

## An Imagined Encounter

I'm out of makeup. Well, mascara. And eyeliner. And blush. I have a wedding later today – the Portuguese kind – and I can't be seen au naturel. Immediately, a future conversation with my tia pops up; she will say: what happened to your face? I will respond with: nothing, Tia, it's just my face. My aunt will then say: but in the photos, on the machine, you look so nice. I say: I didn't have time to look at my face.

I suddenly realize I've given away too much information. My tia says: You don't have time? And she launches into a monologue about how young people only want to hang out, and go to restaurants, and not make their beds. It goes on for about five minutes. I say goodbye and run away, missing the wedding festivities.

Every Portuguese girl plays out conversations with various matriarchs in order to avoid scrutiny, or at least to minimize it. This policing of behavior is still a remnant of the Salazar regime, when secret spies populated even the smallest of towns. I'd bet money that Portuguese aunts invented the kind of surveillance Michel Foucault talks about – the kind that turns everyone into policing each other's behavior.

The paradox here is that my aunt still thinks that Portugal has remained the same since she left in the 1950s. My tia upholds behaviors from over 50 years ago, and expects that Luso-Canadians maintain Salazar's ideals and policies. This was precisely Salazar's aim – to keep people incapable of seeing the power structures controlling them so as to instead observe their own family, friends, and neighbors. Keep them looking sideways. It's not all bad though, gathering information through surveillance is kind of like the predecessor to a neighborhood block watch.

My plan today, on my cousin's wedding day, though, is to avoid being compared with all the nice Portuguese girls, women with successful careers like Nelly Furtado, Mariza, and Cristina Ferreira (no relation to me – I swear). I decide that, instead of this, I'll arm myself with makeup. My glamorized face will perhaps distract my Tia.

I walk to the pharmacy in my neighborhood, Commercial Drive. I was born in Vancouver, Canada and this neighborhood epitomizes my experiences - I know

so many people here that I constantly run into someone I know, especially in East Vancouver. It has taken some time for the world to notice Vancouver, as it is the furthest west inland in Canada and just near the American border.

The city is also located on the Pacific Rim, which connects Vancouver to Asia through the Pacific Ocean; for me, this is a meaningful connection because this ocean was named by Ferdinand Magellan, due to the water's *pacífico* quality, in comparison to the Atlantic Ocean. This unique geographical confluence has perhaps led to Vancouver's diversity. Even before Vancouver landed on the most-livable-list, accompanied by its expensive housing, the city has been a sought-after place to live, due to, in part, its role as the pacific gateway.

Two other large-scale cultural events also impacted the global attention Vancouver has received. The first was Expo '86; I was a child then. I explored the ceramic bicycle sculptures with my big Portuguese family, and asked for an Expo Ernie mascot doll, which I didn't get – I got a keychain instead. The Expo Line Skytrain was built as result of this event, and a new cycling culture slowly emerged.

The second event was the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, which was met with some resistance. This event significantly impacted the city, because various infrastructures were built during this time, such as the Canada Line (YVR to downtown), the Richmond Oval, and Hillcrest Community Centre.

The event itself provided the city with unforgettable memories. My family laughed alongside Canada when Jon Montgomery drank beer out of a pitcher after winning a gold medal on live TV. And, after the Men's Hockey gold medal win, my family and I took the Skytrain downtown to celebrate; the entire train, including my immigrant family, sang "O Canada" on repeat until Granville Station.

We watched the Opening Ceremonies and wondered if any Portuguese people would participate, and we felt a bit bad watching just one Portuguese Olympian walk the flag through BC Place. The ceremony's performances included KD Lang, who sang Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" barefoot; Shane Koyczan performed "We Are More." Nelly Furtado and Bryan Adams sang "Bang the Drum," which celebrated the Indigenous people who existed here before, well, everyone else. And, Wayne Gretzky, with the Olympic Torch, made his way into downtown on a pick-up truck. A chef passerby spotted Gretzky, abandoned his restaurant duties by tossing his apron aside, and ran after the torch. So Canadian.

During the ceremony, Nelly Furtado, a Luso-Canadian from Victoria, my province's capital city, performed for the world – for Portuguese-Canadians, but even more for me this was a big deal. We saw a representation of ourselves on a

world stage – this was affirming to our Luso-Canadian identity, especially as the Portuguese community in Vancouver keeps shrinking.

I rush by a few side streets, to get the pharmacy, remembering the families who lived here. They used to pick up bread and olives, just after church. Their doctors and dentists were here. They would renew their driver's license and then go to the travel agent next door to book their trip to Portugal. All of this, on The Drive. Most of this, just a memory. There are still remnants of the Portuguese immigrants who once had businesses here, but many families have moved outside the city. Many of my young relatives and close friends no longer live in Vancouver because of the city's high living costs. Now, there is a total of one Portuguese restaurant and two coffee shops on Commercial Drive: the Portuguese Club of Vancouver, Joe's Café, and Café Algarve. Further South, there is Casa Verde, Serra Bar, and Metro Coffee, but most Portuguese businesses nowadays are found in Burnaby and beyond.

Many people complain that "The Drive," like much of Vancouver, has become gentrified. In the city, development is rampant, with new projects around every corner. Unlike my Tia, who still acts like the neighborhood police, not realizing that the Portugal she left behind has changed, the entire Drive neighborhood is in constant flux. Vancouver does not have equivalents to Little Portugal in Toronto or Height-Ashbury in San Francisco, but The Drive is a big mash up of all these things on one long street that runs only a dozen blocks. It is the perfect place for people watching. Here, the culinary options are almost endless; on a rainy day I go for pho, and on a sunny day I head to a patio debating whether I want to eat Cuban, Jamaican, or Italian food.

But I return to my task for the day: make-up shopping at the pharmacy. The usual types are inside; the person about to go on vacation, the one who needs to quickly color their hair, and the person embarrassed to buy something embarrassing. Then there's me, the person who almost never wears makeup – only on occasions to deflect deprecating comments. I briskly walk through the cosmetics.

Ah! So many colors, things, options. What do I buy? I don't want to ask anyone...so I look around. It's just a wall filled with products, half of which I don't even know how to use.

Finally, I find a mascara; my sister wears this brand. I see blush next to it. I don't have a brush to blend it with, so I guess I'll use my fingers. Who's going to notice an unblended cheek? So I grab it. Now eyeliner. I'm out of eyeliner, because I've never owned it. Not in high school, and definitely not now. So I

browse the products, horizontally, and finally land upon a Katy Perry product. *Katy Perry has makeup?* I mean, she wears it for concerts and on *American Idol*, but I can't buy a Katy Perry product. Seems childish. But, but...she's Portuguese... well, some form of Portuguese. Pereira. Katy Pereira. Katherine Pereira. Just doesn't sound LA glam. Katy Perry is much better. More American. Getting rid of the immigrant trace, I say to myself. Look, I don't have time to get into an intercultural and political debate on immigration. It's the *wedding day*. It's about fun. Not about the depressing facts of life.

So, with courage, I reach out and get a black and a white eyeliner. I must support Portuguese businesses...even though she's not waving the flag...I feel a sense of obligation to buy this. No one will know. I run to the checkout. I say to the woman: a lotto ticket as well. Lotto Max, with the extra. This woman who has clearly worked here for at least a decade, turns to me. She's got heavy mascara, a smoker's cough, and hard-earned wrinkles to scare off any unwanted trouble. Her employee name tag reads LINDA in capital letters. She turns to me and says: ID please. I look around. Linda can't possibly mean me. She stares at me. *Really lady?* Just because I'm buying Katy Perry makeup does *not* mean I'm living a teenage dream. Linda says: anyone under the age of 30, or at least anyone we think is under 30 has to show ID. I flash her my card, giddy with joy. I'm well over 30, pushing 40. It must be my good Portuguese genes, and the Mediterranean diet. Well, technically my childhood diet was hotdogs and grilled cheese sandwiches, but whatever.

I exit the store, makeup in hand, and look for the closest establishment that I know has a washroom. I'm on The Drive, so there's plenty to choose from. I feel like eating something though; maybe it's a craving for some *chouriço* and *caldo verde*? Why am I craving this before a huge meal? Today I don't question it.

I run over to the PCOV. It's that place that looks like you shouldn't enter, because of the gates and dark atmosphere. In reality it looks that way because it used to be a private club, for members only, but now anyone can enter and order a meal. I walk in and there's a soccer game on. Cristiano Ronaldo is on the big screen. Of course. He's playing with his new team.

Everyone's focused on the screen. I dash by the people watching the game, and yell to the waitress: *Tenho que ir à casa de banho. I have to go to the washroom.* She nods. I'm a regular on Sundays. It's a Saturday, though. I'm thrown off. I walk up to her and say: I'll have a *bica*, and a *pastel de nata*. Maria says: you sure? Isn't there a wedding in a few hours? I nod. There are no secrets in the Portuguese

community, only enlarged versions of truth. Maria says: How about I give you a *papo seco*? I say: and butter? Maria: claro que sim, menina. She turns towards the counter and disappears.

I run to the washroom. As I'm fumbling with my Katy Perry mascara, Nelly Furtado comes out of the stall. Looking fabulous. I've heard that she used to hang out as a teenager on The Drive, but this is now.

She's right in front of me. Right now. Nelly Furtado. And me. In the washroom of the PCOV. She washes her hands, takes a paper towel, and dries her hands. I start thinking of all the things I could say to her. I think, acoustic or electric guitar, or Portuguese guitarra? Toronto or Vancouver? *Bica* or *galão*? Gold or silver hoops? I then think, *Powerless (Say What You Want)* from your album *Folklore* inspired me to be a proud Luso-Canadian; the folklore dancing in that video was something I never thought I'd ever see. I think: are the Portuguese people an easy or hard sell for your records? I want to tell her I loved her concert; I went by myself – front row. I want to tell her that I admire how she is taking time to learn how to sew, to make her daughter outfits. I want to say a thousand more things.

What comes out is: uh. Help. Nelly turns to me and sees I am struggling. Nelly takes both eyeliner pencils, and begins to color in my eyes. From left to right. Right to left. My eyes are closed. I don't know which color she picked. It doesn't matter. I feel free, like a bird, feeling seen for the very first time. No judgment. Two Luso-Canadians understanding the struggle. A tear drops from my face. I hear the cap placed onto the eyeliner, and onto the counter. I stand there for a moment. I'm overwhelmed by my stillness.

I feel a rush of air go by me, and I know that Nelly's gone. I open my eyes. It's just me, and my tears. I recall her song, "All Good Things (Come to an End)." I look in the mirror. My eyes are softer, my lips less pursed, my cheekbones relaxed: my face is transformed. There's a smile greeting me in the mirror. My eyes look vibrant and unafraid to express all that's inside of me. I look at the Katy Perry eyeliner, and feel confident – dare I say happy. I'm energized. I tuck the eyeliner in my purse, and walk out of the washroom, ready for tonight's celebration.

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