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by

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Before the sun emerged from night's bed to grace the archipiélago-nation's eastern islands at 6:59am, reports had already spread that late at night, hours before sunrise, some unknown assailant(s?) had toppled the steely Juan Ponce de León statue down from its concrete column at la plaza de San José, in el Viejo San Juan, epicenter of tourism and la vida fabulosa y decrepita de nuestro ghetto heaven. The day gives the act of vandalism symbolic weight, for at 6pm, Felipe VI, the current King of Spain, will be arriving for a visit. Back in the 14th century, Juan Ponce and Columbus co-conquered Caribbean America. So Felipe's visit invokes centuries of a violent history—morning begins with revolt.

By 7pm on January 24, 2022, Juan Ponce de León's statue will be back up, pieced together, pax sanjuanera.

But it is now 9am and I'm on my way over to the capital from my home in Caimito. The drive takes 25 minutes.

On Calle Pelayo I park across the street between graffiti-tagged edifices. One local on the street's corner is being remodeled, repainted. An American boss gives commands to Puerto Rican construction workers in what I call Gringspish, meaning he's saying all the words in Spanish but this is a Gringo speaking so it

sounds off, like when a Hispanic tries to say *speech* but they say *spish* instead.

So Gringspish. Gringspish is the boss in this street. & Spanish listens. They're building his future bar after all, his business.

Many Gringspish businesses here.

So much America here of late, always business. As recent as a hundred years ago, when business came in the form of another war for possession and invasion; for just as the Puerto Rican archipiélago people were about to achieve independence from Spain in decline, from Juan Ponce's reign, then came the Americans with their business. In front of the capitol building, a line of bronze American presidents. JFK, Eisenhower, Reagan, even Obama has a statue. Puerto Ricans voted for none of them.

Will I see Juan Ponce's broken parts on the ground, or will he be gone by the time I get there?

The walk from Pelayo to San Jose will take about half an hour. It is 9:30am.

I stop and write:

If there are ruins we talk

of ruins

if there is emptiness then

NO TO VACU-ID — REVELATION 13:16

Anti-Vaccine sign seen at protest outside the capitol building. Tents up everywhere, people camping out: families—under the tropical sun, by the capital’s dome, children run between encampments, grandmothers fan themselves and hold signs with more and more biblical quotes meant to polemicize vaccine

mandates. I look up the referenced passage from Revelation / *apocalipsis*, 13:16:

“he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads.”

I have no idea how this connects to anti vax ideas, and I’m not sufficiently curious to ask around. I walk on.

Halfway to Ponce de Leon's statue, I finally get it. The Revelation reference. The Vacu ID—the “stamp” on the iPhone guaranteeing one's vaccinated status—is a “mark” everyone is being forced to wear by the “powers of the earth.” thus it is equivalent somehow to that magic 3-figure number associated first with a Roman Emperor and then with the Romantic King of Hell: like the number, the Vacu ID is the mark all followers of a certain order bear.

At 55 Calle San José, two tourists, one in a sundress and the other in a tank top, take pictures of a condemned building. It's an activist site of protest art, now declared a public disturbance. Hands have ripped away the Resistance Manifesto. Government tape covers the Resistance Manifesto. Wind and violence unmake the Manifesto but nosotros nos manifestamos como quiera, we manifest how we desire. They the tourists, they make cutie poses by the black and white Puerto Rican flag, painted on a tall wooden door: the black and white flag, the building's emblem of resistance; the tourists, their skin is lucent with what I imagine to be the work of California-priced skin products. I walk on and I'm not looking when one of them says, This is so cool.

When I arrive to the site of the statue, the broken pieces are no longer there, though the column still stands, imperial in the square, where leaves cover the asphalt like a rug, fallen from trees lining the quadrant. While a public worker in an orange vest rakes them up on the other side of the square—she says, *they've been shedding since last Friday*—a man and a woman stand and talk by the bench next to where I sit. We're all looking at the empty column. The column tells the story of the conquistador in four faces of text. He accompanied Colon el Columbus on the first voyage. Hatched plans with him to take the country for themselves. He founded Caparra, the town to which the statue pointed with Kinglike confidence. He died wounded from a battle against Indians in Florida.

The man says, They didn't break him to pieces, they're coming to put him back together in the afternoon, the legs are still whole. But now that Juan Ponce De Leon's steel outline is gone, the blue sky looks whole over the column. If I ever see the statue again from this angle, I will think of it as a fissure in a picture of the sky, the stamp of patriarchal Man's impotent prepotence on the horizon; the empty sky hints at least at space for a future. The woman says, Emptiness generates thought, a space to imagine something new. So vast and blue I can almost picture freedom as a space beyond me, even us; and my imagingings strain to adhere to it. She's an University professor coming up with an assignment: another world, where it's not this statue in this place. An Otherworld. Already, tribefolks gather around to imagine new futures. But I am disturbed that no one has ever built a monument to the sky.

People gather. Curious people, activists with an ancestral agenda to resist, professors with big ideas, retired bookish people from the city, and the professionally curious: journalists, filmmakers, documentarians, artists, writers. Many with a vested interest in not seeing the statue put back together again. Others wait for something to happen, folks with their smartphones out, ready for a confrontation as more guards show up in flanks, and more protesters with tattoos and guerilla chimeras. The decolonizers—they may not know who started the deed, but see themselves as having a hand in finishing it. Some say we may not know who's going up there next, but we'd rather see it empty for now. A filmmaker says, These symbols represent what still affects us today, because the white man's power keeps imposing itself. A history teacher climbs up the column. He sits there for less than forty minutes, poses like Juan Ponce for a few, says he's following a protest tradition. Then he comes down. Similarly, another activist occupies the crane that's brought at noon, to prevent it from being used.

Authorities are brought in and within the hour he has disoccupied the crane. Scattered protesters applaud. Some roar at the cops any chance they get.

Over on the next street, an influencer in a tropical blouse walks by La Tortuga, a local restaurant. In front of her, a man with a smart phone on a handheld tripod—mounted with a big puffy mic, along with a bright lightbulb—records her, walking backwards. The lightbulb, unnecessary in this blue sky day, shines on the influencer as she strides with the cocky vibe of a pimp from the landed gentry, who owns every step she takes and the surrounding territory. She speaks with passionate hand motions, like someone describing a delicious plate of food. Though it's moving, the camera's viewfinder is fixed entirely on her, so of course, neither her nor her man notice at all the rising commotion in the statueless square. They might not even know what's going on.

Her video is not about this aspect of San Juan—the polemics and histories that clash in this city every now and then every day, or what it means to suffer this locality more than to cruise it. Her video is about a Postcard San Juan, the place with bright houses, luxurious Airbnb's, and nostalgia ala Despacito: a repository for YouTube videos about the Island You Must Visit. American as ever, a video by the tourist for the tourists.

By the end of the day, it will be discovered that the vandalizers of the Ponce de León statue are also anti-vax people; they will say so on Twitter, though some will question the account's origin since, up until the day of the statue's fall, the account had solely been known as a site for trolls; and now

here they were, suddenly an “activist” account that united causes as disparate as libertarian vaccine politics, Puerto Rican decolonization, and indigenous revival. Radical spaces breed the most curious monsters, and Liberation, like God, uses the Strangest Instruments; so go some Histrionic HistoriLogics. I leave this dilemma to the scholars of spontaneous revolutions, the kinds that effect change as ephemeral as daylight.

Through the smartphone my dealer and I watch the crane put the statue back on the column, column surrounded by a fence of cops, the fence of cops keeping out a teeming mass of protestors who decry the refacing of the defaced place. We smoke in my brother's car and he says, This whole thing was a simulation. I think powerful people are behind this. Think about it, does anyone know who really did this? Then we shared stories about the weird shit we've seen happen at protests. Things nobody's written about yet. Things we know just because we saw them happen when the cameras weren't looking. Things that make paranoid stoners like us think that behind every anonymous disruption there is a Power beyond imagining, against which men like us are nothing but worms. Who fell upon Juan Ponce? A Guasábara spirit, or a CIA-trained guerilla? I remember the dream of another artist: that hand with which Juan Ponce de León points a finger at Caparra—that hand becomes a boy's hand holding a yo-yo: and Juan Ponce de León's statue bounces de Yo-Yo up and down in the capital. That just happened for one day, and it wasn't a dream, it was a performance. But would I rather see Juan Ponce transformed into a harmless boy with a yo-yo, or destroyed for the sake of the sky?