an earlier time.

We were on the sultry beach in Nice and came upon two couples who seemed familiar to us; it was like running into someone in Beverly Hills that you just knew was famous but not coming up with the person's name. As we neared the first couple, the man muttered something about his existence, and we wondered why he would ask such a question on such a day.

He was large and tan with a white, trimmed beard and lay on a towel beside a beautiful woman with jet-black hair. When she began to rub lotion across his shoulders, he winced from the cold liquid on his skin in the hot sun and said, "That's quite uncomfortable, Bret."

She re-capped the lotion and gave his back a slap. "You never could handle anything good, Papa." She was the pale siren beneath the thatched roof of his copacetic cabana and he could not cope with her. With a sudden leap, he was on his feet and dove into a

Comment [1]: Is this a subtitle or part of the main title?

Comment [2]: *Shoppe* is the Middle English variation of *shop*. I changed it to coincide with the Modern English in the rest of the manuscript.

Comment [3]: Because of the present tense used, when I first read the beginning of this paragraph, I was confused as to if the narrator was remembering a past event or just moving on to another location. I see that you're trying to create an "in the moment" feel, but all the movements through time in the manuscript made what was occurring in the present and what was not unclear. I changed all the character's memories to past tense for clarity.

Comment [4]: Because American spellings are preferred in the American publishing industry, and the city of Nice as spelled with an *i* instead of an *î* is well recognized by most Americans, I removed the circumflex accent.

Comment [5]: Perhaps changing this phrase to "recalling" or "remembering" would make the sentence flow better?

Comment [6]: What did he mutter? I was left wondering this after reading the sentence. Without knowing this, the last part of the sentence, "we wondered why he would ask such a question on such a day" doesn't hold as much meaning as it could. I would consider adding the man's words into the paragraph.

Comment [7]: I changed "couldn't help but wonder" to "we wondered" here for conciseness. OK?

Comment [8]: The ellipse at the end of the paragraph made me think we would be returning to the present time, and gave me momentary pause when I began the next paragraph. Because the manuscript has many time changes, it might be clearer to leave it out.

Comment [9]: Are *dark* and *tan* two separate descriptions, or is the description *dark tan*? If so, *dark tan* could be a bit redundant, and it may be more concise to use one over the other.

Comment [10]: For variation, I combined some sentences in this paragraph. Previously, three sentences started with *he* and one with *she*, and all sentences were short. As the verb *lay* can be confusing to many readers, I believe this wording eliminates some of the confusion. If it's too drastic of a change, revising to start each sentence with a different word and changing each sentence to a slightly different length than the ones surrounding it in would be equally as clear and concise.

Comment [11]: This sentence gave me pause, so I tried rewording it a bit. The rest of the paragraph is very direct and informal, and I think the formality of the word *whom* might be what was causing my pause. What do you think?

shoreline of frozen daiquiris that surfed
like Prufrock on steroids.

We moved on to the second couple. The suave
man was sitting up. He wrote:

To Cecilia

When Vanity kissed Vanity

A hundred happy Junes ago,

He pondered over her breathlessly,

And that all time might ever know

He rhymed her over life and death,

For once, for all, for love, he said.

Her beauty scattered with his breath

And with her lovers she was dead.

Ever his wit and not her eyes,

Ever his art and not her hair.

Who'd learn a trick in rhyme be wise

And pause before his sonnet there.

So all my words however true

Might sing you to a thousandth June

And no one ever know that you

Were beauty for an afternoon.

—FSF

The man put down his pen and inspected what
he wrote. Nodding with approval, he put down the

Comment [12]: I had a hard time discerning if it was the man surfing or the shoreline surfing in this sentence. I think *surf* is more associated with people than it is with a movement of water, so I changed the sentence to how it's now presented. If it is the man metaphorically surfing, I would change it to "...and surfed like Prufrock on steroids."

Comment [13]: This transition between prose and poem is slightly abrupt. I was also curious as to what the man was writing on, so I think you should mention that before the poem rather than after it. I might add "he scribbled a poem on a piece of paper" to soften the transition between the paragraph and the poem.

Comment [14]: Editing poetry is not my specialty. I have done some research and can do more, but wanted to ask some questions beforehand. Is this supposed to be a direct transcription of F. Scott Fitzgerald's poem from *This Side of Paradise*? Is this character actually F. Scott Fitzgerald, as referenced later by signing the poem FSF, the woman calling him Scott, and the woman having the name Cecilia? Is this him writing the first draft of the poem? Or is the character that's writing this poem someone who happens to be named Scott who is trying to transcribe it from memory for the woman? I would say the former, but either way, I see no reason why this poem can't stay as is, unless you want it to appear exactly as written in *This Side of Paradise*.

Additionally, *This Side of Paradise* was published in 1920, so if this is Fitzgerald, then this memory would have to take place sometime before then. Does it?

Comment [15]: Perhaps change this to "placed the paper in the sand" to avoid using "put down" two sentences in a row. Changing either of the "put downs" to a different phrase would accomplish the same effect.

paper. He too had a bottle of lotion and began to dab its contents onto the small, athletic woman's back. She leaned into his touch and gave him a look as if to say, *I love you madly, Scott*. He caught her glance and said, "I shall never think of you as reverie, Celee, but as the feminine part of myself—a fresh character for my new book."

Coming back to the present, I realize we've walked another block. In San Miguel we walked everywhere, except when it rained hard, and then we traveled by taxi. Twenty-five pesos, or two dollars and fifty cents, and falling—the dollar went to nine pesos eighty in the month we were there and some expats were frightened. "Why now?" we asked them. "It's been coming for a long time, you know." They knew. They had either forgotten or had buried their heads in the sand.

I can't tell you how many beggars we passed and forgot that they lived—if you can call it that—and died there. San Miguel is a city of opposites: junkshops next to chic boutiques, crowds of Indians waiting for busses to Dolores on the Calzada de la Luz, and five million dollar homes up the hill.

There's a corrida in San Miguel and in earlier days they, too, ran bulls down the streets past the

Comment [16]: After I read the Fitzgerald poem and went back and read the line about running into familiar people in Beverly Hills and not knowing their name, it occurred to me that the first couple (the tan man with the white beard and his black-haired significant other) is supposed to represent a famous couple, too. Do they? I looked for correlations between Papa, Bret, and Nice, and have asked others, but can't find anything.

Update: I stumbled upon Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Great! If this is the same Bret character, though, it looks like Hemingway spells it "Brett." It also might be worth it to put in a few more clues for this allusion, or many readers may not be able to fully grasp the meaning you're trying to convey through it.

Comment [17]: I changed the semicolon here to an em dash, because as it stood, the first clause was not an independent clause, and *CMS* says semicolons should only be used to connect two independent clauses (6.54, *Use of the semicolon*). However, there does seem to be two very separate things going on in these two halves of the sentence. The first gives the rate of the taxi, and the second leads into how the falling exchange rate affected the expats. I would consider splitting them into two separate sentences.

Additionally, the way all the exchange rates are listed makes them hard to decipher on the first read, because there is no constant number in your comparison. Perhaps, "The fare was twenty-five pesos, or two dollars and fifty cents, and falling—two dollars and fifty cents went down to X pesos in the month we were there." This makes the difference clearer and heightens its impact.

Comment [18]: I took out the quotation marks around *expats* because it's listed in the *M-W* dictionary. If you're conveying that the narrator is calling into question their status as expats, however, insert them back in.

Comment [19]: I think because "twenty-five pesos" directly follows the narrator talking about travelling by taxi, this sentence works. However, it is a fragment, so to be grammatically correct and completely clear, you could start the sentence with "The fare was twenty-five pesos..."

Comment [20]: As you wrote that San Miguel was a "city of opposites" earlier on in this paragraph, for conciseness, I didn't believe this second *Opposites* was needed at the end of the paragraph. However, it does give the paragraph a sort of finality. Otherwise, this paragraph seems out of place. Perhaps placing a transition between it and the next paragraph would help.

Comment [21]: Who's *they*? The participants in the corrida? The people of San Miguel?

Comment [22]: For variation, I would consider changing one *past* in this sentence to *by* or *in front of*.

Jardin and down Umaran, the bull's hooves clomping on the stone pavers past Mama Mia's Restaurant-Bar where—for the benefit of licentious libation—men would spike drinks for the underage girls that came to the place for a taste of **notoriety**. Once there, the girls drank until their inhibitions dropped to the floor at the feet of waiting men who hoped to take their virtues.

One afternoon during a running, **a** bull dropped dead in front of Mama Mia's. For fear of bad omen, the **men** dragged off the beast. **Despite** the continuance of dubious drinks at Mama Mia' to this day, the running of the bulls was **curtailed**.

There's a clap of thunder and it begins to rain.
We hail a cab.

—R. Hargis, **July 4, 2008**

Comment [24]: There's a lot going on in this sentence and I struggled in trying to find a way to make it grammatically correct while keeping all the parts together. Is this OK?

Comment [25]: Because you stated the same thing in the previous sentence, I felt that "as the girls drank their way to the bar" was redundant here and removed it. OK?

Comment [26]: I'm assuming it was the men? Or did the *they* refer to the girls?

Comment [27]: Combining these two sentences ("the men dragged off the beast, and despite...") might connect the ideas in both sentences well.

Comment [28]: I think the most important point of this sentence was to reveal that the corrida was curtailed, so to highlight that statement I reworded the sentence to emphasize it more. What do you think?

Comment [29]: Thank you for letting me read your work. I love the allusions and the feeling you evoke of being in San Miguel. Besides the narrator physically being in San Miguel, though, I wasn't sure how his/her French memories connected with the knowledge of San Miguel's past and the brief snippets of the present. It reads as if it's all occurring inside the narrator's mind, weaving wherever his/her thoughts go. If you made this more clear and played it up a bit, I think the meandering bits could work well and the piece would be very interesting!

Thank you, again.
KB