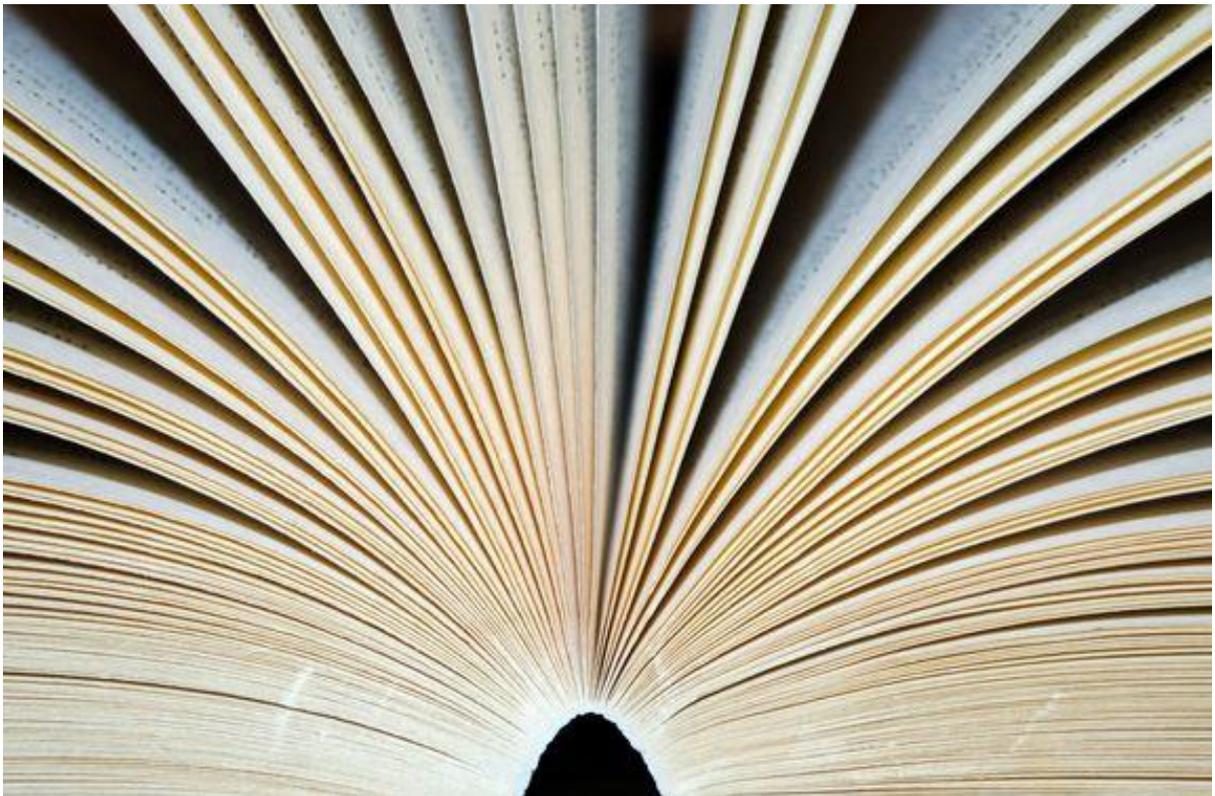


English Plus Short Stories.



Lycée Dupuy de Lôme
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Présentation :

Ce recueil est le résultat d'un travail de la classe de la TL1 en cours de Langue Vivante Approfondie.

Nous avons étudié le genre littéraire la Nouvelle et les élèves avaient comme tâches d'évaluation une analyse et une production.

Certains ont choisi de ne pas publier.

Ces nouvelles sont les leurs.

Marian Hayne-Le Tenier
Professeure d'anglais de la TL1

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A Day for Happiness



Walking through the market on this day was pleasant, I didn't pay attention to the drunkards that were always yelling at Marian's Inn (of course well-known for the beer, that they cherished a lot) for some more free rounds of beer, with their wives pulling them out of the tavern to go home, the daily scene. I was surprised how the lord arranged the weather to my mood this day: the sun was as shiny as my happiness; the sky

was for once clear of the clouds and so was my mind. I had been up since 7 a.m. naturally for several days, after the kingdom's lower-class midwife said that Gisella would soon give birth to our child at the last visit. So, every morning since she said that, I've woken up to buy fresh fruit and vegetables at the village market for my Gisella. As farmers, we haven't had much money these last months, the crop was very poor, so I went to work as a blacksmith with Watson who is the best in his domain. He needed help with all the orders he'd received as the knights' tournaments would begin very soon in the kingdom. I was well-paid, this is why I could afford the assistance of a midwife for my Gisella and our child, but also to buy fresh food every day.

I first went to Agnes's fruit stand to pick up some apples.

'Hello Agnes! Do you have my red apples?' I asked politely with a big smile.

'Hello Richard, yes right here, I kept them for you' she told me kindly.

'Oh, thank you so much, Gisella will love them, she'll probably make a pie with these. She's improved her baking skills since she spends a large amount of time at home. Ugh pregnancy - tough time for women but at the same time such a precious present from God,' I

said passionately. Agnes didn't say much, she just wanted me to hand her the money for the apples.

After that, I went to the butcher's shop « At Willy's » that happened to be quite far away from the apple stand.

I was taking my time, walking slowly, saying hello to people. Everyone was so glad that the knights' tournaments were happening again in our kingdom; it was a blessed time of the year where everyone had a bigger income thanks to all these rich people drinking and buying our goods. The kingdom of Queen Aina II, I must say, was a lovely place during spring and summer time: A lot more children would sing, dance and play in the streets; it was safer, very sunny, so flowery and delightful. I think I'd never been this happy in my entire life, so I couldn't even imagine what it would be when I saw our gorgeous child and hold him or her.

When I finally got to Willy's shop, I thought it was the luckiest day of my life, there was no crowd screaming and jostling for the best bits of pork, only two or three people talking to each other.

'Hello William,' I said, still with a big smile on my face.

'Come on Richard, you're the only one who still calls me that, it's just Willy, you know,' he told me as he reached to shake my hand.

'Okay I will call you Willy now if it makes you happy,' I said with a little laugh.

'How is Gisella feeling? I've seen her few times, she didn't seem well, we could mistake her pregnancy for a disease,' he said, genuinely interested.

'She is feeling a lot better now, she is stunning and lively,' I told him lovingly.

'Well I'm very happy for you Richard, you'll be an awesome father to your child,' he added.

I smiled even more as it made me feel even happier.

Willy hadn't even had the time to ask me what I wanted, when a boy from behind me began to scream my name 'SIR RICHARD! SIR RICHARD!' he shrieked.

'What is happening? What do you want, boy?' I said, scared.

'Mrs. midwife Eloise and doctor sir Albert sent me to look for you, they told me tell you that Mrs. Gisella is in labour right now,' he said to me rapidly.

I directly began to run to our house, I didn't even take a second to say goodbye to Willy or to thank that little boy. The apples bumping against my leg as I was running as fast as I could, my hair waving in the wind, my heart was racing by, just the thought of me being a father

TODAY, all these emotions at the same time in my body, I could feel my love for Gisella growing bigger and bigger, I couldn't wait to see her and kiss her while holding our child. My excitement helped me run even faster.

When I finally got home I could hear my Gisella scream with the pain, but after some seconds it ended. I quickly threw the apples on the table to finally get rid of them. I'd never climbed the stairs that fast in my life. When I got to the corridor, the midwife, Eloise, was just leaving the room, I ran to her with all my excitement showing on my face and asked

'So?? is it a boy or a girl? Is she okay?', overexcited.

'I'm sorry, doctor Albert said. 'It was a tumor. Your wife died,' she announced to me insensitively.

Aïna S.

The Pride of the Kingdom

Today was a day like every day, just an ordinary and lovely day, as usual. Me and my mother woke and got up to go to the factory, we were labourers. I did not have a father, in fact my father had passed away not very long after my birth, I did not know him. After leaving our gloomy and confined home, us and everybody else in the borough were going to work. Our borough was a place in the Kingdom, governed by our queen that we loved and respected so much. Her majesty was respected by each tiny little resident of the Kingdom and was close to her people.

Contrary to what you may think, going to the factory was not a torment, actually it was a pleasure, we were all organised and coordinated: The main feature and the pride of the Kingdom was the hard-working nature and the worship of its residents. Our queen was very proud of us and we were of her, too. At each season, all the boroughs alternated their jobs and their locations. Currently, we were in the mines, to mine galleries to find some ore or rocks for the realm. The other boroughs were supposed to work outside our lands, it was more perilous, the Outside was unpredictable and filled with huge and unfamiliar creatures.

Consequently, this was the reason why the other boroughs were not outside this time. The week before, a dreadful event had occurred, around a hundred residents of another borough had gone out of the Realm for an expedition, to discover other lands and their possible resources. But, instead of taking the usual road, the explorers chose to take another pathway. They were forced to do this because of a recent storm which had obstructed the usual road. On their way, they had bumped into one of those creatures. Some of the explorers, panic-stricken, had tried to run away from the creature but, just a handful of them had managed to run. They explained to us what had happened and described the creature, the scene, the disaster. After that, the queen, with cleverness, opted to interrupt the outing, everybody in the kingdom was shaken.

I was in the mines with my mother and some colleagues. Today, the aim given by the queen was to find a rock or anything else which could treat the survivors. Me and my colleagues started to search in the rock, my mother was too tired because of her age, she looked at us and took a close look at the stones we had found. After a long time mining, we were exhausted.

“Aaaaahhh (yawning), we must have been mining for 2 hours, and now, all we can find is just clay...” I sighed.

“Mmmh... WHAT?!!!” shouted my mother who made everybody jump; my mother was sleeping, no one expected such a shout.

“What? What’s happening mom?”

“You said clay, didn’t you?”

“Yes, it’s just green clay... why?”

“Green clay?! It’s perfect!! If you didn’t know, green clay is a remedy to treat a wound!! We can bring this to the queen and the survivors will be treated!!!”

We left the galleries as soon as we had heard this marvellous news, we climbed back up to the Throne Room to inform the queen of the news. When we arrived in front of the Throne Room, a guard was standing in front of the door.

“Stop! You are about to go into the Throne Room, and meet Her Majesty, the Queen of all the ants! The Queen of the Kingdom of Antlanta! What’s your request? Mmh... Okay.”

We showed him the clay and explained to him.

“Go in!”, he continued, “But just the younger ones!”

Then, I went into the throne room to meet the queen.

“Hello, my Queen, this is urgent, my colleagues and I have found green clay, and it might be a remedy for the survivors of the tragedy!”

The Queen understood immediately and gave all the green clay to the doctors and asked me for the location of the clay in case we ran out. She entertained me, my mother and my colleagues for our discovery and thanked us. The survivors were saved, and everybody in the anthill celebrated the news.

The next day, everything went back to usual and everybody left their home with a smile.

Alan-Théo FORTUNE-TARLING

Summer despair

It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon, in the middle of the summer. Everything seemed to be perfectly alright, the sunbeams warmed people's hearts, everyone was smiling. No one could guess what was going to happen and how destructive it would be for me.

This precise event made me suffer so much. I couldn't see the sun anymore, probably because of the water in my eyes. Everything was blurred around me and I just burst into tears in the middle of the street. People were staring at me, shocked. They couldn't understand my pain. Even if I talked about it, they were too narrow-minded, it was another world for them. But for me, what had happened was harmful and I knew that my life would never be the same.

It was terribly hot there. I was sweating so much, I could feel every single drop on my face, mixing with my tears in an endless flow of sorrow. The heat was attacking my whole body and skin. Since morning, the temperature had been slowly rising to reach its highest point expected that day. I was hoping to be anywhere but here. The sun seemed to follow me everywhere just to make me suffer more, and I was suffocating. I felt like I was in a desert, with only dry sand around me, waiting for the precious liquid, dreaming of an oasis. The climate and my feelings coming out were too much for me to bear or to handle. I fell on my knees and refused to walk back: I couldn't move.

I had never felt in such a terrible mood. People were looking daggers at me, but I wouldn't care any more, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable because I was in such a trance that it seemed futile to me. Nothing, no one in the whole earth could soothe my dreadful pain. The seconds and minutes wouldn't stop the ache, nor would they stop the uneasiness spreading through my whole body and my brain. The nightmare was alive, inside my entire body, like a spreading poison. I knew it would come some day, but I wasn't expecting it right now. My legs were really shaking, and I was unable to stand up anymore. I tumbled on the floor, and broke into even more tears: The flow was out of control. I'd never felt such misery.

Again, and again, the memories wouldn't stop haunting me, as it had been since this horrible scene took place. I emerged as if I was waking up. People had been staring at me since the beginning, I couldn't bear it and I started to wave my arms, as fast as I could, to dispel the

gazes on me. In vain. I started to grip my fist to fight whoever wanted to stand before me. I was loudly stamping on the floor under my boots. I never liked them anyway, but I had no choice but to wear them. I was like a bird in a cage, without any escape, I was fighting for some freedom and for what I'd always wanted from that moment.

I'd never heard such a disaster in my whole life. I could not even believe that such a tragedy could happen someday. I wish that no one would ever have to suffer or endure pain in the way that I did. I really took the strongest punishment anybody could bear. It was a real burden to keep walking and generally living, knowing what had happened back there. My jeans were hurting me after such a long walk in an infuriating and harrasing heat. I could not help but remember the moment my life stopped. Again and again, I was feeling these obnoxious memories exhausting my heart and my body. I needed it. I needed it so much and I couldn't get it. I was feeling like a man without oxygen, like nature without any water. My living conditions weren't satisfied, and I knew I didn't have much time left to change things. But I could not. I put all the energy left in my body and screamed as loud as I could to find somebody to help me. Silence. People were still rushing past me and didn't even consider looking at me anymore. I was alone. Help would never come from outside. I had to figure out how to get rid of this situation on my own, no matter how hard it was. But it was impossible.

I surrendered. I would just be quiet from now on. I had to bear with it. I would have to wait for time to heal my wounds. It would never be the same now. Everything had changed. My life would never be the same again. The world had collapsed. All of my innocence had fallen apart. Eventually, I could not help myself but hope. My dreams would never leave me. I had to go on, not living with my anger and my distress but to hope for more. For life to start again and to live on. I had to calm down. Slowly my tears stopped running down my cheeks and I raised my head up. I went up and walked again. At this exact moment I found a hand to help me, to secure me and to calm me down. It was my redemption. It was the hand that guides you through your life and helps you build your own way. My dreams would never come true, but I still could live with them. I had to go home now.

Suddenly, I heard the voice I was desperate to hear which said "OK, sweetie, I'll get you an ice cream. After all, it soon will be your birthday, it isn't every day that we get to be six years old."

Amber BEAUMONT

Littlerock Woods

The screeching of the tyres against the gravel of the alley made enough sound to let the wildlife of the area know that someone had arrived near the little cottage. It was Jack, driving his truck, his dog Vegas in the back of the car. This house wasn't his but his friend Billy's. It was a vacation house, a little cottage lost into the woods of Littlerock. Jack was going to live here for a few months. He had no job and lived with his parents, but this situation didn't bother him. In fact, he had got his degree a few months before and had just started looking around for jobs. After some time, seeing that he couldn't find a job, his friend Billy offered to let him spend some time in this cottage. So, there he was, with Vegas and his rifle, ready to live far from all human contact for a while. He opened the front door, which led to the living room. The room was large, on the stones were hung ancient tapestries and stuffed animal heads. The dining table was in the center of the room, with candles ready to be lit. Jack was impressed by this small yet well-preserved house. He went to the bedroom upstairs and started settling in. He then explored all the rooms in the house. Downstairs were the dining room, the bathroom and the kitchen (which was in the same room as the living room) and upstairs were several bedrooms and a "mystery room". In fact, the door leading to that room was locked for a reason Jack did not know. He wasn't really suspicious about it and simply took Vegas for a walk. During this walk he had the opportunity to get familiar with the forest and noticed that deer lived on the property. Pleased with this discovery he went back to the cottage as it was getting dark outside, had a good meal and went to bed early.

The first few days in the house went by really fast. One day, like all the others, Jack woke up at 5a.m., prepared his gun and went outside to hunt. The hunt was a success. He managed to kill a deer. A male in the prime of life. He finally got back home with his reward at twilight, prepared the meat, put the pieces in the fridge and started cooking his dinner. Vegas was sitting by the fire he had made right after the meal. It had got dark when Jack heard a strange noise coming from outside. He first thought it was the noise of the wind blowing through the windows and decided to ignore it. But a moment later, he heard it again, so he decided to go and check outside. He had to stop Vegas from barking to hear what it really was. The deer from the forest were belling long, desperate bells. The noises were getting closer and closer, and

Jack, who was starting to feel threatened, went inside the house and locked the doors. A few minutes later, it felt like the deer were just outside the house. The noises were frightening and Jack, in shock, was standing in the middle of the room. Eventually, the belling stopped. Jack concluded that he was probably too tired from getting up so early every morning. So, he went upstairs, fell onto his bed and fell asleep right away.

The next morning, he did the same routine as usual. That routine went on for weeks. He got up, went hunting until twilight, with Vegas, prepared the meat, ate and went to sleep. But he never heard the deer ever again, which led him to think that whatever he had experienced was just a dream.

After nearly a month of living this way in the cottage, he began feeling worse and worse. His health deteriorated. He would be dizzy, throw up from time to time and worse, he was starting to see strange things. Moreover, finding out what was in that “mystery room” disturbed him more and more. He WANTED to see what was in there. So, one day, when he got himself together a bit more, he looked around for a key. He found it underneath the big closet in his bedroom. He rushed to unlock the door, and he entered Billy’s office. There were lots of books on a shelf, along with old, precious stuff like soldiers’ medals, or old diaries, or ancient handguns. On the desk, he saw a journal, probably belonging to Billy. He took a closer look at the diary and read that it was the property of someone named Joey. Intrigued by the fact that Billy had never mentioned a Joey, he opened the journal and flipped through it until he reached the last page Joey had written. The last words were

“They know what you do, and they will kill you for it.”

A chill went down Jack’s spine. It was too much for him. He was too weak to take his truck and leave, but if he stayed here he would die, and there was no way he could call anyone here. At last with the little strength remaining in his body, he managed to write something in the journal. He then crawled to take his weapon. He could barely breathe, he was dizzy, the room was turning around him. Finally, he pulled the trigger.

When Billy found his decomposing body a few months later, he also noticed that the journal had been opened and he read “The deer eat poison.”

Chadia HADDOUCHE

A Merry-go-Down

On the 6th of January, Terence was standing next to the ticket office of the pier of Achtonmouth, smoking his cigarette. His thoughts were lost in the fog. He was still hesitating. This reunion, was it such a good idea? He hadn't seen them in years, ten years in fact. The message from Erika, a week ago had surprised him. Terence hadn't heard from her since *that night*, where he, Erika, Jamie, Steve and Sasha had agreed never to see each other again. Why now, then?

He threw away his cigarette butt and caught sight of the thick dark clouds, which seemed to be devouring the sky in the direction of the Achtonmouth. Terence finally turned around towards the ticket office and noticed that a young lady, all dressed-up in grey, was staring at him, anxiously cracking and twisting her fingers joints. He squinted, as if he was trying to focus, to recognise her. The fair strand of hair that had escaped from her hat gave the answer. It was Sasha. Terence came closer. She was smiling, her face had kept that sweetness, that softness, a sort of never-ending "sweet sixteen-ness".

"Terence! I'm so glad you came. Have you bought your ticket already?"

"No, not yet Sasha. Actually, I was still..."

"Well hurry!" She looked at the sea: "I can see the ferry coming!"

Terence sighed in resignation. At least, she would be there. He bought his ticket from the thoughtless-eyed ticket clerk. A few seconds later, an intense gust of wind made it slip out of his hand, swirling it over the pier. He caught it right before it touched the brownish water and reached the ferry. Doubtless, a gale was close. The sky was darker than ever, the wind was blowing in all directions and the waves were crashing against the hull, making the same noise: The storm that was coming.

"What despicable weather" said a well-known voice behind Terence's back that made him start. He turned around and recognised Steve, and behind Sasha, Jamie and Erika were standing: Erika was trying to prevent her hat from being blown away.

"Shouldn't the boat stay at the embankment?" asked Jamie

“It’s only a half-hour journey, don’t worry. However, I highly recommend you all to firmly grab the barrier,” shouted Erika, her voice getting lost in the wind, the words reaching their audience with some difficulty.

The ferry left the pier and while it was in the middle of the sea, the rain started, and quickly transformed into a downpour. The group of former friends took refuge under the shelter of the deck, and Therence couldn’t see anything around him. The fog and the rain were wrapping the slippery deck, while the gusts of wind were more violent than ever. Suddenly, a loud noise broke through the racket of the gale, and, in the twinkling of an eye, time seemed to be suspended. At that moment, a bright white light dazzled Therence and the others and when they opened their eyes again, the boat was entering the port of Achtonmouth.

“What was that light?” Therence questioned

“I don’t know, probably the lighthouse,” answered Erika, pointing it out on the greyish clouds. Then, she hailed a cab and soaked to the bone, they rushed into it.

They were all quiet in the cab, but the loud silence of the floating question in all of their minds filled the conversation: “*Why did Erika organise this reunion?*” She was the only one with the answer, but she was looking through the window of the cab, a faraway look in her eyes. The fog was lifting, nevertheless, the rain was heavier and heavier and Therence only realised they’d reached the manor when they parked. The shape of Black Wing Manor stood out in the gloomy atmosphere surrounding the domain. The manor was high rather than wide and had those contorted gargoyles that Therence particularly enjoyed noticing. Coming up from the roof stood something that looked like a bird observatory, which, thought Therence, had to offer a great panorama on the wild and green hills of Achtonmouth during the sunniest days of spring.

Erika paid for the cab before getting out and led the group to the main door of the Manor. The large front step protected them from the rain and the engraved pillars had lanterns on them. Their panes were dirtied by dust, condensation and spiderwebs and yet they offered enough light to illuminate the massive doors. All in ebony, they had engravings at its corners, which represented what seemed to be lions’ paws, with the claws firmly sank into the heavy wood. At the centre of both doors was a door-knocker. It had probably been bronze once but over the years and bad weather, it had formed a patina, oxidised in some places, and then led to its actual colour closer to brass. Erika took a large key from her pocket, inserted it in the

keyhole with a significant “click”, then pushed open the doors, revealing to all, the inside of Black Wing Manor.

They arrived in the vast hall, the parquet creaked when they walked in. Therence looked up and noticed that the ceiling of the entrance was higher than the other room, the height of the house, actually.

Erika then announced that there were six bedrooms in the manor, three on the first floor, two on the second and a last one on the third floor. They could choose the one they wanted. Therence and Steve took the first-floor bedroom, Jamie and Sasha the one on the second floor, while Erika choose the highest bedroom. Therence, tired from the crossing, decided to take a nap. He went up using the carpeted spiral staircase. On the wall were hung portraits of the house-keepers and their dogs, two French bulldogs to be accurate. Once in his bedroom, on the first floor, Therence sat on the floral bedside rug, and bent forearms his forearms on his thighs. Still he was wondering. He laid on his back and turned his face to the window which was attacked by the weather. He finally thought that maybe Erika just wanted to reconnect. They had all been very close at college after all. Maybe she just wanted to find again what they had all lost in one night. He closed his eyes. No. He shouldn't think about it. He needed to forget. They all did.

“I shouldn't stay here alone. It's the best way to get lost in my thoughts,” thought Therence. He got up and looked for the others. They were gathered in the living room. Therence sat on the red couch and grabbed the glass of Port that Steven was offering. After a few minutes of chitchat, Sasha finally rooted out the devil.

“Tell us, Erika, why did you gather us here today? I mean, I'm glad you did, I missed our friendship but why now?”

“Well, I thought we'd broach this subject later..” she suspended her sentence. It seemed she had a lump in her throat. Her eyes were shining, with tears, probably. “My guilt... is too strong. It's...overwhelming... I want to confess to the police!”

They all stared at her, but she was avoiding their looks.

“You can't be serious,” said Steven quietly, articulating every word. “It has been ten years, we would be in even more trouble than before! You need to understand tha...”

“Do you think I don’t understand the consequences? I am ready to take them on! What I really can’t understand is why I’m the only one of us who seems not to be impervious to the fact that we killed someone!”

“It was an accident, Erika!” shouted Jamie, “A tragic accident! We were young and what? We were supposed to ruin our lives while it was her fault? We were all drunk and Leeloo chose to drive. She could have killed us, too!”

“I can’t do it any more... I’m sorry. For us, for her parents and for myself, I have to do it.”

“Confess to a priest! If you want to be relieved of that secret, it’s up to you but don’t you dare drag us down with you.”

“I’ll go to the police station tomorrow. End of discussion.”

Erika got up from her red velvet armchair, a self-assurance in her eyes that Therence had never seen before. Maybe she was right. His guilt was overwhelming, too. Being in peace for the first time in ten years, he would like that too. They stayed in the living room, lost in their thoughts. From time to time, one of them would mumble a word, interrupting a long silence and creating another. Then, Sasha and Steven went back to their rooms, to meditate on the discussion.

Suddenly, the muffled sound of something falling froze the guests in their movements and thoughts. Jamie stopped his cup of tea near his lips, while Therence rose from his chair to find the origin of the noise. It seemed to Therence, led by the others, that it had come from the top floor, where Erika’s bedroom was. They started to climb the stairs slowly, but this anxiousness led to a natural acceleration of their movements and they quickly reached the third floor, where Sasha knocked at the door. Erika didn’t answer. Steven kicked the door in, and it gave way. The horror scene of the bedroom petrified them. Erika was laying on the floor, disembowelled.

“We need to call the police!” Sasha stammered. “We can’t stay with a body in the house!”

Steven ran to the living room to look for the phone but realised that there was no signal because of the gale.

“At least now she won’t talk...” Steven whispered, “Let’s gather together in the living room to decide what to do next.”

Stunned and terrified by the death of their former friend, they withdrew in silence again. Therence decided to take the floor, while Steven was pouring himself a cup of tea.

“I know we’re all very shocked by the death of Erika. I am, and I know you are. Nevertheless, we need to decide what we’re going to do.” A long silence followed that sentence. “I think we need to get rid of the body.” he declared, finally.

“Where do you want to do it? In the ocean? We won’t be able to reach it...” started Sasha. She couldn’t end her sentence. At that moment, Steven’s cup of tea broke against the floor. He was convulsing, froth by his lips, his eyes rolling in their orbits. Petrified, almost mineralised, Therence and the others weren’t able to move for a second. They rushed to Steven when as his throat rattled. No pulse. He was dead, too.

Unable to know what to do, they took Steven’s body and put it in the same bedroom as Erika’s.

Once the door was closed again, Therence took a look at Jamie: He was shaking, and Sasha was as white as a sheet. They couldn’t move as time went on. Like marble statues, they stood frozen. They only blinked, all together, at the same moment, at the same intervals. Even the storm seemed to always make the same sound, the drops of rain always falling at the same frequency.

Like a time bomb, Sasha finally burst.

“It’s one of you,” she whispered getting up from the carpeted floor.

They raised their eyes to her.

She said, however, what they were all silently thinking: “Jamie!”

“Sasha please, I didn’t kill them! They were my friends. I am not a murderer!”

“That night, ten years ago, you said to Leeloo that she could drive, you gave her the keys. We told you that she shouldn’t, but you didn’t care! You were the one in the car with her, we only helped you, the responsibility was all yours! So, when Erika said that she wanted to go to the police, you panicked!”

“Please, Sasha,” he screamed, while Sasha was walking backwards, terrified, faster and faster, in a sort of desperate escape. “Even if I did kill Erika, which I didn’t, why should I have killed Steven?”

“I don’t know you’re nuts, NUTS!”

“Please, can both of you calm down?” Therence said “Can you snap out of it, just for a few minutes?”

Again, they stopped moving. They were playing some kind of morbid hide and seek.

“Maybe you did it, Therence!” Jamie exclaimed, pointing him out. “I mean, you’re weirdly quiet, you were guilty, too, in that story, just as much as me! And Sasha, it’s no good looking as though butter wouldn’t melt in your mouth! You’re accusing, but aren’t you just hiding your guilt?”

“Do not try to shift the blame! I wouldn’t be able...”

Sasha couldn’t finish her sentence. She didn’t watch out for the stairs while she was walking backwards. She hurtled down the steps and broke her neck. Therence ran to her, crying for the first

time since the deaths. Her eyes were wide open, and, they were empty. The sparkle was gone, now and forever. Dazed, he didn’t hear Jamie, who was losing control of himself. She was gone.

Now he was able to hear the voice of Jamie, which quickly became unbearable. Therence turned around and saw that his eyes were bulging, and a large vein was noticeable on his neck despite his shirt.

They couldn’t understand what was going on. They were both snapping. Suddenly, Therence jumped on Jamie, showering him with blows. Blood was spurting out, he broke his nose, his eyebrow arch and before he realised what he was doing, Therence dealt the fatal blow.

When he stopped beating the corpse, when he finally pulled himself together, he barely had the time to see his bloody phalanx, to feel how painful they were, before he was pulled back by an impressive strength.

When Therence woke up, he was lying on his bed, on the first bedroom on the first floor of

Black Wing Manor. Then he remembered. Didn’t he just kill his friend? He took a look at his hands, which were bloodless and painless. He gathered up the courage to get out of his bedroom and heard voices from the living room. One by one, he went down the stairs, pushed the large door which separated him from the voices. Hands on the handles, he hesitated then quickly opened them. He stood still. They were all there. Therence, Erika, Jamie, Steven and

Sasha. They all looked healthy, or at least alive. Their deaths hadn't been a dream, neither had they been a nightmare. The pain was real, the blood was real, the sounds were real.

"I don't understand, I thought you were dead - Erika, and you Steven, all of you, actually!"

Therence stammered.

"We don't understand, either. I only remember the atrocious pain on my stomach. Then I woke up and came down," Erika explained.

"All I remember is your punches," Jamie mumbled, arms crossed on his chest.

A long silence followed.

"I don't know what's going on, but I'm leaving!" Steven finally screamed, impetuously.

He went to the main doors, hands on the handles, turned them, opened them. A blinding white light filled the manor. Then, nothing.

When Therence woke up, he was lying on his bed, in the first bedroom on the first floor of Black Wing Manor. Then he remembered. What was going on? He rushed out of his bedroom, scared to find his friends gathered in the living room. They were in the living room, of course. They all stared at each other, begging for answers that no one had.

Steven decided to try to get out, again, in vain.

When Therence woke up, he was lying on his bed, in the first bedroom on the first floor of Black Wing Manor. Then he remembered. He went down and found his friends. They were sitting in the armchairs, but no one knew what to say. They couldn't flee, so they tried to die again. They took a revolver from the armoury and put a bullet in their heads.

When Therence woke up, he was lying on his bed, in the first bedroom on the first floor of Black Wing Manor. Then he remembered. It was Hell, definitely Hell. They couldn't leave the manor, they couldn't die. Maybe they were dead in fact. Maybe it was Hell, the punishment for their hidden crime dating back ten years. Trapped -They were now trapped like rats.

Indeed, on the 7th of January, over the whole of England, the news was in the headlines. ***"The ferry to Achtonmouth sank in the storm on the North Sea. The passengers are missing, presumed dead. The search is going on, but the hope of finding survivors is weak."***

Clara EGRON

HER

March 1999. Somewhere in Europe. At the meeting of the afternoon and the evening.

After a never-ending day of work at the petrol station, I needed to be alone. Away from everyone. So, I decided to just go out, without any goal except being away from Civilization.

Then I was out, walking, ignoring everyone. I was just walking on my own. Because I hate people. There are many reasons for this categorical hate. Most of them are just selfish. That's not bad, of course. No. Being selfish is a human thing. Or a cat thing. Maybe both. Anyway. One of the things that I lament the most in our humanity is that people pretend to care. To care about other people than themselves, to care about their neighbours' lives, about the poverty of some countries, about our loving Earth... Today, everything is about pretending. We all pretend. From our birth to our death. All of us. Without exception. And I am not better than anyone else. I pretend all the time. Pretend to like mushrooms, pretend to like beer, pretend to want to socialize, pretend to like being with my fellows, pretend to be satisfied with my life, pretend to be happy to exist. Pretending is a human thing in the end. And only human I guess. I don't think that cats pretend a lot. But maybe they do. I don't know.

In the end, if I had to define myself in one unique sentence I would say that I hate people. More than hating people, I rather hate humanity in general. That is the only way to describe myself. Just a young man of twenty-five years old who hates. I am like a creature of hate in fact. Hate towards everyone.

Everyone except her. She is the only person that I can bear. She is even more than that. She is the only person that I love now and the only person that I could love in fifty years' time and after my death. She made me fall in love with her. I love her so much that I cannot be away from her. I need to see her. I cannot stop thinking about her. She is always in my mind. Sometimes I dream about her. I love her and everything that is around her. Everything that touches her. Since the day I saw her, I fell in love. It was love at first sight. Like no one has ever seen before. Like a Shakespearian story. It was so beautiful. But not as beautiful as her everyday. Good-looking. Beautiful. Attractive. Gorgeous. Perfect. Her. A million words would

not be enough to describe how beautiful she is. The shape of her body is constantly moving, following the years and her life experiences. She is never static. Her shape is never the same from one day to another. Time did not spare her. She is tall and petite. Her body, as irregular as it is, is strong. Even in the most rainy day. Even with the most burning sun. Her hair is indescribable. It is long and short at the same time. It is thorny and soft. It is brown, blond, and ginger. It is curly, smooth and wavy. It is in branches. She is Rapunzel and bold at the same time. She is contradictory, paradoxical. Her skin reflects the impact of life and of time. Her eyes, of a deep green, suggest love, kindness, generosity, magnanimity and strength but also hurt, pain, disease, sadness and desolation. Contrary to what we could think, she is not indestructible. The most violent wind, the most deadly storm or the most scorching fire could make her fall.

At first, I was in love with her complex appearance. Her beauty is indescribable. Breathtaking. But she is not attractive just because of her beauty. She is attractive because of everything that represents her.

But with the passing of time, I discovered that she is not an ordinary person. Not even close to an ordinary person. Unlike humanity, she never pretends. She is always totally honest. When she falls she does not hide it. Because she cannot. Pretending is not something that she can do. She could not hide anything that touched her. On top of that, she truly loves everyone. Without any exception. Her generosity is without end, without frontiers. If she could welcome everyone she would do it. She never discriminates because of gender, or the colour of one's skin, or religion, or wealth. She has this maternal instinct. This special maternal instinct is not a privilege reserved for a small part of us, but it extends to all of us. She wants to protect us. Protecting us from external aggression. From the rain, the wind, the storm... Us. Her weak and breakable child. And her education is fair and valid. She is calm, quiet and protective when we are respectful and human. But when we are impudent and inhuman, she enters into an outrageous rage, that destroys everything that dares to cross her path. She could even destroy us. She has the power to be harsh, but fair. When she reacts like that, she is just teaching us a lesson about respect and gratitude. Like a mother. Our mother. She loves us. With an unceasing and unlimited love.

At the moment when I realise that she is a real loving person, I love her even more. And when I think about it, I am grateful for having her. She is so exceptional and uncommon that I do not understand why people bully her.

People are bad with each other. Of course, I know that. And that is quite understandable when we know the real nature of humans. But why do they have to be bad with her? Don't they see how much she gives us? Don't they know that she would die for them? For us? Why are they treating her so badly? That is not fair. People are not respectful. They are ungrateful. I mean, she is literally our oxygen! Isn't that enough? What more do you want? Without her, they cannot live their beautiful dishonest little lives. We need her. More than anything. Without her we cannot live. So why are they destroying her? Probably for money, the holy dollar. The saintly profit. The sacred economy. Is money a reason to destroy everything? Moreover, she has not done anything bad that could justify such behaviour. The only thing that she wants is to protect us. That is praise-worthy. But no. That is not enough. So, they throw rubbish at her. They cut her from the root. Without any remorse. Without any shame. Without any guilt...

Obviously, she cannot protect herself. That is why I have to protect her. I am like a knight defending the castle. I have to defend her purity, her kindness, her generosity, her beauty and the amazingness that describes her. I could die for her. And I would if it could help her. I would do anything to delight her. If she disappears, I die. I love her so much. I cannot live without her presence. If I had to move away from her, I'd kill myself. I have to see her. Everyday. If I could, I would live beside her forever. I just want her to be happy. And without me she cannot be. Because nobody will protect her. Because nobody hears the tears of her sap when we hurt her.

In the end, the forest is maybe more human than we are...

Clémence KERDELHUE

The Artist

He is a passionate, a bohemian. He is holding a cigarette, his back straight on the stool in front of his easel. You have to imagine: the young man from the back, the smoke flying up around him and enveloping him with a comforting softness. The two-winged window is wide open to the avenue, we can hear the horse-drawn carriages and the brouhaha of the passers-by, going back home from the city in the warmth of the late afternoon.

The melody of Rachmaninov's piano comes from the phonograph and reveals all the poetic aspects of the room, with its flowery tapestry and the big mirror above the fireplace on the right, in front of the window. Behind the young man, a black walnut bed, covered with a striped yellow eiderdown made of duck feathers, occupies nearly all the length of the wall. At the end of the bed, the bedroom door. *This* is the lair of the young painter. His stroke is light, he is diligent and sometimes he gets up to glance at the avenue. Here, on the third floor, he overlooks it.

But in fact, he is not very tall, even a little bit thin. His half open white shirt reveals a translucent skin, a few dark hairs, and green veins. He wipes the sweat beading from his forehead with the back of his hand. We can see his heartbeat. He looks at the young people leaving from the university in front of his block of flats. Girls and boys meet on the pavement, laughing. It's not for him, he's always preferred calm and the smell of paint to the laugh of girls... Except one girl.

He draws on his cigarette and throws it out of the window. Slowly, he crosses the room and the parquet cracks under his feet. He grasps a stemmed glass from the fireplace mantel and drinks a gulp of wine. Then, he sits down again on his stool. He looks at his painting, washes his paintbrush by moving it around in a little glass of water next to him, and mixes the most beautiful colours of his palette to meticulously paint some irises on the banks of a lake. He is focussed, and the paint soothes his anxiety, makes him forget the pain caused by the death of his poor, long-suffering mother. It's a landscape of his beloved region, of the countryside in which he grew up: He thinks of it with nostalgia and tender love.

He lights a cigarette again. He has nearly finished his painting. He will add it to the art book that he has to present to the Beaux Arts for his admittance. It is the second time that he

is putting in an application for this school. The first time, he failed, but by a whisker, he was convinced of that. He was now determined to better himself, he'd worked hard to achieve his goal: becoming an architect. Beautiful buildings captivate him, and he has this rare sensitivity that artists have that make him see life differently. But the world has not yet understood his talent, his genius. So, he tries again, and this time, it is going to work.

The big day has arrived. He wakes up early this morning, he's stressed. He drinks his coffee in one go, smokes two cigarettes in a row, sitting by the window, one leg on the sill and the other one in the bedroom. He pours himself a glass of rum, splashes some cold water on his face. He shaves his face cleanly, chooses his favorite shirt, a blue one with two pockets on the chest, he puts a handkerchief in one of them : since he frequents the same bars as the artists, he has observed and developed his taste for nice clothes, and even if he doesn't have a lot of money, he likes to go out with his big hats and his ivory-headed walking stick. Furthermore, he has always thought that a handkerchief was very *chic*.

He leaves at nine in the morning, with his suitcase full of his works. He breathes in the freshness of the morning, there are already a lot of people out in the streets. It's Thursday, people are enjoying the good weather. He makes huge strides, he almost runs, he can't wait to finally arrive in front of the luxurious portal of the Beaux Arts. His shirt is untucked, he stops to put it back in his trousers. Then he raises his head and looks at three women crossing the street. One of them smiles at him. He is shy, he looks down and blushes. He glances at his pocket watch: nine minutes past ten; his appointment is in less than an hour.

He takes the time to stop at a brasserie, but he only orders a coffee. He knows himself, he could not eat or drink anything else, he has a knot in his stomach. He looks at the passers-by, the flowers of the florist on the pavement in front of him, the waiter walking around on the terrace, white apron around his waist, an ashtray in one hand and a tray in the other. He smokes a cigarette and calls the waiter to pay. He looks for money in his pocket, drops two coins, picks them up, blushes with embarrassment and holds them to the young man. He stands up and leans down to take his case. He wanders a bit in the streets of the city, reads the headlines of the newspapers of the day: Politics and politics again, the young dandy does not care for that.

He arrives in front of the portal of the Beaux-Arts a quarter of an hour early. It doesn't matter, he enters the courtyard. He already knows where he has to go, and he gets to the waiting room. There, two young men with an extravagant style are already waiting. One of

them is very tall, very thin, with a charming look and a mid-length haircut. His moustache is also very thin, and well-trimmed. He wears an oversized hat, with singular colours: yellow, orange, pink... It's so rare to see such a thing! In his hand, he holds a peacock blue velvet jacket with a green fur collar. The other man is dark-skinned, he's wearing a beige outfit and has a moustache which is as well-trimmed as his neighbour's. On the end of his nose, round glasses, and white gloves on his hands. Very classy. The young painter, who has just arrived, is a bit intimidated and sits in front of them.

He looks at the wooden clock. The unremitting tick-tock of the seconds passing resonate in his ears. He tries to find a comfortable position, crosses his legs, uncrosses them. He intertwines his thin fingers and untwines them. It's five to ten. His breath quickens. He knows that it's only a matter of minutes now. Finally, the big oak door opens. An old grey-haired woman with a pulled back bun appears. She's wearing a long dark dress, matching with her pasty complexion.

He is called to enter first.

Even though he felt shy in front of the two young men in front of him, he stands and walks with a firm step to the door. This time, he knows it, he will manage to seduce the jury.

Four men and one woman are in the big assessment room, all of them seated on pale yellow velvet armchairs, behind a long wooden table. Sun beams light up the place through big paned windows. At the centre, between the door and the jury, a rectangle table is used to put the drawings and three easels for the canvas. The young man steps forward and introduces himself. The jurors nod without a word. Then, one of them, the older one, makes a gesture to indicate to him the table where he can put his work. They will stand up in a few moments to come and judge them, notepad in hand.

But while he takes out his paintings from his leather wallet, he realizes, almost with fear, that he has forgotten to sign his latest painting, the landscape of his childhood. He therefore turns to the jury and asks for a moment, just a minute to sign this ultimate painting. He grasps the black fountain pen that he had inherited after the death of his father, and speedily writes his name at the bottom right: Adolf Hitler.

Constance BODRERO

The endless curse

The average day was only ever waking up, hunting, eating, gathering, eating again and going to bed. This “tribe” of mine would have a hard time communicating, since at their best they could only talk in “grarhgh”s or “wrehhghh”s, somewhat complicating the mammoth hunts. I had stopped counting the moons I had spent living, but I knew I had been alive for a far longer time than the others. So, I had decided to try to invent a means of communicating, simply out of boredom.

It was at first very difficult to make them understand that their “harhrlgh” should be called a spear, or a “honhonkh” a mammoth, for the sake of making hunts easier. It was after a generation that I managed to teach all the kids how to speak, and I had still not aged an ounce. Even though it was a simple life, I hoped that it could continue being this way forever, as being able to teach children was satisfying.

The weather would become colder every moon, the prey harder to seek and the plants rarer to find, but not just in the periods where days were shorter. I wondered what my average days in a few moons would become, as it seems there would be drastic changes. My tribe and I concluded it would be best to look for a place where the air would be warmer, to find prey for our next hunts, and, more crops to gather.

Naturally, I was the last member of my tribe who stayed alive. I roamed for hundreds, thousands, maybe millions of moons, until the temperature became warmer again. I found myself surrounded by an unimaginable amount of dunes, where I found a settlement near a river. These people would command others to move immense blocks of stone, in order to build what they called “tombs for their Pharaoh”. I was quite intrigued by this situation, as nothing of this civilisation could seem possible with my tribe to whom I’d taught language, but what I understood the least was: why would they agree to be ordered around by the ones who commanded them to work harder, armed with whips?

I had to befriend the people that would work hard during daytime. I understood that these people – the Hebrews – were “enslaved” by the Egyptians, and after having learned their language enough to communicate efficiently, I decided to see what this “main city” they were forbidden to live in looked like for myself.

It seems like I could blend in this main city without any problem, as my skin had tanned while I had been lost in the dunes. The first man I was able to talk to had blue stains all over his arms. It seems he was referred to as a “scribe”, and apparently, he could not only talk with Hebrews if he needed to, but he also could talk Egyptian and could “write” both languages. I decided to stay with him to learn these languages and how to write, but also what they called arithmetic, architecture, and such. Moons passed by, and “years”, equivalent to 12 moon cycles or so, and the old scribe died and, having learnt enough with him, I left his remains where they were as if we had never met, and headed towards the Hebrews again. This time, I was taught about slavery, and how the Egyptians treated the Hebrews. I felt inspired by these words. I needed to know what ruling over others could be like.

I managed to infiltrate the Pharaoh’s quarters at night, and choked him to death in his sleep, without any remorse. The next morning, the guardians that saw me warned the others, and began attacking me. It was easy for me to fight them, for their power was nowhere near a mammoth’s, or their speed close to a goat’s. Dozens tried to impale me with their spears, yet none could hurt me at all. I easily broke one of the guardian’s hands in order to take a spear for myself, and slaughtered the others. The palace that was decorated entirely in blue silk carpets and banners was now almost entirely dyed with their blood. I could now wear the pharaoh’s ornaments, and none of the people could tell if I were truly the pharaoh or not.

As my reign started, I set new and harsher slavery policies. I reduced the Hebrews’ food rations, but also the Egyptians’. I raised the farmers’ wheat taxes and blamed it on these “gods” of theirs’ will. Soon Egypt became a land of despair, but it was awfully fun for me to see these people that could age suffering. Over the decades, the people began to acknowledge me as their rightful sovereign, for I would never age. My new hobby was to observe the Hebrews trying to revolt and free themselves from slavery, even though none had been successful. The funniest attempt was one where a man named Moses apparently met with the Hebrews’ god and he told them to flee Egypt. I heard they all drowned in the sea while escaping.

Slowly some people in quest of titles would go back to the palace, attempting to compliment me for my “exploits” as a pharaoh, but I never really cared for them, they who were as power-thirsty as me, but with no power to do anything.

I was starting to think that I should fake my own death and leave these lands to ruin, so I told my people to build a pyramid for me. It was around that time that I saw a beautiful woman wandering in my palace. For the very first time, I felt the urge to know more about

something or someone, not just slight curiosity for a new culture I had just discovered. I felt the urge to have her become mine. Soon enough I was told her name was Chione, and that her presence in the palace was due to her fiancé being one of my bootlickers, whose name was Matmeh. As the way I became pharaoh was totally unknown to this generation, I couldn't ruin everything by publicly assassinating that man, but I decided nonetheless to meet with him.

I acted as though he could be my personal confidant, and often asked him about his life. Chione was the daughter of a rich merchant from another city, and her father was Matmeh's old friend, and he asked for her hand as soon as he saw her beauty. I immediately began thinking about how I would get rid of him. I sneaked out of the palace at night and sought venomous snakes to set in Matmeh's bed. My deed done, I went back to sleep, content with my unidentifiable assassination. The next morning unfolded quite predictably, as I was woken hearing a servant's shriek when they discovered snakes lurking around in the corridors. I then thought that it would be the right time to finally talk to Chione. I went to find her and told her

"I've just learned what happened to your future husband, Matmeh... He was my closest confidant and would sometimes tell me about you."

"I don't really care about his death," she sighed. "It was only an arranged alliance, after all."

Despite the lack of interest in the matter expressed by her absent looking gaze and her sighs, I couldn't help but find her irresistible. Her voice would remind me of the birds' chirruping in spring. She continued in about the same tone:

"I guess I'll just go back to my father's house until he marries me off to some other rich friend of his."

"Is that a bad thing?" I wondered out loud.

"There's nothing over there, nothing to do, nothing to see, nobody of interest."

"Then why don't you stay in this palace? I could even make room for you in my quarters. Are there any activities you'd like to do to avoid boredom?"

A flame lit up her eyes when she heard me pronounce those words. We became good friends in a matter of days. Every single day spent with her was a complete blessing to me. The fact that she was now free to do whatever she wished to do was like a dream to her. She was

passionate about singing and dancing. She would give her own rhythm to her moves by singing without any instruments and would let me watch her as she did so.

That period lasted a whole year, until her interest for me became more physical, which I had never experienced before, as I wasn't the same as the mortal humans. Also, during that year, I took no interest in putting pressure over the people I reigned over. My body, however, was starting to feel different than how it used to feel. I noticed something totally new: I grew taller. I hadn't grown or changed at all physically in hundreds – thousands – of years, so why would I grow now? All I now wished for was to stay with Chione forever, but if my body was changing, possibly becoming mortal, how could it last forever?

I couldn't get that problem out of my mind. As I hadn't been myself for days now, Chione became really worried, but I couldn't possibly tell her that I was scared of growing taller. I then remembered. Chione would die someday, so what was the point of hoping that these days could last forever? The thought of one day losing her broke me. How could I live without the peace she brought upon me? How could I spend the days without the fear of being bored if she wasn't there?

As time flowed, my body grew taller, hair was growing over my chin just like the old men of my tribe in the past. For the very first time in my life, I felt vulnerable, as if I could get physically hurt. The fear of losing her also became stronger every passing day. Was I also getting "older"? I couldn't take it. I knew I had to abandon either my immortality or Chione. I thought it would be best if I talked about it with her.

"Do you think we could live this way, watching you sing and dance every single day, waiting for the next one impatiently and so on forever?" I asked.

"I hope we can," she said cheerfully.

"But how can you hope to do so? You will die someday," my mouth spat instantly.

"Of course," she smiled. "We all will, but even in the after world, I hope to dance and sing for you every day!"

"Nonsense," I whispered, ending the conversation.

She couldn't understand my feelings at all, I couldn't tell her I was immortal, or even less that I was an immortal afraid of death. After nights of reflection, the thought of dying one day became unbearable. I had to stop my ageing. I woke Chione up in the middle of the night and asked her for another dance, on the palace's balcony. I hoped her harmonious chant would be able to soothe my fears, and she sang and danced endlessly until the sun rose...

I pushed her.

Seeing her dance one last time, I felt as if it would be enough for me, so long as I wouldn't die ever. I looked over the fence over which I pushed her and saw her bleeding body on the ground below. I could read confusion in her eyes as she was dying. Tears ran down my face, and I called for the guardians to go and help her, as she had fallen from the balcony while performing a dance. By the time they got to her, she had already died. I felt satisfied knowing I would not have to fear death any more, even if it meant I had to lose Chione. It was finally time to use the pyramid I had built for myself.

Living in the palace without her felt boring, and even sending my people to death through overwork wouldn't make up for it, so I finally faked my death, and got some mummy supposed to contain me buried next to Chione and left these lands.

I journeyed again across the desert, until I was facing the sea. I tried to remember what boats could look like and decided to build one myself with the nearby trees in order to explore the world further. There was no point in staying alive if I could not find any interest in living.

I anchored near new lands that were far more filled with vegetation than back in Egypt. These lands almost reminded me of the times where I would hunt mammoths with my old friends. These lands were however governed by conflicts, men wearing fur clothing armed with swords fighting others who were heavily armoured and bearing shields and lances. The sight seemed almost hilarious at first, but I decided to pick up a sword and join the side that looked like the weakest to me. Immune to fear, I fought as valiantly as when I had taken over the Egyptian palace by myself, and even got so much into the character that I hollered "filthy Roman scum" as I stabbed a soldier in the face. Cavaliers then arrived as I cut further into enemy lines. I knew I was living for moments like this. Almost entirely by myself, I repelled an army of a thousand "Romans" and these Gallic people thanked me with all the gifts they could think of. I ran away from them as I thought it would be a bad idea to interfere with their wars, and kept roaming.

I settled in some forest at some point and felt like living here could be nice for a while.

I started counting the passing years, so I could tell precisely that for 543 years, nothing worth thinking about had happened within my forest. The atmosphere was then slowly changing, and that forest stopped feeling like a "normal" forest should feel like. I left it for the first time in centuries and reached for a city. New languages were now easy for me to assimilate, so I had no hardships communicating with the people. It seemed that "slaves"

weren't a thing in this society, but that people would now be paid – cheaply – for their hard work, soldiers in armour would now be called knights, and seemed to behave in a very honourable way. I asked about the quickest way of becoming a knight in order to go back to the battlefields but was told that I needed to be a noble man to become knight, which would mean that I'd have to wait at least a generation to be able to blend into them. It was then that I heard of a holy sword that was magically stuck into some rock and decided to go for that piece of a legend instead of waiting. I drew out the sword and people started calling me their king. I could not believe that becoming a noble was so ridiculously easy as to simply draw a sword out of stone. I couldn't wait to go back to the days where I could starve the people and still be regarded as a great sovereign, and also play at war regularly.

Somehow newly dubbed as "King Arthur", I led my troops to war but had to hold back to make the wars seem fair. It was fun nonetheless, and I thought once again that these days were among the most enjoyable I had had in a long time. Once we headed back to my new castle after our campaign ended, not only did I meet the mad nobles, jealous that I easily pulled some dumb sword out of a stone, but men from all across the continent came to offer to me their daughters. I began sorting out the proposals by matchmaking my angry nobles with the random daughters of these men, and then thought it wouldn't do any harm if I got one for myself. I did at first feel somewhat afraid that the same thing as what had happened with Chione could occur again, and then decided to see for myself how things would unfold. I first wed a daughter of Count Alexander, but she deceased after a matter of weeks. I tried marrying another woman, daughter of some other Marquess, but she also died soon after. I came to the conclusion that I could not tie myself with mortals in such a way, so I just kept on living without any needs of that kind.

I noticed however that I began ageing again, but I had no idea what the source of this phenomenon was. I could feel "her" power, "her" gaze upon me, but I did not know from where it could be. I tried seeking her out in the whole town and could not find "her" anywhere. No matter how many years had passed, I knew I couldn't forget Chione's facial features, and that I would recognize her the very moment I would see her. I went back and forth through the corridors of my castle and suddenly I felt a powerful stare right behind me. I turned around and saw Guinevere, one of my knights' wife. She did not look at all like Chione, but the sad gaze that reached out to me was the exact same.

"Who are you?" I asked, sickeningly afraid.

“Guinevere,” she declared, composedly. “Lady Guinevere. You should know it, though, as I am with your right-hand man, Lancelot.”

“That’s not what I am asking. Who are you?” I repeated, instinctively.

I then understood. It was not women nor love that would make me age or become mortal, but my “soulmate’s” presence near me. It brought back the memories of the days spent at Chione’s side, but also the fear of death.

“Not this again,” I murmured. I dashed towards her, grabbed her neck and carried her as she was trying to yell for help.

“Not this again!” I cried.

I dragged her all the way up to the highest window and threw her into the pit that was around the castle.

“I need more power,” I thought. “More, even more power.”

I needed power, power to live forever and stop cowering before death.

I decided once more to flee what I had called home for a time, this time determined to live forever without any obstacles to my well-being.

Over the centuries, I wandered around the world, and tried never to settle for too long. Every time I did settle, a “soulmate” would find me and I would have to get rid of her. The idea of killing as I was afraid of dying grew unbearable to me and I began to prefer the idea of dying over running away forever.

About 1500 years after Guinevere’s death, I had settled in a city named Tokyo. Everything had changed so quickly in such a short amount of time. The towers – called buildings – would be at least twice as high as my castle used to be, but they were the average people’s workplace. Fighting and killing were now illegal, even though there were some outcasts who would still do it anyway. This society wasn’t perfect, but it was big enough for me to blend in and to understand what “morals” mortals would abide by. I had spent the 16 last years hoping that a soulmate of mine could happen to find me here, so that I could finally relieve myself of the burden that life now seemed to be to me. I spent most of my days reading manga or playing video games, as I didn’t need to earn a living, for I have no mortal needs. I’d regret every day the times I’d spent with Chione.

My nights then became harsher. I would regularly dream of a beautiful woman looking me straight in the eyes, repeating “Who are you?” and “Where are you hiding?” I was always

just as infatuated by her gaze. I knew what this meant, and, although hoping to finally die, I was still frightened by these nightmares.

It was on a rainy Thursday that I finally got to meet the woman who had appeared in my nightmares in person. It was on my way to the library to return the manga I had borrowed the previous week that I bumped into her.

“Ex-excuse me,” I stuttered, as I recognized her face.

“It’s not a problem,” she said, shyly.

I couldn’t help but think of her repeating “Who are you?” and “Where are you?” and was certain that she knew who I was, as much as I knew who she was. She was apparently heading the same way, also returning to the library novels she had borrowed.

The echoes of my nightmares were getting louder each minute, until I couldn’t take it anymore, and tripped over my own foot. She gave me her hand to help me get back on my two feet and asked me if I was alright, to which I replied with a nod.

The atmosphere quickly became really awkward.

“You know me, don’t you?” I was determined to end my life with her, hoping that as a soulmate she could understand me and forgive me for my past mistakes.

“I do,” she replied, as if she were trying to copy Chione’s cheerful smile. “And the same goes for you, you’ve met with me already.”

“Say, do you forgive me?” I felt my heart aching as I asked her.

“I love you,” she answered.

“Can we put an end to this curse of mine together, then?”

“Yes,” she smiled again. “It is my turn to fully enjoy immortality.”

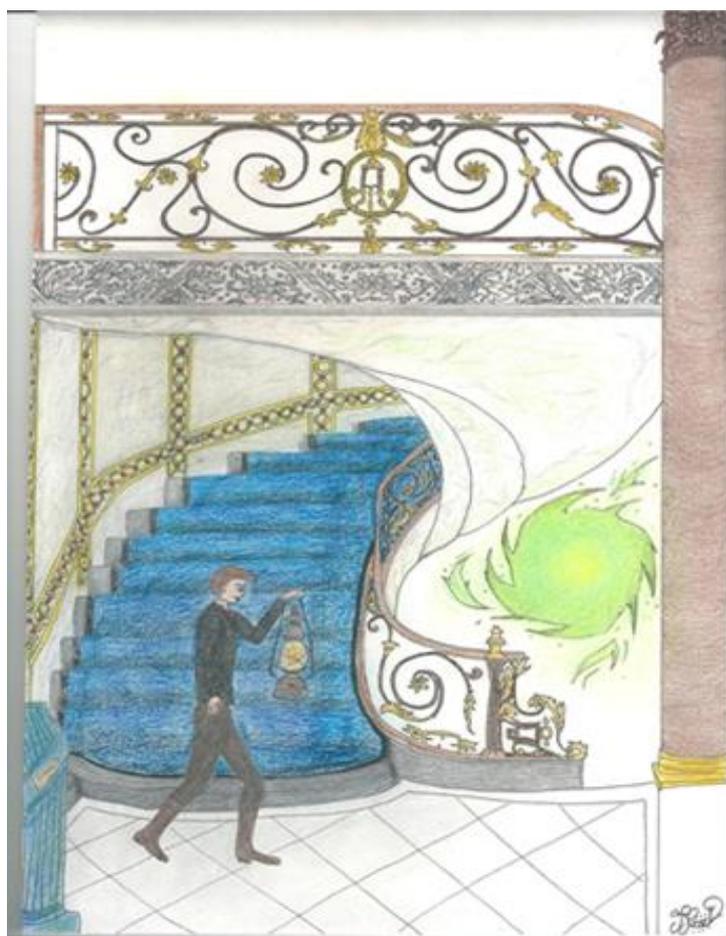
I then understood she was also immortal and that she became as vulnerable as I did when we were next to each other.

I felt her hand bind my neck as she threw a dreadful gaze at me, with a cheerful grin.

Elouan B

The Apprentice

My studio was located in London, at the British Museum. It was situated on the top floor of the building. It was quite messy. My books, my parchments, my quills and inkpots were everywhere, but there, I could work peacefully and stay away from prying eyes. I was an historian and had been an expert in the restoration of historic manuscripts for several years.



At the Museum, my work was respected by everyone. Recently, I had obtained my own office and my name was engraved on the door.

By the way, the museum curator was worried about my tenacity at work, and also my health. This was the reason why he allowed a young trainee to gather some historical knowledge, gain some expertise and therefore help me. Charlie was very clever, spontaneous and curious. He tried to do his best, despite the fact that he was impulsive and sometimes clumsy. We were finally managing

to get on well, until that night.

It was quarter to nine, I was still trying to restore a wonderful book from Ancient Egypt. My studio was silent, deserted because Charlie had recently left to join his girlfriend. For my part, I wanted to finish my work as soon as possible.

Several hours later, night had fallen, and the moonlight came through the stained-glass window above my desk. I had fallen asleep when a blast of thunder suddenly woke me up with a flash of lightning. My sight was out of focus. I was sweating, and I could not breathe easily. Then, I suddenly saw a kind of green glow all over the place. I turned around to admire this

bright light, I wanted to touch it. But, at once, the light disappeared. Immediately, I took an oil lamp to see what was going on. The door was open, and a cold wind blew in the room. The green light reappeared and moved down the stairs. My curiosity was too strong, so I decided to follow it.

The museum staff had left the building long before. At the first sight, I was alone in the immensity of it. No sounds. Just the sound of the rain outside. I went down the marble steps, guided by the shining lantern. There seemed to be whispering around me. I was delighted and hypnotized. Then, as I walked, I heard a metallic creaky key opening a door. This noise came out of my dreams and I regained consciousness.

The room of the medieval armory was open, panic was growing inside me. I shouted and listened attentively to the possible response of a voice I knew. Nobody answered. The door seemed to have been opened by some magical trick. However, the shining light penetrated the hallway and plunged me into the darkness of the corridor. I did not know what to do, the sight of this dark corridor, illuminated by a single window, and all these fearsome suits of armors terrified me. With all my courage, I moved forward in this unfriendly passage. Step by step, I stared straight ahead, trying not to pay attention to the metal giants. I passed near them, when, all of a sudden, a shrill squeak froze my blood. My oil lamp suddenly went out. I turned my head, terrified and stared at it closely. The squeak probably come from a hitch of the sword. I continued on my way when the armour behind me lit up with a green light and started to move jerkily. I screamed and started to run away. All the suits became animated and like a dominoes effect let their wide swords fall near my back. One of them threw its mace stuffed with spikes in front of me. Incredibly, I managed to dodge it, and fled to the end of the hallway. There was no light and the corridor ended with a staircase. I ran so fast that I did not see the steps and tumbled down to the bottom. My fall was so violent that I lost consciousness.

Several hours later, from the depth of my sleep, I heard little footsteps near me. Then, I felt some gentle tickles on my cheeks. I opened my eyes and realised that it was a tiny mouse grazing my face. It was nibbling on a piece of parchment. This made me furious. I tried to stand up, but I could not move my body at all. I realised that I was partially paralysed. I only could move my upper body. I was stunned but not defeated. I observed my surroundings. It was a dusty and abandoned cellar. I had never seen this place the whole time I'd been working

here. To my great surprise, the green light I had forgotten re-appeared in front of me. At this point, the green halo, huge and dazzling, bathed the room.

But the light gradually faded, until I could see a human shape holding the green lantern.

I was petrified. I shouted:

“Who are you?”

He did not answer, and I could barely see his face. Nonetheless, he slowly raised his head. He seemed to be mad. He glanced at me hostilely. My pulse was racing and my forehead sweating. Instinctively, I started to gesticulate, to shout and protect my face from eventual injuries. I felt a hand shaking my shoulders. And someone was calling me:

“Mr. David! Mr. David! ... James!! Please, wake up!”

I recognised this voice and opened my eyes. It was Charlie. He had a handkerchief on this nose and looked nervous. I responded:

“Charlie! You scared me! What are you doing here? You were supposed to be spending some time with Mary. What happened? What time is it?”

“Yes, you are right professor, but Mary did not feel well last night so I went back to my flat and I decided to come earlier this morning to tidy up your studio. But, when I came into your room, I saw you on the floor, moaning and shaking.”

“But, how did I move from my desk? And were all these hallucinations, real or unreal?” I asked.

Charlie did not answer and help me to stand up. My legs were fine, not broken. I could walk normally but was still weak. I asked for Charlie’s help to discover what had made me ill during the night. I looked at the shelves and I observed that many of the vials of chemical substances were missing and I asked what had happened to them. Charlie took his head in his hands and he moaned incomprehensible words, his face crumpled. And he finally told me that the day before, he had made a combination of two toxic substances to work more quickly, forgetting the risks of intoxication. Near the place I was lying, a test tube was broken, and the liquid had been discharged. I’d probably breathed in the toxic vapors of the poisonous liquids. I became aware that all my visions were due to neurotoxic molecules, which had set free my darkest and most fearsome chimeras. For several hours, I had lost control of my mind.

I was relieved and finally safe, but I was really upset with Charlie for forgetting the basic rules of safety. After two weeks of suspension, Charlie continued his course at the museum. Many years later, when Charlie and I were having a drink, he told me that it was an unforgettable lesson from his doctorate and that he was just an apprentice at that time trying to overtake the master! Today, we both have a good laugh thinking about this event.

Juliette JOSSET

The Orphans

Once upon a time, there was an orphanage that housed twenty-two orphans.

There were not any kids. None.

They had an overflowing imagination. When it came to inventing a new game, they were never short of treasures and as they trained each other, they were never bored. But one day, a new director arrived.

This director had a certain amount of experience. Previously, she had run a rest home for circus elephants. Very quickly, she began to regret her former companions, and to become worried to death about the new ones.

‘Look out! You’re going to get hit! Get down, you’re going to hurt yourself!’ she repeated.

‘Elephants are resistant, but you’re not elephants. Would you mind playing nicely, without trying to break your backs?’

But no matter what the headmistress said, the children did what they wanted. The day she caught them hurtling down the stairs on a box, she made decided that they had crossed a line.

‘Now that’s enough!’ she exclaimed.

She took the twenty-two orphans under her arms and led them into their rooms.

‘Elephants are solid as rocks, but you’re not elephants. In your beds, at least, nothing will happen to you!’

From that day on, the twenty-two orphans were stuck in the dormitory. The director removed all their toys, leaving them just their blankets.

One morning, the director discovered an elephant in the dormitory.

‘My dear friend, you’ll have to go away, you could hurt the orphans, but in the meantime, we have to find them!’

‘To find what?’ asked the elephant.

‘The orphans! Can’t you see they’re gone?’

‘Maybe they went to play?’ said the elephant. ‘In the stairs, for example,’ he added.

The director rushed out of the room.

‘They probably went out to have fun in the garden’, he said ‘We had better go and see.’

They searched the garden from top to bottom, and the house from the cellar to the attic.

The orphans were nowhere.

‘There’s a place we didn’t think of,’ said the elephant. ‘A particularly dangerous place.’

‘Where?’ asked the headmistress.

‘The roof,’ answered the elephant. ‘They’re probably there!’

They climbed up onto the roof. At this moment, the elephant did a somersault.

‘Hey!’ grumbled the woman. ‘You really think it’s time to play?’

‘Why not?’ said the elephant. ‘I bet you can’t do it!’

‘Hm, I used to be able to...a few years ago.’

‘Try, at least! Hold on, I’m going to help you.’

‘Hahaha, if only they could see me!’ said the director, bursting out laughing.

Then they played tag in the gutters. They were having so much fun, they forgot to be cautious. Suddenly, at the bend of a ledge, they bumped into each other and wobbled on the edge of the gutter. Then, they tipped over.

Meanwhile, down in the porch, the orphanage inspector was getting impatient. He had already knocked on the door, rung the bell, and still nobody came to open it for him.

‘How can I do my work if I can’t get in?’ he grumbled. ‘And what is that weird whistling’.

This whistling, it was the elephant and the headmistress falling. They landed right on the inspector. Then, BAM!

Suddenly, instead of an elephant, we saw twenty-two children! They jumped on to their feet. The inspector and the director, however, were a little dented.

‘You two, you have to go to bed. It’s urgent,’ decreed the orphans. And they transported the two adults to their bedrooms.

Since that day, the twenty-two orphans had fun again, just as they wished. The headmistress was always glad, even if they transformed her bed into a pirate vessel.

‘It might get dangerous’ she said, ‘but you can do it anyway.’

Once, she told them the story of the elephant.

‘What happened to it?’ asked the orphans.

‘I don’t know’, answered the woman. ‘However, do we ever know? We could possibly find it...’

‘Astounding!’ the orphans exclaimed. Then, all together they rushed out to seek the elephant.

Lou BERNARD

Hotel Arizona

I

July 6, 1997.

It was 6pm. I was still working on the photos from my last photo shoot with Milie, my best friend. Those photos were crazy, it might have been one of the best photo shoots I've ever done. Then, I heard the sound of an email resound.

"Hmmm, what? It's Sunday and nobody is working except me, what is it?" I said, opening this strange email.

"Dear Mr. Daniels,

The Art Gallery of Jerome, AZ. invites you to present your amazing work as a photographer. It will be a huge pleasure to welcome you and your guests to our showroom.

We're hoping for an answer before July 8 as the private preview will take place on July 20.

Sincerely,

Adam Turner, general manager of the Art Gallery of Jerome."

"Oh wow!" I screamed in the whole apartment, so loud that Jo heard me.

"What's happening, honey?" she asked, intrigued.

"I swear to God, you're not ready for this! I just received an email from Adam Turner, you know him? Me neither... whatever. Listen to this: '*The Art Gallery of Jerome, Arizona invites you to present your amazing work as a photographer*'! This is so f*cking incredible, I can't believe this, can you?!" I was so excited that I didn't let Jo get a word in. "My first preview, Jo! I am finally becoming well-known in this world! Can you imagine? You, me, on top of the stars! And what about an imprint on Hollywood Boulevard?! What do you think, huh?"

Mentally, I was in another world, thinking about our future with so much enthusiasm. In fact, I had been in that business since my 20's. Trying to get a place in this artistic world isn't an easy thing. And when you get an ounce of recognition for your talent, you can't just ignore it and miss out on an opportunity like this one.

"I'm very happy for you Jamie, you finally got what you were expecting. But I'm sorry, I can't go with you. My sister just called, my mother is sick, and I have to go to Tucson for a few

days. Even a couple of weeks, if she doesn't get better. You know that I support you no matter what, but I really have to take care of her," she said, moved and filled with emotions.

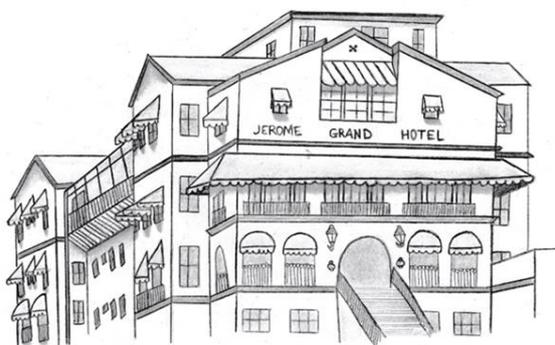
"I am sorry Jo, it doesn't matter, I will answer Turner that it is impossible for the exhibition, you need me."

"No, you don't. I know how important it is for you and that it's your dream. You'll go to Jerome. Do it for me, please."

I couldn't resist, and she was right, Jerome was where I belonged, where I had to be. So, I answered Turner that I'd be there: "I'm your man," I said exactly...

II

A couple of days passed, it was the 20th, the day I had waited for finally arrived. I was on my way to Jerome, and Johanna was going to Tucson. The city was only two hours from home, so I could come back after the preview, but I preferred to get a room in an hotel. And, bingo! I suddenly remembered the Jerome Grand Hotel, one of the most haunted hotels of the US, and I was the biggest fan of paranormal, poltergeists, spirits and all that stuff. I find it fascinating. So, before going to the exhibition, I had to get to the hotel and book a room. And that's what I did. Two hours passed, and I finally arrived in Jerome. I was discovering this town for the first time. It was pretty, with a lot of hills. In fact, this city used to be a mining city. When the mining industry was at its height, the number of inhabitants was near 27,000. But when the mines closed in 1952, this number went down to only 40 inhabitants. It stayed a ghost town for a long time, and in the 70's, the population slowly came back to 200 people. But the city still had the aspect of a ghost town, with a very dry landscape and old constructions.



Here it was, the Jerome Grand Hotel, constructed in 1926 as a hospital: The *United Verde Hospital*. But it was closed in the 1950's because of the development of medical services and because of the closing of the mines. Somebody bought the building in 1994, but it had been unused since its closing.

44 years unoccupied. This guy, Larry Altherr, chose to make the *United Verde Hospital* an hotel. What a good idea! No kidding, make a hospital a hotel? Was he serious?

“Ho-ho there’s paranormal activity in my hotel, what a surprise!”

Anyway, I was welcomed by a woman at the front desk.

“Hello Sir, what can I help you with?”

“I would like to book a room for tonight, please.”

The decor of the hotel was fascinating in its own way.

“How about room 6b, with a single bed and a bathroom.”

“That’s perfect. I have one more question, I have a private preview at the gallery at 6pm, I don’t know when it is going to end, when do you lock your doors?” I was so excited about this evening.

“Never, sir. Don’t worry, the gates will be open when you come back.”

Never? Ok, that’s comforting...

“Have a good evening, Sir.”

“Thank you, Mrs. ... C.. Caudwell?” I was trying to read her name on her name tag, but without my glasses it was difficult.

“Yes, that’s right, Mr. Daniels.”

I went back my car to see the gallery and finally met Adam Turner. I felt really bad thinking about Jo and her mum. She wouldn’t be there for my first exhibition... Whatever, I knew she was with me in another way, her picture in my wallet proved that to me.

III

I took my car and drove to the gallery, playing Ricky Martin’s “María” loudly, to motivate myself. The pressure slowly came in to my entire body. When I recall this memory, I can still feel this pressure. There was absolutely nobody on the road, it was deserted. Maybe because Jerome isn’t a very attractive place, except for weirdos like me. I’d chatted with Adam the day after my positive answer. He said that he had invited about 50 people to my private viewing. I think that it was the first time I had felt the pressure...

Then, the gallery showed up in front of my eyes. It wasn’t the Louvre or the British Museum, but for a tiny town in Arizona and a little photographer like me, it was imposing. Everybody was already there, even Milie; I saw her blond mane through the windows.

When I appeared, everyone applauded me for my work. They clapped so loudly that the walls shook, and my photos with it. After this, Milie threw herself into my arms.

“This is amazing Jamie! Everybody is here to see you! My parents came! Even Sofia, Terrence and David came to see you! You’re an artist Jamie, and you must know it!”

Terrence, Sofia and David were members of our “crew” at university, that’s where I met Milie too. We were the “Famous five”, like the children’s books. Absolutely inseparable, the group could not live without its every member. I had not seen them for 2 years, we emailed sometimes, but we all had our own lives.

I spent a little, but precious, time with them just before my speech.

“Hello everyone, and welcome to Jerome. I am so glad to see how many of you there are! This represents the work of my entire life. I would like to thank Mr. Turner for giving me this opportunity, which I will never forget. And of course, thank you all. I know that there are some people in the room who came from far away just to be here for me and for my first preview. I’m moved, seriously. Anyway, I hope you’ll enjoy my photos. Please, come to talk about them with me, I would be pleased to hear your advice or your criticism. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

I’ll never forget how they looked at me, with their eyes wide open. A certain pride took me and intoxicated me.

The sky got dark and a tiredness came with it, I knew it was time to go back to the hotel.

IV

1 am.

Still nobody on the road. But this time it seemed normal because of the hour. I had never seen a sky like Jerome’s. Away from all forms of light pollution, the stars were shining bright like diamonds, mesmerizing me. It brought a beautiful end to this amazing night.

I arrived at the hotel, and yes, the gates were open... I was hoping that the restaurant would still be open because I was starving, and the canapés were not so nourishing. But in fact, the hostel was entirely empty. Even when I called for someone, nobody answered me. It was cold, I remember, and not very bright. The atmosphere set at a snail’s pace... I felt some wind on the nape of my neck. I was thoroughly exhausted, my legs weren’t following my mind, that’s why I decided to use the elevator. I knew that the hotel’s elevator was old and excessively slow, but it didn’t matter. I could not use my legs. I waited for the elevator, empty of any energy. I could hardly keep my eyes open, I was worn out.

V

All of a sudden, I woke up. 3 am. I'd suffered a total blackout of what happened. Maybe I was so exhausted that my head refused to record what I'd done? Or maybe I drank a dab more than I'd thought? It had already happened to me, at New Year's Eve with my workmates. So, it might be that, but I did not remember drinking that much. To be honest, punches on the pipes of the radiators were the thing that awoke me. When I researched on the Jerome Grand Hotel, the sound of thumps on the pipes was something recurrent, apparently. I needed to sleep, and this was punching me out of my bounds.

I decided to turn on the television and my phone, to see if I had some news from Jo. She had texted me at 11 pm:

"Hi sweet ♥, how r u? and the preview?

I'm going 2 bed, txt me back pls. 😊

lly."

She was so kind, thank God I had her by my side. I hoped everything was okay with her mum.

Unexpectedly, the television turned itself off. And when I turned it on again, some "snow" appeared on the TV screen. It was strange and unusual. I tried to twiddle the cables, but nothing changed. I gave up. I decided to go out of my room, to see what was going on, but it all appeared normal.

As the biggest fan of paranormal, I chose to take a walk through the different corridors of the hostel. My room was on the 2nd floor, and the most haunted floor of the hostel was the 3rd. The corridors seemed endless, all painted in green, with old paintings of Jerome from the mining era. Different display cases were installed in the never-ending corridor, filled with surgical instruments which were used in the former *United Verde Hospital*.

At that time, while I was admiring the showcases, I heard something scratching the door of room 7. But, except me and an old guy in the room 9b, all the rooms of the corridor were vacant. I got closer to the door to hear more clearly when, abruptly, I overheard a familiar sound. At first, I did not recognize it because it was improbable to hear it here, in a hotel. I eventually found what was going on: A cat was meowing in this room. A CAT? What the hell was a cat doing here? Of course, the room was locked, but the cat stayed quiet.

I wanted to go upstairs to the 2nd floor, but once I was in the staircase, I heard the echo of a rolling trolley. It captivated me. When I reached the 2nd floor, I stood, stunned, for a few seconds.

I saw a man. Certainly a doctor. He was walking with the trolley and a clipboard. It freaked me out. Of course, I loved those ghostly things, but here, it was becoming truly scary. A real (or not) man was walking just in front of me in a doctor's outfit. While I was hiding from the doctor, I saw the chandelier wobble. This was spooky too, because the chandelier seemed so heavy that even the wind couldn't make it move. The light started to vibrate too, and when I looked back at the doctor, he had disappeared.

VI

Throughout my research, I read that around 9,000 people had died in this hotel during its days as the *United Verde Hospital*. What's more, Jerome and its region had the biggest stock of copper. And people made a link between this and the paranormal activities in the hotel, saying that the copper kept the spirits, because it's one of the best conductors. Americans can be a little ridiculous at times...

The 2nd floor was basically the same as the 1st, that's why I didn't linger there. Of course, the 3rd was the one which was the most interesting to me. I got to this long-awaited stage. I was instantly overcome with a different pressure. It was very cold, dark and unpleasant. The corners of the wallpaper were ripped and hanging. A strange smell of cigar smoke and whiskey came to my nostrils. At the end of the corridor was an old surgical room, its name was still on the door.

As a snoop, I tried to open the door. Miraculously, it was open. Afraid to see someone like the doctor, I quickly peeped into the room. I saw two ladies. It totally terrified me. I could not stop myself from thinking what had happened. What was wrong with me? A deep desire to go in was inside me even though the two ladies frightened me. So, I did. I opened the door; the two ladies were standing with their backs to me. One was dressed in a white gown, and the other in a nurse's outfit. They turned around. It was horrific. Their faces seemed rotten, as if they were two living corpses. The two zombie ladies started to chase me, I ran away. I was running faster than I'd ever run, but the corridor was truly endless. I had the impression that the walls were stretching out in front of me as I ran.

Like a shot, while I was running out, the two ladies caught fire. I stopped, and I saw the fire spreading to the carpet and to the curtains. And probably soon to the whole the hotel.

The staircase finally appeared. I was getting to the entry to get out of this hell, but when I passed in front of the 2nd floor, I heard a new-born child crying. The sound of his cries, mixed with the sound of the sirens, became louder and louder. The fire spread to the whole hotel, the atmosphere was getting warmer and warmer. This aggressive hooting noise started to get into my head. I couldn't hear anything else. The fire smoke made my head spin. I passed out, with the noise still piercing me through. It was white, dazzling. I thought I was turning blind. Little by little, I saw colours, especially red and blue. Like spotlights. I slowly opened my eyes, and I saw myself on a stretcher. In fact, the spotlights were from the ambulance. I was out of my body, seeing myself from the outside.

Jo was there. Sobbing on my lifeless body. My friends were there too. Milie, Sophia, Terrence and David were crying into each other's arms. What was happening? Why was I seeing myself from outside? Was I dead? Had I become a soul? Certainly.

Louisiane LEBRUN

The Flowers of our Memories



It was one of those cold days of December. Although Christmas was coming, and the snow had fallen all night long, there was nobody outside. No children throwing snowballs or building a snowman. No parents complaining about how they were fed up about doing the shopping because of the icy roads. Nothing but silence.

But the story doesn't take place in a middle of the neighbourhood, no. But in a big and old house. That kind of house hidden by the weeping willows, and frightening anyone who wanted to get closer to take an indiscreet look through the grubby old curtains. Inside, there was no furniture, all the rooms were empty, and the dust had settled on the floor. An old smell of mould floated in the air.

Only the bedroom upstairs was furnished as if the owners had left the premises in a hurry giving the impression that the room was frozen in time.

The dwelling seemed to have been abandoned for a long time now without a living soul ... Well, actually, not really.

Sitting on the window sill in the bedroom, a young man watched the snowflakes fall from the sky and land gently on the ground, touching it gently like a sweet kiss. An expression of melancholy on his face, between his hands there was a photo in black and white of a woman the same age as him. A very beautiful girl, holding a bunch of poppies in her arms, she wore a locket around her neck and she gave a bright smile to the photographer.

“If you knew how much I miss you, sweetheart...” he sighed, shaking his head.

Tears began to run down his cheeks before crashing onto the photo. He had been waiting for his love to return for so long. She'd left one day in the spring of 1943 to go to the Front as a nurse. Medical services being precarious, the government had demanded that all women aged between 18 and 30 should go to the battlefield to care for soldiers wounded by shells and other horrors that war presents. Ever since that time, she had never given any news, but he refused to believe her dead, he'd made the promise to always stay at home, expecting her return. So, he did.

"I love you darling, I hope you come back soon."

Suddenly, he heard the humming of a car then the significant slam of the front door. He quickly got back on his feet, on the lookout.

"Who's there?" he asked, nervously.

The silence answered him before a female voice began to sing. The young man frowned. Who the heck is coming home? He wasn't expecting anyone! Unless... "Brooke!". He rushed down the stairs, hurtling down them at full speed. Finally! She's back! But when he reached the hall, he froze, speechless...

Who is she?

The young girl stood at the door, carrying heavy cardboard boxes. She put them on the tiles then wiped the sweat that dripped from her forehead. Even though there was a stranger in his house he couldn't help but think that she was absolutely gorgeous. She had beautiful ginger curly hair; she was tall and svelte, she was the spitting image of Brooke, he thought; except for her eyes, Brooke's were blue, while the stranger's eyes were green.

"Hum, excuse me, Miss, but...who are you?" he asked, hesitantly.

She didn't answer, focused on sweeping the floor and moving some furniture.

He asked again, still no answer.

2 weeks passed, and the young girl still didn't seem to see or hear him so, the young man was content to contemplate her for hours; when she slept, read or cooked. Once, he wanted to follow her to the bathroom, but he came out as fast as he'd gone in, cheeks on fire and his face red. Over the months, he began to develop feelings that until then had been extinguished. Indeed, since the arrival of the young woman his feelings for Brooke were no longer as intense as before although he hoped one day to see her again.

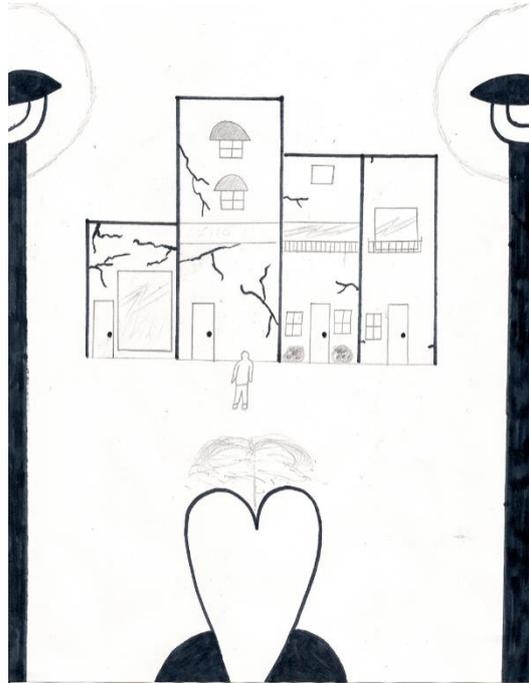
One spring day, the young woman went back to work when while removing her coat she saw, on the table, in a vase, a bouquet of freshly picked poppies. Intrigued, she approached

it and carried them to her nose to smell them, a pure wonder! She went to the bathroom sink to put water in the vase. She glanced in the mirror and started, stupefied, almost dropping the flowers. On the mirror, some mist had suddenly appeared, and letters wrote themselves forming three little words: *I love you*. She opened her eyes wide, yet she didn't seem frightened. The more the days went by, the more the young man showed his love for her by picking poppies each morning from the garden and leaving some words on the mirror. While she was gone, he decided to discover her name. He was searching everywhere when a small safe placed on a sideboard caught his attention. He decided to open it, and he came across some old letters and an official paper; one of those letters was about a nurse during the war who had given birth in pain before dying. Another talked about the new-born baby who had been placed in an orphanage with only the inheritance of his mother's pendant. His first thoughts were for Brooke at this moment, she was a nurse and wore a pendant too, could it be that... No, it's probably just a coincidence, isn't it? But then, he looked in the safe and saw some jewellery, THE jewellery: a silver locket. He grabbed it with a trembling hand and observed it meticulously. Good grief! It seemed familiar to him! He opened it and gasped, inside the locket, there was a picture of him, how could it be possible?! Still not sure he understood, he glanced at the official paper and couldn't help but shed a tear: There was his name, Anton Nowingham, next to Brooke's. This was all making sense now.

The young woman was his great granddaughter.

Manon DELVAUX

Park Bench



She was sitting on a bench, in the park. She was waiting for him to come. As a way to pass the time, she looked at the trees. The beautiful blossoming trees. The wind rose up... It was cool. She looked at a group of goldfish. She thought it would be so good to be like them. Swimming freely and having no problems or responsibilities... She closed her eyes... but the state of serenity was suddenly interrupted by tears.

Indeed, she could hear someone crying. It was her friend. He had asked her to come to the

park because he needed a “safe” space to talk. He told her he wanted to talk about a thing... He came to the bench and after a shy “Hi...” from her friend and a few seconds of silence, he burst into tears. She hugged him warmly, and softly told him “There, there...”.

She asked him why he was crying.

“Something happened last Friday...” he answered.

“What happened? You can tell me,” she replied.

“Last Friday, when I came home... I saw it. Everything went black. I felt like I was going to fall. What had happened? I couldn’t know. I fell to the ground and... fainted,” he said with a trembling voice and a red and tearful face which was completely misshapen by the implacable sadness.

His friend was listening to him carefully and prepared herself for what sounded like a sad story.

“I heard familiar voices saying ‘I could not stand it,’ and I also felt hands on my body. I felt my own body hanging. Someone was carrying me. Then I can’t remember what happened between that moment and the moment I opened my eyes. I was still lying on the ground. The

ground was cold. I could hardly stand up and... I didn't recognize where I was. It seemed as if I was in a sort of a village because there were four old buildings, lined up in front of me. They looked as if time had deteriorated them. There were also lamp posts with speakers surrounding what looked like a main square. They lit only this main square and I could not see further than it. And also, there was a big fountain. It was the shape of a heart and the gushing of water was the only sound I could hear...

"I didn't know what to do, so I came to the furthest building on the left with a vitrine inside. I looked in the dark shop window and knocked on it. Nobody came. So, I entered directly. It was all dark and silent. Then, I heard the voice of a little boy. He said:

'You'll see, we'll become best friends!' That innocent voice reminded me of something, but I couldn't remember what... I heard nothing more, so I left.

"I went to the second building. That building also reminded me of something... It was dark again. At the moment, I entered it, I heard children laughing and talking. Then, I heard a woman's voice saying,

'I came with a friend.' The laughing and talk ceased, and I heard steps. Surely some children. They said,

'Hello!' and asked questions like

'Have you been friends for a long time?' I also heard the words 'cute' or 'shy'. I heard nothing more, so I left.

"At the third building, it was dark and silent again. Then I heard water flowing. It lasted for 3 minutes, then it stopped with a slight grinding noise. I heard what sounded like a foot stepping in water, followed by a relieved sigh. I heard a small plunge and a voice which sounded like the one in the first building, but with a little more maturity, not so high-pitched. It said:

'So? How's the water?' and it laughed.

"I heard nothing more, so I left.

"The fourth and last building was the least deteriorated, it even looked like it was new. Inside, I heard just a thump and someone crying. I don't know how long it lasted but it was long and horrible to hear those cries. I heard the sound of a door and another woman's voice saying, 'Oh my God... what happened?... Oh my God! He could not stand it!'. I heard nothing more, so I left.

"I heard a trembling sound. The trembling went crescendo, and I fell to the ground. I felt like I was going to fall! Then, the buildings fell down. They turned into simple pieces of stone.

I turned around and I saw the fountain. It wasn't there any more. Suddenly... I heard the speakers. I heard a voice coming from them... and it sounded like mine. The voice said,

'You must face it...'

I remember nothing else."

She was speechless. Because of the story. She couldn't understand what her friend was saying, so she asked, "What are you trying to tell me?".

Then, he cried very loudly: "My goldfish is dead!"

She could not believe it.

Everything went silent. We could only hear the noise of the wind.

After a minute, she stood up, went to the school of fish she'd seen earlier and said, seriously:

"I hope he will not adopt you... just for the health of my ears."

Mattéo SAVI

In Character

Harry parks the black Chevrolet just behind the same car, in front of the entrance of the bank. The man on the seat beside him looks at his expensive wristwatch, still holding the Thompson Submachine Gun tightly in his other hand.

"Two minutes left." he announces dimly, and nobody answers.

The air is thick in the car, weighing on them like a sentence about to be given.

He closes his eyes and repeats over and over the same words in his head, like a mantra: *You are John Dillinger. You're about to rob a bank with your fellow comrades. You brought your little brother whom you dearly love because he insisted on it. You only agreed because everything is supposed to go well.*

And like that he opens his eyes and he's ready. Like that, he is John Dillinger, the number one public enemy in the USA. He smirks to himself in the rear-view mirror, delighted in the exhilarating feeling thrumming in his veins and exchanges a look with the two men in the back.

"Be safe, lil brother."

The blond-haired man, slightly younger than the rest of them named Garrett Dillinger chuckles. Beside him in the back of the car is sitting one of his associates, a grumpy forty-year-old man. The one at the wheel is Harry Brunette, another bank robber well-known by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, one of John's trust worthiest accomplices. The four of them are wearing long grey trench coats and holding long, polished guns. John picks his hat up from his lap and rests it on his head, so the wide brim can conceal his recognizable face, throws a quick look at my wristwatch, the clock still ticking, and says:

"It's time. Let's go."

The four men open the doors as those in the car in front of them do the same. They all look tense but struggle not to look suspicious with the two black Chevrolets parked right in front of the most prestigious bank in Chicago, the long guns hidden under their long coats.

John climbs the stairs to the mighty and impressive white columns, but he knows better: Despite this impressive appearance, security is lacking, as is the case for nearly every bank in this country. *Blame it on the economic crisis that started only a few years ago, in 1929*, he thinks, a bitter taste in his mouth. He has a lot of things to blame on this crisis.

As soon as they push open the glass doors of the bank, John wastes no time. Each of them knows the role they have to play. Two men stay in the cars, ready to drive away, two men guard the entrance so that nobody can escape from the hall, and the rest take care of the cash.

John, as the boss of the whole operation, ostentatiously takes his gun out from his trench coat, and fires twice in the air. Screams echo in the hall, and before people can run away, he jumps on the main counter and proclaims, his voice steady and confident, as if he'd done this a bunch of times, which he had:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a hold up. Sorry for the inconvenience, this should only take a few minutes. Do not attempt anything and no harm will be done."

He jumps back down to the floor as cries spring up around him, but he couldn't care less. He needs the key to the safe.

"John! Found the key!" Harry yells, while showing him the man at the end of his gun. The man is wearing a suit in which he must be sweating profusely, his eyes are wide open, looking scared to death, and his eyebrows are shot up, creating deep wrinkles on his forehead.

"Perfect."

He approaches the man and grips his collar harshly, guiding him to the safe. As the man seems to hesitate in giving the combination, John gets closer to him, as if they were old acquaintances.

"Listen. Either you open the safe right now, or you get that bullet in the head. It's as simple as that," he whispers, threatening the man with a tone that oozes danger.

With trembling hands, the man begins to turn the button using the right combination and the safe unlocks. On cue, fire shots as well as screams are heard outside.

"Shit," mutters John under his breath. He then opens the safe to find... an empty room. Barely a few stacks of money sprawled on the floor, and he feels a chill of dread going down his spine. Immediately, he storms out of the room and screams orders at the others, while frantically searching for his little brother.

"Let's leave right now. There's nothing in there, it's a trap!"

They all rush towards the exit as the gun shots still sound outside. John, with his little brother Garrett in tow, begins to climb down the stairs, but there are too many bullets flying in the air, and the cops' cars are already parked, blocking the road.

Just as he's about to yell at everyone to go back into the bank (they forgot to take hostages with them in the precipitation) he witnesses - with horror - Garrett receiving a bullet to his side. Time comes to a standstill, and it's like he's watching his brother falling in slow motion, but before his head hits the ground, he has the reflex to catch him. Somebody yells to go back inside but he doesn't hear anything as he draws Garrett inside the bank.

He sets him on the ground and there's already so much blood on his clothes. But he doesn't even notice, the only thing he can think about at this moment is the dying boy beneath him. Garrett looks at him, already weakened by the gash oozing blood from his side. John is not silly, he knows just by looking at where the bullet hit him that there's nothing he can do to save him, and it's all his fault. Whoever betrayed them and told the cops about where the next robbery would be done is a dead man. He takes his little brother's hand in his own and slowly watches him die as warm tears spring out of his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he whispers as sobs rack his body, but the boy can't hear it anymore.

He sobs some more, again, waiting and waiting, and... He sighs, already feeling irritated.

"Man, that's when you're supposed to come closer to comfort me..." he says, looking up to Harry.

"Oh! Right, right... Sorry, everyone!" yells the other man to the whole production team, and everyone deflates.

"Ahhh, I'm getting sick of this scene... And I have to wash all the blood again," complains the blond boy after opening his eyes. "And you can stop crying now, Matt."

"I know, I know, it's just that I was really in character..." he answers, wiping his tears away. "I'm gonna talk to the producer."

He gets up and goes behind the camera where a makeup stylist goes to him to fix his makeup.

"You know, I'm not feeling this whole *Let's do a take that lasts five minutes* thing. Especially if some of us don't do their job well..." he says to the producer, who's sitting on his assigned chair.

He doesn't even look up from his phone to answer.

"I'm the boss here, Matt."

Morgane MARTIN

The Fall



The bright sun was warming my face. The birds were singing all around me. I looked all around and smiled, amazed by the charm of this place. I was standing on the sand, barefoot. The fresh breeze coming from the ocean was carrying me to a world where

nature was getting the upper hand. A long, wide path made with sand was behind me. I was surrounded by the ocean. In front of me tremendous, colossal stairs lead up to a huge hotel on a cliff. The elliptical-shaped inn was filling the whole place. The walls were of a faded burgundy, and in the middle of the hotel there was a black, metallic gate. I was lost in my thoughts when I heard Tris calling my name:

“Natie! Hey! We are waiting for you, come on!”

I smiled and nodded. Tris, Kole and Luce were waiting for me, just in front of the stairs. I took my bag and joined them. The boys insisted on taking mine and Luce’s bags while going up stairs.

Once we were in front of the gate, Kole rang the bell and the gate opened after a few seconds. We entered the hotel and started to admire the colours, the harmony and the pulchritude of this spot. On our left, we saw the reception office. Next to it, there was a huge shop, like *Tesco’s*. The supermarket took up almost all the place in the yard, and left only a little bit of space for a coffee shop on the left. In the middle of the lot there was a big fountain. A lot of people were sitting in front of the coffee shop, some of them were sitting around the fountain, and the rest were just walking all over the patch, enjoying the sunny day. Suddenly, Tris started screeching:

“Oh my God, oh my God! Look at this shop! Oh my God! A shop! Finally!”

We all looked at him, surprised by his abrupt and odd reaction to a store. I saw that nobody could see how to react. I wanted to ask Tris why this shop was so special for him, but he started speaking at the same time as me:

“I am so hungry, guys! I've been starving for three hours. And now I can finally buy food! It's the most beautiful thing that's happened to me today!”

I looked at Luce and then at Kole. We didn't know what to do with Tris. Eventually, I broke the silence:

“You know what, Tris? You can go shopping for all of us, and we will go to the reception office to collect the keys for our rooms.”

“Sure! What do you want? I'm sure that they have everything in this supermarket. It's the biggest shop I've ever seen,” declared Tris eagerly.

“It doesn't matter,” declared Kole. “You can buy whatever you want, I'm certain that it will be good, knowing your palate.”

Tris beamed like a five-year-old boy who just got a brand new toy for Christmas and rushed into the market. Luce, Kole and I glimpsed at each other and burst out laughing. Through the window we saw Tris running all around the supermarket and couldn't help ourselves from giggling for at least five minutes.

After we'd calmed down, we went to the reception office and took the keys for our bedrooms. But when we walked out of the office, Tris was still in the deli. We decided to wait for him in the coffee shop. We sat down at a table in front of the coffee house where Tris could see us, when he got out of the shop. We ordered three hot chocolates and three brownies. We drank them and ate the brownies while talking about what we would like to do during these holidays.

Tris walked out of the store an hour after we'd finished. So, of course, we were already sitting next to the fountain, waiting for him. He was so elated that we all immediately smiled when we saw him. But then we spotted something peculiar. Tris was walking up to us with the shopping trolley.

“Tris? Are you sure you didn't forget something?” asked Kole. Tris examined his trolley carefully, very confused.

“No, I have everything. Cookies, chocolate chips, water, vegetables, fruits, cake, bread, cheese, juice, eggs, whipped cream, sugar sparkles, marmalade, sparkling water, salted butter, baking powder... I even bought you mushrooms!”

“First of all, I'm allergic to mushrooms so you'll have to eat them yourself. And second, why do you still have the shopping trolley?” questioned Kole, disoriented.

“Oh, this is what you meant when you said 'No mushrooms'... I get it now, sorry. And for the shopping trolley, I purchased it too!” he exclaimed with a big smile on his face.

“What? You actually bought a shopping trolley?” I shouted.

“Of course, I did. It's easier than packing all the food in bags. Plus, I wouldn't have enough bags for all of it”, he shrugged. “Are we ready to go? Do you have the keys?”

“Yes, we have them,” retorted Luce and we started walking to our rooms.

The hotel was elliptical-shaped, and the rooms were on both sides of the building. Ours were cliff-side. We walked through a little underpass to reach the bedrooms. The path was very narrow. Only a few centimetres cut us off from the edge and we had to walk single file, so we wouldn't fall into the ocean. We were almost there when Tris stumbled and fell into the ocean with his shopping trolley. My heart stopped for a minute as I watched him fall. Luce shrieked and Kole tried to catch him, but he did not succeed. We stared at Tris in the ocean. He wasn't afraid for himself, for his life. He was frightened for the food that he'd bought! We could hear him screaming:

“My food! No, no, no! My food! I can't lose it!”

To begin with, we couldn't believe our eyes. We observed him screaming and picking up as much food as he could. When his shopping trolley sank, Tris started crying. I felt like we had to do something, I couldn't let him drown, too, because of the food. I glanced at Luce, then at Kole, who was laughing at this situation. I peered at him, offended.

“Kole! Stop laughing! We can't leave him like that! He is going to drown because of this stupid food. What should we do?” I gasped.

“Yeah, we should definitely help him.” He thought for a few minutes, about different solutions, I supposed. “You should go and help him, Natie,” he said.

And after those words, Kole pushed me off the cliff.

Natalia SIERADZKA

A Special Spring Day

My name is Sam, I grew up, well, I can say, alone. My mother spends her time at home, but she drinks, she is an alcoholic, so I don't have many ties to her. When I was 3, she lost her job - she had a shop which was doing well, but she closed because of the competition that made her lose all her customers - and since that day, she drinks all day, every day. My father, I owe him everything, but unfortunately, he spends his time at work to earn money, I rarely see him because he has several jobs, otherwise, we couldn't live. My father is too nice with my mum, he never left her and buys her bottles. I saw on photos that we had a big house before, but I don't remember it because since this all happened we live in a little apartment, with only one bedroom, a kitchenette and, for a bathroom, we only have a rusty and pretty trashy shower. The room is so small that when we are on the toilet, we could brush our teeth and almost take a shower at the same time. My father can buy us food - and that's the most important thing - but we don't have enough money to pay for a plumber, or better, a new shower. When I'm at home, I'm in my bedroom, it's like its mine because my mother can hardly walk to this room, she's that drunk, so she stays lying on the couch all the time.

When my father is at home, he sleeps in the bedroom too, on a small mattress placed next to the wall that's also my bed and a desk to do my homework, but I haven't seen him for a while. Sometimes I go to his workplace to see him a little, but that's really rare because he has tough bosses, who don't respect him, in my opinion, and who, when they see me, yell at my father to get back to work. So, I come back home, and I lock myself in my room to read books and do my homework. That's the only thing which allows me to escape from this life, this house, this mother. I'm a really good student, my teachers say, and I know that too because I spend my time working and I always have the best marks in the class. My father knows that I'm good at school and he says that I'm clever, but he doesn't know a lot of things about me, and even less about my schooling. So, I always have good marks but nobody at home really cares. If only my father could be there more often...

One day in spring, when I was 18, I learned the best news of my entire life, but everything also tumbled down. This day started like every day: I woke up at 7, discovered a bunch of empty bottles littered on the floor like every day and got myself ready to go to high school. When I arrived, I joined my friends and we went to class. The morning was normal, I didn't show what happened at home, and smiled as if nothing was wrong, like all the time. It was my routine.

At lunch, when I was in the canteen, my maths teacher, Mrs. Mary -she likes me, and I wish everyone could have her as a teacher because I have never had a teacher like her - she is so clever, so kind and so joyful. Anyway, she came up to me and told me she had some really great news for me. I looked at her, astonished and asked for more details.

"You've been accepted to the university of your dreams! Oxford my dear! And it's not a joke, I received a message from the headmaster and he said that you have been accepted and that he will send you all the papers and contact you. Congratulations Sam, I'm really proud of you. Hard work deserves a fair reward, and there - it's yours."

She took me in her arms and I was still in shock, I didn't believe it.

"Don't stand there gawping, my dear. It's true. And, Sam, if you need anything, for the university or for anything else, I'm here, you can count on me," Mrs. Mary said with a reassuring tone.

I nodded, and she was gone. I stayed some minutes, motionless and suddenly I realised what she had just told me. I was so excited, so glad, so joyful, I was on top of the world. I met my friends and told them the good news, they were all very happy for me. Maybe, I could finally have a normal life, without my family's problems. That's what I thought.

After that, I returned to class and got congratulated by some teachers. All afternoon, I was on a cloud and it must have been the first time I wasn't as attentive during the course as usual. My teachers noticed it, but they didn't say anything because they knew the reason why.

When the bell rang, I was still so excited that I wanted to tell my father the news, so I visited him at work. When I arrived, he seemed quite surprised to see me there, but I quickly saw a big smile on his cheeks. He looked around to see if his boss was there and asked me why I'd come.

"Dad, I've got a big, big, big, great news! Something really important and that you will not believe!"

He looked at me with a really surprised look.

“I’ve been accepted at Oxford. The University of Oxford.”

He gave me the proudest look, I saw he wanted to cry and then, he started to shout:

“My son is going to Oxford! Do you hear that? MY SON, MY LITTLE SON IS GOING TO OXFORD!!”

His boss was certainly not there, because he would probably have fired my father on the spot. My dad took me in his arms and held me really strongly.

“I’m really proud of you my boy, really proud,” he whispered.

Then I thanked him and told him I missed him, and I walked slowly to go back to the apartment, still joyful and without thinking of my troubles or in which position my mother would be when I got home. For the first time, I wasn’t thinking of her, I was just thinking of myself and it’d been a while since that had happened.

I still was daydreaming when I arrived in the corridor. I opened the door and closed it after me, I put my jacket on one of the two chairs that stay in the living room, without paying attention to my mother who, I knew, was surely lying on the couch. So happy, I was whistling when I turned around and caught her eyes. I hadn’t seen her on her feet for a while. There we were, her, and me, both standing up, looking each other in the eyes, without saying anything. I saw in her look something I’d never seen before, I didn’t know what it was, but suddenly, I understood. It was a mixture of distress, hatred, suffering, misfortune, regret, maybe a bit of love too, and a tear on the corner of her eye made me do the same thing. Yes, I had understood, so my look went down to her hand, and I saw it. I didn’t have the time to say anything, I just looked at her eye, she pointed the gun at me, and pulled the trigger.

In the press, two days later, the title was "Alcoholic mother killed her son because of her hatred of life", and it said that after pulling the trigger on her son, she took his hand and killed herself.

My name was Sam, I was 18, this day of spring I learned that I was accepted at the university of my dreams, but that day, my mother killed me too.

Nina CLEMENCE

The Swap

Ambrosia always had an intense attraction towards baking, pastry and the culinary world in general. Since her childhood, she had got used to smelling the flavourful fragrances that came out of her kitchen, where her mother and grandmother used to bake the most astonishingly amazing dishes ever. Marbled cakes, apple pies, baklavas and other petit fours came into being from the large door of the huge oven they had. While growing up, she began to cook and bake with her models; she gate-crashed their tiny kitchen and followed the steps of her mum. Her mother, seeing her growing interest and her curiosity, began to give her the responsibility to prepare Sunday breakfast. She started by cooking eggs for her family. Ambrosia delighted in cooking eggs. Hard boiled, scrambled, sunny side up or poached eggs, she quickly mastered the art of egg cooking. Then she moved on to pancakes and crepes that she served neither too hot nor too chilled, with the right amount of maple syrup trickling down her creations. And then she started to try her mum's famous and well-known marbled cake, the one that she ate during her childhood. And this way, little by little, Ambrosia assimilated all the basic recipes that a complete cook should know inside out.

As childhood was left behind, in her early teenage years, she started to think out of the box: she decided to create her own recipes and her own presentations. She commenced searching for inspiration in nature, when she took a walk early in the morning during the week ends, or on the internet, where she also used to watch cake compilation videos on YouTube when she felt disheartened. Ambrosia had a huge creative potential, and a wide and immense imagination; so, she had no problem finding new ideas. When she grasped, in her fast-moving brain, an original thought, she drew it in her miniature notebook that she always had in her back pocket. She sketched the outline of the cake, and then with some arrows, indicated what the ingredients were, and the different layers of her creations. She then tried her recipes out, and it was not necessarily successful at the first try. Ambrosia had always been resolute and persistent, so she never ditched her ideas, and tried again and again until she got the perfect result, until the embodiment of her idea became a reality.

It went without saying, when the moment came to choose her vocational guidance, Ambrosia had no doubts about the path she wanted to follow. She entered an internationally renowned culinary school in Paris after successfully passing the practical exams. She was the best during the three school years she spent there. All the chefs that instructed her were absolutely mesmerised by her inconceivable and unpredictable talent. She soon made a name of herself amongst the biggest names in Paris' culinary world. She did internships in the luxurious restaurants of major hotels, and her work was an absolute success: the chefs were ecstatic (and heaven knows it is so hard to satisfy them) and she was quickly hired in the luxury restaurant where she'd done her internship. Her dreams were coming true, she was overjoyed and extremely radiant; her life was even better than anything she dared to expect.

A few years later, after moving up the ladder, she winded up being at the head of the restaurant as a Chef. She succeeded in passing lots of competitive exams and contests, and she always had the first rank. And on the day of her 27th birthday, her ambition went higher than ever: she discovered she had been shortlisted, in the light of her exceptional and successful career history, to take the exam to have the incredible opportunity to become the Elysée's starred-chef. She decided to do it. She was so overwhelmed with ecstasy that she promised herself she was going to accomplish it, nail the most exceptional opportunity she'd ever had. She had to seize this chance; it was a once in a lifetime possibility that could never come up again. The task was apparently simple: the candidates had to make the creation of their choice for a wedding day. Ambrosia knew she had to do her best: she had the necessary skills to carry out her creations successfully; her technique was perfect, and she had her own overflowing creativity. Nonetheless, she also knew that the competition was fierce; pastry chefs from all over the world came, aspiring to win this contest. She had 48 hours to conceive entirely by herself, from the first broken egg to the last touch of buttercream icing, a huge 150-pound wedding cake, made with 20 layers of successive dark chocolate cake and lemon genoise, filled with milk chocolate ganache and iced with yuzu and passion fruit frosting. The cake would be 1,5 metres high and would be covered with edible flowers and chocolate sculptures. Ambrosia was aware of the extreme difficulty of the task, but she had convinced herself that she was capable of doing it.

After 48 hours of hard work, Ambrosia had finished her incredibly exceptional creation. She never thought she would have been able to do such a thing in her life, on her own. After 48 hours of emotional torture and physical tiredness, she was finally going to present her

exceptional creation to the strict and severe jury of the contest. She entered the room. Well, it was not really a room, because it was in the entry hall of a luxury hotel in the core of Paris. When her creation was brought into the hall, the jury, composed of famous starred chefs from all over the planet, was amazed by Ambrosia's creativity. They walked around it, several times and took some pictures, but they didn't say anything. Ambrosia then had to cut a slice of the cake and give it to the jury (that part was assessed too). When all the members of the jury had their cake in front of them, they counted to three, so they could all taste it at the same exact moment.

One...

Two...

Three...

And they all immediately spat out what they ate.

Ambrosia had put salt instead of sugar in the cake. It was awful.

Tesnime SAFRAOU