

Pearls of fate

A collection of short stories

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curated by Mr Malégeant

Paréditions

Foreword

I would hardly call this « *a group of pupils* », not even « *a group of students* ».

This qualifies as a mighty « **think tank** ».

The epitome of variety and, still, so many meeting points here and there.

**Cathedrals of anxiety,
lousy alibis,
sparkling descriptions,
catchy stream of consciousness,
daring egotrips,
an obsession with the consumer society,
varying degrees of luck,
unforgiving moments of weakness,
unexplainable acts of bravery,
Gothic horror shows,
hints of a daunting future,
an all-knowing ghost here and there,
and ubiquitous, far-fetched considerations
arise from the vortex.**

To what extent are our lives pre-written ?

To what extent are we predetermined to become what we eventually become ?

What kind of moments generate significant shifts in life ?

Toying with the unlikely brings unfathomable wealth.

And immeasurable pride.

May each of you fare well,

Mr M.

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“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.” Indeed, since her mother's death, she dedicated her life to this fight against unfairness and helping people to improve their living conditions. But will her body follow her ambitions? Or is everything impossible?

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A not so perfect life. An unexpected solution. An unresolved case. Untold confessions. Repressed reality. Unwanted visions. Awakened trauma. All these words, tightly connected, will move Madison and lead her to the unnerving truth. Will she finally admit and accept it?

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Jacob, this clever boy who has just moved to Cleveland, just got back to school after the summer holidays. His life in his previous town was kind of cheerless and he wants that to change. His intention is to have a clear shift in his life, by making friends for instance. In this new life, a mysterious woman will take over Jacob's life. What will happen between these two ?

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Hazy Slumber, 16 years old, was living an average teenage life: still living at her parents', going to school and hanging out. One day, she met a ghostly teenage boy around her age who reminded her of one who had appeared in a nightmare, and who would then keep showing up at unexpected times. Who is he? Why does he keep showing up?

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If your world had turned upside down and everyone close to you had suddenly disappeared, would you finally realize what life had given you? Let's see about John... a teenager just like any other, living in Boston.

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Alia is a fearless young woman who likes to stand up for everyone. One day something is going to happen to her and is going to change her vision of life. But is her reality the common reality ? That's what you're about to figure out.

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I had great expectations about my father's studio. I loved the fact that he had hidden a magic world in there. Now I'm here, in front of one of his paintings, one that represents a garden, with a little wooden bridge and a river.

Simon Vayer

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“Every good day starts with a protein shaker”. That's what Richard Luckman thought. He was the luckiest and most muscular man in the world (according to himself), but one day his daily life changed forever. Follow the crazy adventures of Richard and see him ask himself this defining question: “Was I really doing the right thing?”

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He had always loved books. Getting lost in imaginary worlds was his favorite thing. But what if one day, while he was finally enjoying the trip of his dreams, he had to actually dive into the hazardous universe of his favorite book?

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Mike Device, an orphan, just got selected to attend the university of his dreams in Indianapolis. Everything seemed so nice and cool in his life, he had great friends even if they looked really unique. Such as Techpo, his new friend from the university. He didn't know how to deal with him at first but they ended up becoming really close. Yet he acted weird as if he had something to achieve, as if their meeting had been planned from the start.

Agatha Strange is a 15 year old teenager from Philadelphia. She is used to exploring new places with her two friends Lewis and William. One day, they will find themselves in an old abandoned Catholic School named "St Nicolas". They will meet a mysterious character who will ask them to accomplish 3 missions. Will they manage to fulfill his requests and get out of this cursed place?

In a small town, Sierra, a young girl, was leading a meaningless life. She is going to see her life being turned upside down by many events. Sierra will see herself helping many needy people, but are they really here? With us? The appearance of a ghost, a secret mission. Will she manage to endure her new life?

The images came and went all the time, without a single moment of relief, she had the feeling that her brain couldn't breathe, that she would have to deal with those horrific flashbacks for the rest of her life.

"So, my name is Darene, I work for ReLife laboratory, I have been watching you for 1 year and I chose you. You are my subject."

I'm Jonathan Skull, I work on Wall Street, I have a wonderful wife, a lot of money but ... I just got assassinated ! Who killed me ?

Unshakeable

Mariam Bourma Ali



1. “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about the elections of the representatives.

It could be difficult for me to achieve everything I had planned and dreamed of.

* * *

The dew is brightening. By looking at it, Rosalind felt more ambitious. The day after, Rosalind had collected the signatures that would allow her to be the representative of her university for the conventions. The purpose of this convention is for each student to bring up a subject that they find important .

During the collection of the signatures, a man dressed with a navy blue jacket approached her. At first she was reluctant to talk to him, due to his uncanny face expression. Although it was a bit awkward at first, she found him really interesting : she learned that he had been raised by a black woman . His mother wasn't committed to his education and the woman had been taking care of him for a long time. That is why he now feels an endless love for her. John wanted to be a part of her project.

Days passed and Rosalind was eventually elected.

* * *

Today was the day when Rosalind had to deliver her speech to the crowd. A bit stressed, she turned around. A man came to her to lead her to the stage. She glanced at the crowd.

Rosalind has an asset : she is eloquent.

She took a deep breath and began : « Noone has the right to oppress a minority ... This why I am here : to make it clear to you ».

There was a long silence. The whole crowd was staring at her. They were all fascinated.

2. “Guilty”

After my speech, I received a lot of compliments from the professors of my university, from students. Later that day, I had not come to expect that special compliment from Azra Coleman.

Azra is one of those people who could make you feel her values through their work. She is a strong and powerful woman who suffered for a long time. When she came to Harvard people considered her as **guilty** : Why ? People don't really know, but in one of her interviews, she said that someone came to her and yelled that she did not belong there but to the street. I really love that part of her personality because she did not reply but now she can tell that person « Look at me now ». I'm one of her huge fans and has been following her work since the very beginning. She has a charisma that inspired me to be what I wanted to be and achieve my dreams. She is one of these people who would stand up for the victims. After talking to her, the way I was feeling was ambiguous. The way she talks emphasizes the quiet part of her, which is weird because before that, I always figured out she was fierce and cold. The media had given me that impression.

After our conversation, we went to the court as i'm a law student. But something happened that made my admiration for Azra even more daunting. A lawyer accused a young lady of corruption but in that case it was clear that it was her boss who had used all his contacts to send her away to prison. And at that moment Azra bravely stood up and as always she grasped everyone's attention and said « Because of her skin colour, you want to send this lady to jail. Zealots! I'm pretty sure there are witnesses who could make it clear she is completely innocent. »

Her plea was amazing. Everybody was impressed. She talked with so much fluency. Through her speech we could feel she was strong albeit a little nervous and uncomfortable. Azra is like a turtle. She is strong but on the inside she is fragile. After she told me about her trauma, I can relate to her state of mind.

Even if she seems to be unshakeable at trials, back home she suffers a lot of crises. As I understand it, her current house reminds her of the family house where she no longer lives. Her house is the place where she suffered the most due to her abusive father. As we were leaving the courtroom, Azra started to speak in a weird, confused way and then she just fell down on the ground, fainted and would not recover her senses.

3. “A poem”

A few months went away since the day I fainted. Even if I have become more exhausted, I’m feeling more confident; lots of people applauded me after my speech. Things are getting better, indeed one of the most powerful and famous TV hosts, Harvey Steve, invited me on his show “Clash with politicians”. I was indeed excited insofar as it will allow me to express my state of mind about the state of our society.

The day of “Clash with politicians“ came. I knew everything I had to tell them but my ideas are scattered. People were really nice to me and lead me to the studio. Mr Harvey began with a delightful reference to Obama’s Inauguration speech back in 2009. Now that was a really interesting speech. I should have listened to it entirely.

Then Steve launched the debate with a racist quote from an anonymous person.
“We shouldn’t let them come to our country, they are erasing our community”

“So Azra what’s your opinion about this?”

“I think the fear people feel about strangers is non-sense; to have such a mindset nowadays is unfathomable”...

The debate went on until the moonlight and it was great to have been able to acknowledge my thoughts about such meaningful topical issues.

On my way back home under my car I saw a piece of paper which caught my attention, usually it was unlikely for me to pick anything up from the dirty ground. I unfolded it and there was a poem written on it:

***“When people fake their real face,
it allows them to manipulate
people
such as a vampire.
Now darkness is getting closer
your will may fall into them”***

4. “Let go”

Having found this note under my car made me think that I must have had quite a few enemies. However, I would not let myself feel intimidated by these crooks.

The night is over.

And that motivated me to make more interviews. Indeed my goal was to show the world the struggle I had to put up with.

In the afternoon I went back to the university, which allowed me to see Jack again. With Jack we got together to prepare a new important event. Indeed I wanted to set up a pretty big eloquence contest. I had always thought that people of my age didn't have the opportunity to talk about what they feel is significant or what messages they might want to convey. We only needed to get the green light from the director of our Uni, which went like a breeze as he thought our project could improve the reputation of the University.

Many people came to the event. Most of them delivered great speeches. In the evening, after the eloquence contest, we had collected a ton of money which would help me to launch my foundation. Indeed I had always wanted to build a foundation to help people in need.

But later that day, I got hit by strong migraines followed by atrocious chest pains. I was feeling my body letting go until everything went black.

I woke up in a place that was totally unknown to me. I saw people that I didn't know. The doctor told me that I had been in a coma for 5 months and that I was now tetraplegic so everything I had dreamed about... had never happened.

Kadiatou Sylla | « Low-ranking souls »



1. “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about this time. For so long I had dreamed this would be the last time, I was hoping so I guess. I have to move out one more time, a new place, a new high school. In short, a new environment to adapt to. Since I was a child, this is all I've known. I don't even try to make any new friends now, what's the point of it? I'll probably leave them sooner or later. This type of stuff seems endless to me, I'd rather stay alone than be hurt by others. It's already been ten years and I've never stayed in the same city for more than a year. What's the reason for that you'll ask me? Is it because of my eyes? These eyes that see things they shouldn't see... I dunno, because of my ears. These ears that hear what they shouldn't hear. Who knows. Sometimes I wonder if I was somehow cursed by a higher being for my sins in my past lives.

It all started when I was 8 years old. My grandma, whom I admired and loved deeply, was murdered in an unknown way to others. She was often mocked and treated as a witch because she said she could see ghosts and evil spirits. I always found her speaking alone, and having conversations all day long with something or someone I wasn't able to see. I remember being reluctant to trust her, or just to ask her about what her power, if we can say that.

Since her death, I have gotten this ability, or rather this curse. I had mixed feelings about being able to see dead people. How could a little eight-year old girl manage to cope with all of these problems and awful visions? I wasn't able to sleep at night anymore. From that moment on, every ghost that I met, and couldn't avoid interacting with would stalk me and beg for my help, either to contact their significant other, their family or just to tell me their stories again and again... I learned later from one of these ghosts that my grandma died trying to protect me from an evil spirit. As I couldn't see ghosts before, this fact wasn't a possibility for me. I still remember her last words, they will be stuck in me forever.

- “Ayla, my dear, listen carefully to what grandma is about to tell you... You have to protect yourself from all evil spirits you may meet during the year you turn 18, everything will be okay just trust me.”

It was the weekend I slept in her house because mom had a business trip. At that moment I was alone with my grandma in my arms. The dew was still there making this scene even more dramatic and hurtful. No one to comfort me, no one who understood me as well as my precious grandma could...

This time we moved to Denver, Colorado. My mother had not been back here for at least twenty years. This was her hometown where she spent her entire childhood. She wouldn't admit it, but I could see the overwhelming joy on her face. I guess she must have missed it a lot. It was my first time in this city, in this state even. All I knew about the city is what I learned in history classes or through the internet, like the fact that the city was founded in 1858 or that the first gold pellets of the region were discovered here. My first impression was quite overwhelmingly agreeable. I liked the aesthetics of the city and its architecture. As a fan of Native American history, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the Denver Museum of Art had one of the largest collections of Native American art in the country. After we got settled, this would be the first place I visit. I thought I would even spend all my free time there to learn more about the fascinating culture of Native Americans.

* * *

My first day at my new school couldn't have been worse. My mom forced me to go to a private high school where we still wear uniforms. She knows I hate wearing skirts though. The girl's uniform was a black skirt, a white shirt with a vest over it plus a tie in the school colors : navy blue and yellow. It was my first day and I still managed to be late. When I arrived, all the students and the teacher were at the window. I was wondering why, but after a few moments, they found their respective seats. I had to introduce myself in front of the whole class. I hated it, all those eyes on me, scanning me from head to toe, looking for my slightest imperfections. Only after pronouncing my name did all my new *classmates* start chatting, finding my name unique and strange. These particular awkward moments make me hate new encounters the most. **Ayla Beatrix Striver.** A combination of words associated by my mother, Ayla which means moonlight in Turkish because I was born on a full moon night, according to her this moon sparkled with the most beautiful light she ever saw to welcome me on this earth. Beatrix comes from Latin and means the one who brings happiness. As if I was able to bring happiness to anyone. I wasn't happy myself.

* * *

During the lunch break, a girl from my class came up to me. She looked very arrogant and walked towards me with a confidence I had never seen before while staring straight into my eyes.

"Are you good at studying?" she asked.

Surprised by this unusual question I didn't know what to say and stood there without saying anything.

"I would like to be your friend for a long time but it will be hard if you die early." she continued.

"What is she even talking about?" I mumbled

"If you get bad grades in this school, you die. You saw the kid who jumped, right. He was guaranteed to come last in class this time, and just as we all expected..." She didn't finish her sentence.

I guessed that was why they were all in front of the windows when I arrived this morning. How could they stay so calm even knowing what had happened? I was wondering more and more about this school.

"So you're saying if you come last in class, you commit suicide?" I asked with a quaver in my voice.

"Well, it's not a suicide, but we can not say that it's a homicide either... In any case, you end up dying. That is why if you don't want to die, you must study as if your life depends on it because it is the case, here at East High School. She declared with a hint of sarcasm.

She had a smile on her face while saying these horrible things which left me wondering about her, her sanity, and about this school in general. I left her company and quickly headed back to class to avoid being around her.

The following morning, when I entered the school, everyone was looking at me with a suspicious eye. The rumors said that I was the one who had pushed the student that had died the previous day. Here I am again, a victim of these endless rumors. Strangely enough, I felt an indescribable pain inside me this time. What could it be? Maybe it came from my desire to stay longer in this city that I hadn't had the time to visit yet... It looks like we're not going to stay here very long either.

2. “Guilty”

There is this guy named Felix in my class, I don't know why, but he is a very intriguing person to me. He is depicted as the best student of the school. Always having the best grades in every subject. Moreover he is loved by everyone here, teachers as well as students see him as a role model to follow. But I feel that there is something wrong with him, I find myself uneasy every time we are together. Surprisingly there were always dozens of ghosts around him, it was the first time ever that I saw that many ghosts around one individual. Because of him I always find myself having to listen to the uncanny stories of the ghost, men, women, students, that were surrounding him. I felt **guilty** of being so interested in someone I shouldn't that I accepted my punishment, since everyone had their own stories. Stories of injustice and grudges someone ought to listen to...

“ It was a mistake.... ”

“ It wasn't my fault but yours... ”

“ After I got drunk, I jumped... ”

“ We were just waiting for the green light. Who could have known that the truck driver behind us was dozing off? ”

“ They said I'd ruin my husband. ”

“ How was I to know that this river was so deep? ”

I didn't know what to do, they all came the one after the other, and confessed their sins and how they died. I was confused, stressed out, sometimes I felt like I was losing my mind. I couldn't focus on my studies anymore and would be late at school every time.

It had been over a week now and I kept running into Felix on my way to school. Naturally he started talking to me, which made people jealous, and made them hate me and stare at me more often than usual. I realized that we actually lived in the same neighborhood, but since I was always late for school we never saw each other in the morning. But now everything was calming down and I could go to school on time so we always went to school together. The more he stayed close to me the more he noticed that I wasn't like the others, and being a fan of all things supernatural he started asking me about a lot of stuff, for instance if I could see wandering spirits? If I could communicate with the other world? He was quite a curious person. I was only starting to get his personality so I didn't know how to describe it yet. Tired of all his comments I ended up confessing to him that I had the ability to see and communicate with ghosts which delighted him and made him as excited as a child. He wasn't like all those zealots, being really obsessed with supernatural stuff so it was easier to speak with him. Sometimes I felt like we were real friends just like everyone else. So, to say the truth, I was really happy when he came to me in order to have a great conversation together, to ask me questions or just to be together...

“ I have been thinking about it all night, but something doesn't add up, you can see all the other spirits, but why can't you see the dead students' spirit? Haven't you seen them recently? ”

He was talking about the former students who were ranked last and ended up committing suicide again. I lied to him. I said that I couldn't see any ghosts in the school, which was the reason why I chose this school and I remained ambiguous in my words, so I wouldn't have to tell him the truth.

He was being too nosy about it. However I forced myself not to say anything about the ghosts in the school to Felix. So I gave him a cold look and didn't answer his question.

" What's wrong with you? " He asked with a surprised look, and with a shaking voice. As if he had said or done something terrible to me, unintentionally.

I sighed and answered : " I am sick of talking about spirits and ghost and anything related to this subject. SO Just drop it, OKAY?! "

I know that I was being really rude to him since he was just too curious and he hadn't done or said anything rude or hurtful to me. As I was turning away I could see that he was sad and the smile he had on his face since we had met was starting to vanish little by little.

I walked by the place where that boy had fallen the day I arrived. We could still see stains of his blood on the stones there. I couldn't believe that I had been the witness of such a crime on my first day. I was late that day, I arrived precisely when he jumped from the rooftop. He came to me as soon as he had become a ghost because I was the only person around.

" What happened? Am I dead? I didn't do it. I didn't want to die. I was so scared, " he said without giving me the time to answer all his questions. I kept walking. When I got inside the building itself I heard a shrill scream, and turned around to see that ghost burning and fading into the air. I didn't want to tell Felix about it because I was scared that this guy may have been his friend and that he would be afraid to be by my side. He is my only "friend" there and I didn't want to lose him. Even though we shared different values, we constantly managed to find some common ground.

* * *

That evening, he waited for me at the end of the classes and apologized at the second he saw me. In front of the whole school. I was so embarrassed, I just kept on walking. He followed me until we were alone. While walking, a drunk man ran into us and made me fall into Felix's arms. We accidentally exchanged a kiss. It was our first kiss. He imagined that this kiss would change everything and that his life would no longer be the same.

3. “Let go”

The next day he came to me and asked for an explanation.

“ Why am I now able to see ghosts, how is it even possible? ” He asked.

I thought it was out of anger and that he was mad at me and would treat me as everyone had treated me in the past, until...

“ Wow that’s so cool, this is the best thing that ever happened to me. Thank you, Ayla. ” He said
Then he stayed at my place asking me countless questions .

* * *

On my way to my classroom, I overheard a really strange conversation and I stayed longer to be able to hear more.

“ Principal, we should stop this, what will we do if we get caught? ” My head teacher said.

“ Nothing will happen, we have the power. Just do as I tell you to. ” The principal continued.

“ But using this kind of method and killing all the students who got the worst grades only to scare the others and make them work harder isn’t right. ”

“ But it keeps our school first, it makes the parents donate to our school and makes their children enroll in our school, so just stop being stupid and do your work. ”

I quickly stepped out as the teacher was coming towards the door and went to see Felix. The teacher came before I could say anything. He walked in slowly and stood there without saying a word.

“ Mr. Collins. Did someone in our class get the lowest scores at this test? ” a classmate asked.

Everyone looked at each other with scared eyes, a deadly silence haunted the room for a long time.

“ Mr. Collins, please tell us. ” another classmate asked.

“ Felix Rex. ” he answered unwillingly.

“ Don’t tell us who has the highest scores. Tell us about the one with the lowest scores. ”

I always forget that Felix has the highest scores in our school. How can I remember? He is always being silly with me.

“ What is this? How come did you get the lowest scores? ” the teacher shouted.

Everyone was so shocked by this piece of news.

After the classes ended, I went to find Felix and I was mad at him.

“ Why did you do this? Are you stupid? You know that the one who scores the lowest kills himself, right... What are you doing? ”

“ Don’t worry! I know what I am doing. ” he answered.

“ How can you be so sure? What do you know that I don’t? Explain ‘cause right now it’s hard for me to understand you Felix. ”

“ Actually, I know who is behind all this and I’ll do my best to stop him. ”

“ What? How? Did you hear the Principal too? How can you be so sure? ”

“ Not the Principal, but my Dad. I got to overhear a conversation he had on the phone. You can not imagine how surprised I was. So for the sake of all those who died. I decided to confront him. ”

“ Please let me help you, I won’t let you die like the others. When I entered this school I sensed a very strong evil energy, you won’t be able to fight it. But if we both do, we may stand a chance. ”

* * *

The very next day, when all the preparations ended, Felix and I came to school to fight that evil spirit. The strongest I ever had to fight. Each wound in the monster delivered a soul he had eaten, all these innocent spirits would now be able to rest in peace.

I was into doing this job properly until I saw a very familiar face. As I went towards this soul I started crying. This familiar face was my grandma. She was there, looking at me and smiling. She took my hand and helped me eradicate the evil spirit. Although it was in a very weak voice, I could hear her say that she was proud of me as she was disappearing.

* * *

As incredible and strange this story may seem, it was my story. Now it's your turn to tell me yours.

Anais
coupeP



M A N I X

1. “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about my new vacuum cleaner, I was wrong. The gigantic billboard in front of my window introduced it as the best, for only one hundred and fifty dollars. At first, I was reluctant to buy it, I already owned four other vacuum cleaners, but this one was different: it was brand new. I don't think it's too many, everybody needs a new vacuum cleaner. Otherwise why would the billboard have told me that I needed it? I think my desire of buying new things is endless, but I might like that, if not, I wouldn't have bought all of these things. It's fascinating how buying a new object makes me happy, or at least in the moment. Well, I can't sleep. I thought that buying the perfect navy blue couch would have helped me to sleep better, or maybe I just need a new TV.

My life is perfect. I think. I wake up every morning, loving the refreshing, pleasant dew that I can feel through my perfect window. I cook in my perfect kitchen, the last ultra modern model, the best one according to the ad I saw on my way to IKEA. All the furnitures have the perfect design and the perfect colour, which is a magnificent red. I sit in my perfect couch, in front of my perfect TV, extra 4K HD for only a thousand dollars, the best one according to the ad I saw one day on my old TV. I eat in my perfect plates, with all the perfect set that goes with it. It's the best one for my guests, even if I don't have any. My walls are white, a perfect white, decorated by perfect paintings. I also like my perfect brown table, and my perfect chair. Everything's perfect.

Buying my first couch had been the genesis of all these needs. I remember that day, it was October 15th 2012. Damn, it felt great. I was peacefully walking on the street when I saw it through a store window. This couch had to be mine. And all the set which goes with it: the table, the chairs and everything. This set was called “Riesman's set”. I never understood why all the furnitures

stores have to give weird names to their set. But it's my name, so this set was meant to be mine. Until then I never stopped buying objects to feel better. If I'm sad, I buy a new lamp. If I'm happy, I buy a new table. If I don't have any emotion, I buy nothing, so I feel sad, and I buy another lamp. Once I thought I might have a problem with buying things. Nevermind, I bought a new carpet.

2. “Guilty”

On a random morning, I woke up very happy. I didn't know why, but I was. I had great feelings about that day, I was sure that something perfect would happen. I was right. On my way to IKEA, I was so focused on what new thing I would buy (as always) I didn't see I was running into THAT girl. The girl who could save me from my insomnia. Usually, I would have kept on walking without even looking up. But I felt something really strong about her.

Now that I saw the one who will marry me, I no longer have this kind of pain in me that is keeping me away from sleeping. But even if I'm sure she's the love of my life, my feelings are still ambiguous. To be sure that I loved her, I decided to use the same way every day, just to see her. Once I think she recognized me, she even smiled at me. If that is not a sign that she loves me back I don't know what is one.

She's obviously the kind of girl who doesn't like to be disturbed. She walks with a determined pace, the gaze focused on her goal of just walking. She has values. I know it. Probably the same as mine. It's logical, since she's the love of my life. She's kind, soft, sophisticated, anyway: perfect. Her outfit was meaningful: a long brown coat, a short black skirt, a black sweater and a delicate golden necklace for only jewellery. It obviously proves that she takes care of her looks. She's meticulous, just as me when I go buy a new vacuum cleaner.

I waited a couple of weeks before daring to talk to her. But I couldn't stop her in the middle of the street, I would have felt **guilty** disturbing her day. So I decided to follow her until she stopped at a coffee shop, Then, I talked to her. I first said “Hi”. And she said “Hi, do I know you?”, and I instantly got back to my house. It went pretty well I think. Her voice was perfect, unctuous. I had to know her better, but I couldn't dare to disturb her again. This time, I decided to follow her to her house to know where she lives. I hid myself, waited her to go out, checked if there were any passers-by, then got in. I was extremely disappointed. Her house was empty as hell. No TV, no chairs matching with the table, no forks set. And she didn't have that new vacuum cleaner! I

wanted to scream like a zealot.

After this horrible deception, I went back to my house and cried. I thought I was becoming crazy. It couldn't be true. She had cured me from my insomnia, but it was already back, I couldn't sleep any more. That was her fault. Only HER fault. I couldn't even go to IKEA, because I knew I was going to see her again. I was heartbroken, and I couldn't even buy a new table. I didn't know what to do. Was the problem IKEA, or was it the girl? I decided to go with the easy solution: get rid of IKEA. So at night, I took a big jerrican of gas, I went to the store, and burned it. Completely. There was nothing left, except my crazy mind thinking I made an enormous mistake: that was the girl I had to get rid of.

3. “A poem”

I made my decision. I had to kill the girl. I was not going to change my mind. I should have done this since the beginning. The day I first saw her I should have punched her in the face and thrown her in a trash can. People on the street would probably have been scared, throwing a stranger in a trash can is a little unlikely. Well, I’m not a psychopath, I’m not going to do that. I’m not Ted Bundy, I don’t kill girls for no reason. And I don’t rape them either. Here I had a reason. And a good reason. So I’m not a killer. Not really.

I had to make a plan to kill her. I wanted to do this properly. I wanted to do this like a pro. I started to think all day, at least I wasn’t thinking about IKEA. After days, I finally found my plan, but before applying it, I had to know why she was like that. Why would she keep an old vacuum cleaner instead of buying a new one? I instantly went to her house to question her. I rang her bell, she opened the door.

“Hi? Do I know you?” She said to me without knowing that I would probably be the one who would kill her.

“No you don’t know me, but I have a couple of questions for you” I said to her with a perfect smile so I wouldn’t scare her.

“OK I’m listening to you” she said

“Well, you see I have the impression that you’re the type of person who keeps the same furniture for too long even if a better and more recent version is available and I want to know why.” I said to her without a stammer. I was sure about everything I would say, that was a part of my plan.

“Are you a salesperson? Because, if you are, I’m not interested. I don’t buy new things because I don’t like to throw away objects that will end up scattered all over the world.” She said before slamming the door at me.

I had no doubt anymore. She was the devil in person. My plan could continue the way I had imagined it. The first part was to talk to her, so I that could be totally sure that I had to kill her. The

second part was to kill her.

I waited for the night to fall and I took my knife, the new one from the last knife collection. It's well sharpened, perfect to kill someone. Then I went outside in the darkness

, and walked towards her house. The wind was blowing, but blowing so hard that a piece of paper slapped me right in the face. I looked at it, there was a poem written on it.

“Like the ocean, you are blue”

That was not a great poem, I didn't like it. I was about to throw it away, but I saw that there was another poem behind.

“Be brilliant, be beautiful

But be smart

Killing the devil isn't easy

It's a creep which will haunt you in your sleep

Go back on your feet

Before getting eaten by the beast”

I preferred this poem, even though it was scary. But I was fearless. I threw the piece of paper away and kept on walking.

4 - “Let go”

After walking about ten minutes, I found myself in front of her house. I was well prepared. I took a deep breath and knocked at her door. She opened it innocently, without knowing what was going to happen to her.

“I recognize you! You’re the salesman who came today! What are you doing at my house in the middle of the night? Go away, I don’t want any of your furniture!” She said to me furiously.

“I’m not a salesman, I just want to talk to you, that’s all” I said, thinking that she would accept.

Actually, she slapped the door to my face. I was shocked. I really thought that she was going to let me in to talk. Maybe she was not like the others. I had to find another plan.

I simply broke into her house through the window. That was pretty easy. Well, easy for me, I’m a pro. I was now in her kitchen while she had probably already gone back to sleep. I went upstairs to her room. Fortunately she was already sleeping. I approached her bed, raised my knife above her, prepared to kill her.

At this precise moment I was so happy. My life was going to be complete, I was going to achieve what I was meant to achieve. She had broken my heart, I had to stab hers. That was the obvious way for me to be happy again; to heal, in a certain way.

Right before I had the time to stick my knife into her chest, she swiftly opened her eyes and looked straight into mine. Her look was so cold and so sharp that I almost peed on myself. Instead, I just cried as loud as I could, let my knife fall out of my hands and fell on my butt. She pushed her sheet away letting me see that she also had a bunch of knives and other sharp objects.

I was so surprised that I tried to get up and run, but she jumped on me and grabbed my foot. We were now both on the floor, both fighting for my life.

With a simple kick I managed to pull my foot out of her hands. I got up and ran away but as soon as I was up, she was too. She ran at me, stabbed me in the back and finished me on the floor. She stabbed me once, twice, three times in the chest before I passed out.

The poem was right, she was the devil. Maybe killing her wasn't a good idea after all. While she was stabbing me again and again, I was still thinking about this poem. I especially thought about the verses: "Go back on your feet, before getting eaten by the beast". I obviously didn't manage to get back on my feet and she's obviously the beast. Now, I wonder what she is going to do with my body. Is she going to have me as a kebab?



Seth of Santo Padre

Jocelyn Arnold

1. “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** when my boss gave me the control of Arizona... But this is not how the story started, it started way before.

My name is Seth “Enciado”, this is not my real last name, I don’t know my last name, I lost every contact with my biological family when I was 5, I don’t remember anything about them. I’ve been raised in a drug cartel in Mexico more precisely by Carlos and Julia Menendez. They raised me as if I was their own child, I had everything I needed , I’ve always eaten and drunk enough, the only thing about my childhood – that I knew of - that was a bit different than the other boys, was that I was taught to be a huge drug dealer... So now you’re a bit more familiar with that story. Last January our chief Diego Garcia more known as the “Padrino” asked me to develop the business in the US, and I don’t know how but my name came out to manage that project. For a long time I have been reluctant to do it because I was still a missing kid for the American government but then the cartel made me understand that I didn’t really have the choice, and my American journey started that way. We’ve had a difficult beginning, our strategy was simple, maybe too simple, they only told me to conquer Arizona through the country land, not really accurate...

“ So my team and I, went... ”

“ Your team? Who are the members of your team? ”

“ Hmm, well there was big Joe, Joe Castilla, Juan Pablo, Mario “el Bendero” Hernandez, Corto Hernandez, Mario’s older brother but everyone called him Luigi because of Mario, and Henrique but for him I don’t remember his last name, I’m not sure he has one. ”

“ So my team and I went to Arizona that beautiful state in the south of... ”

“ We know American geography. Please Faster. ”

“ Relax guys, we have time! ”

So we went from farm to farm to stay discreet but we were already shipping our meth through the whole state. We were working like blue collars in the 30's; we started working early in the morning, so early that we could see the dew while we were in the desert, and when we finished the sky was navy blue, our day seemed endless.

In February my friend Benjamin Dito was sent to Tucson to help us. I'm very close to Ben, we've been raised together, I didn't feel threatened by him...

" Mr Seth... hmm we don't have time if you still want the justice immunity you have to... "

" You know before, I was fascinated by guys like you, now I know you're cowards. I want to call my lawyer. "

2 - “Guilty”

“ So as I said Ben arrived in February and the situation just went out of control... ”

“ With the Phoenix Cripz*? ”

“ No, no, no, it started with the stupid little Nazis, a little group of white zealot thugs, which was only known for some robberies facts at that time. ”

“ (...)Seth you know you don't have to snitch that much on them, we'll have problems, and you know I'm good at doing my job so don't make it easier for everybody and sh*** your mouth. ”

Now speaking louder to the inspectors. “ Well I think we're done for today guys. ”

“ It's always a pleasure to see you Brandon. ”

Brandon Scherbatsky, my lawyer and friend, he was the exact type of guy you absolutely want on your side and not the opposite, he was a king among gods. As you just understood I... or maybe We, They? have been caught. Anyway from the moment we worked with the fourth Reich, things got f***** up, they were amateurs, real country people with guns. They were supposed to pass the product from point A (usually from the frontier with Mexico) to point B (which could be Arizona) but after the third incident in four go-fast sessions, we fired them... And in this world, everything is violent so they threatened us and the cartel, they told us that they would kill us and take the meth to deliver it again. Few weeks later we found one of our farms empty and broken into; they had left no traces and unfortunately no witnesses, for once they had learned from their mistakes (Nervously laughing).

From that moment on, the cartel switched to secured mode, there no longer were any contact outside of our crew allowed except for business. We all knew that those rules would never be respected, and the DEA started investigations about our activity. The atmosphere became weirder, the fight between the two sides were becoming more and more violent each time, the cops-thugs relationship was fiercer than in “Heat” with De Niro and Al Pacino. It was too tough to handle so I gave up the organisation to go talk to the cops with Brandon. Dishonored. **Guilty** but free .

cripz*= famous real gang in the United States

3 - “A poem”

And that was it, everything I had known until then had just disappeared, I was experiencing a strange mindset, split emotions, I felt ashamed, lonely but also free not only in front of the law, I was, like, liberated from a pressure I had always felt.

While my ex-friends were getting in troubles instead of myself, I didn't know where to go or just where to live... So like so many young adults, I came back to my parents' house, I needed it.

I feared my dad's reaction because he had always wanted me to be the most influent drug dealer in the world like the number 1 on the FBI's list and as I was finally becoming that person, I left .

Unlikely as it could seem my two parents were super glad I visited them, they had been living far from the cartel for several years. For weeks... we talked a lot, we all knew that this transition period couldn't last forever, one day the cartel would hire someone to shoot me, I had to leave without looking back... The night before I left, I went up to the attic, it's a dark place where my parents store basically everything and that night there were pictures scattered on a box I had never seen before, pictures of my biological parents, and it was as if I had fallen back into a lost childhood, a ton of memories came back to me, of my mom telling me stories before going to bed, playing baseball with my father... I didn't know they had those photographs, I was frustrated to discover them only now but on the other hand they shouldn't have told me before this ordeal. On the back of one of the pics I was holding, something was written:

*“Consume as energy
to raise your kids
as they gave you
to live...”*

4 – “Let go”

I was happy. It's kind of weird to discover happiness for the first time as an adult. My plan was basically to leave the country on a sailboat, I didn't find anything less original, it will look like the end of a James Bond movie when the bad guy or the traitor gets to leave on his luxury yacht. I just had to pack my luggage and kiss my parents before leaving.

* * *

It was 3 pm when Seth left his parents' house after he kissed them for the last time. He drove his truck to the harbour, but on the way, at a crossroads, a bike stopped next to him, the biker shot him twice, one bullet in the heart and the other in the throat, he bled to death.

His friend Ben made it and escaped from the control of the cartel, as crazy as it may seem, he lived quite a traditional life years after, he got married and had a nice house with three beautiful children.

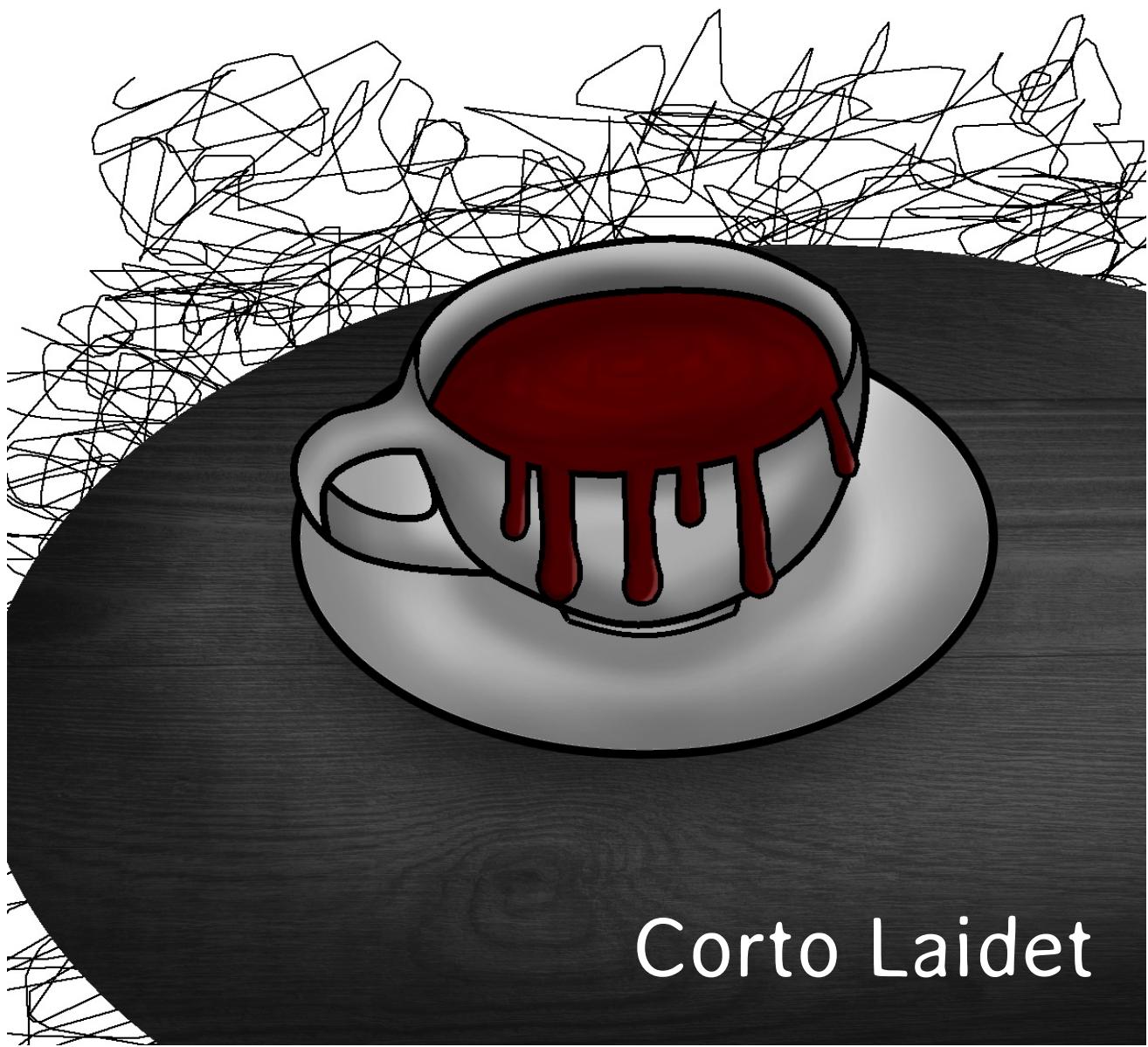
As in the legend of the brothers of Santo Padre, 2 kids, brothers, not blood brothers, but brothers by heart, raised the same way, to accomplish the same goal, but one is “bendito”, he is blessed and the other is “sentenciado”, condemned... People say that this legend would repeat three times, they were the second generation. The first brothers lived in the 19th century : Seth died in the Camerone battle in 1863 and Ben created the national Mexican bank. Who knows when the next brothers will be born, maybe they're already alive, it's been a while since those last two died...

My mother and my grandmother used to tell this story in the village and now it is my turn to tell it to the new generations.

The cartel is another ordeal to overcome for the third generation, the cartel must not be aware of this story.

And the babies fell asleep...

the **devil** is
in the **details**



Corto Laidet

1 - “Great expectations”

“ I have **great expectations** about tonight! ”

These were the first words that Michael said that Monday morning because a great encounter can be the end of his routine for ever...

Life is full of different people, there are musicians, intelligent people, strong people or also all the special people. But Michael he is very, very simple. He is 28 years old and he lives on his own with his cat named “Miaou” on a little apartment located in a small town next to London, and he works at the Vintage shop. His life is based on a simple routine : every morning he would wake up at 6:30 AM, have a shower, put on his most beautiful navy blue shirt with a great tie, black jeans and some funny socks with plenty of colours. After that he would select a cool mug, (today was the David Bowie mug) and put some hot water in with a tea bag out of the collection that he loves so much.

He was fascinated by tea and his collection was endless, he got precisely 1738 types of different flavours and everyday he would enjoy one of those. He peacefully drinks his favourite tea while watching a comic show like “Rick and Morty” on TV. In the background, he could stare at a view of his little garden with the dew reflecting on the grass, he really liked those minutes of happiness every morning and sometimes like today, his cat Miaou would come to claim some love.

Talking about Michael's expectations, one week ago, he was surprised to find a piece of paper with a phone number and the drawing of a heart. At the beginning he was reluctant to send a message, he said to himself that it may be a serial killer who wants to kill him violently... But after a night exchanging messages with the stranger, he discovered that it was a girl named Olivia and she wanted to meet him in real life the following Monday.

D-Day !

Michael needed to go to work, he put on a good pair of loafers and he was ready to go.

On the road he was used to listening to some cool music like Jazz to start a good day. After a 25-minute drive, he eventually arrived at the Vintage shop, ready to tidy the place up and advise clients, discuss Music, Art or Clothes. This day at work was really good, but now it was time for Michael to meet his mysterious date.

A certain Olivia...

How will the date go?

2 - “Guilty”

Michael was a little anxious about the date, she might have been a nice girl in text messages, but she may be awful in real life. It is only after seeing a person face to face that you know if the connection is real or not.

It was 5:10 PM, Michael was listening to some great “Tyler the creator” tracks on his speakers on his way to the date, which... the date was supposed to start at 5:00 PM...

“ Oh ****, she will hate me, I’m so late bro ! ”

He stepped on the accelerator to reach his destination faster.

Many minutes later, he looked at his phone, and he saw a notification :

Olivia :
Sorry, I will be late, my bus left me at the wrong place... Wait a little bit :)

Michael was so relieved after seeing this message. He saw the bar where the date was supposed to be.

“Love and Food”

Cool name for a first date. The good-looking man chose a table next to a chill fountain, he really hoped that he would be having a great time ! Suddenly, his eyes focused on a beautiful creature. She had silk-like hair, an angelic face, a charismatic oriental nose, an outfit that could be a part of the next Prada collection.

He had a chaotic conversation with himself : “ Wow, this is the first time in my life that I can witness perfection!! I can no longer fall in love with anyone else! ”

He was the witness of a crime scene, the murder of his heart, because she was so sublime and charismatic.

The angel walked towards him with a cute smile, and spoke to him :

“ Hi cowboy ! ”

“ Hey girl, we are both late ! Haha. ”

“ Ha ha, yes, life is full of pitfalls. ”

She sat in front of him, and stared at him with her beautiful light brown eyes.

Throughout the conversation, Michael discovered a lot of things about her : She was a women's rights activist and she had devoted a huge part of that week-end to a charity, and she gave 10% of her salary to “Action Against Hunger”.

“ She is a woman with values ” Michael thought to himself.

The beauty would always look at his eyes with passion. She laughed when he said that he was a tea-zealot and she answered that she liked it too. (which persuaded him that she was the One) Drinking hot chocolate and vanilla tea, we both felt that the relationship had already become ambiguous. One hour after, Michael was satisfied; all his doubts about her had evaporated, he had discovered an interesting part of her, she was educated, funny, had some kind of a temper and she liked tea !

The bar was about to close, the two lovebirds had to say goodbye, but :

“ Michael, I have something important to tell at you... ”

“ What is it ? ”

“ I'm **guilty** of a murder... ”

Michael disconnected for a second.

3 - “A poem”

This sentence rang in my head like a joke, and I found it hard to believe.

“ Hahaha... You’re pulling my leg right ? ” I asked.

“ I would like to but no, I killed a fucking man. ”

She may have had that special sense of humour ? I’m gonna get into this game only to know if she is serious or not.

“ Okay, so how did you kill this man and who was he ? ”

“ A random guy that I had met through a dating application, he forced me to meet him in real life so I planned a meeting in an isolated place, and 12 stab wounds later, that was that.”

Damn, she has some imagination to invent a story like that, but it may all be fake. I shouldn’t make her think that I’m afraid of her.

“ Where is the body ? ”

“ In the darkness of my cellar... Are you afraid of me now? ”

I don’t think this is a joke anymore...

“ I see, you’re like the female and modern version of Jack The Ripper, take me to this place and I will help you hide the body. ”

I still have a slight hope that this is simply a seduction mindgame, and that she killed nobody.

She smiled at me.

We took my beautiful car and she gave me the location data, I was under the impression that it was merely his house address but I was not 100% sure.

“ Oh, you also like Radiohead ? ” she asked me when she saw one of the albums in my car.

“ A lot, this is the type of music my dad raised me with. ”

I loved them, I have a lot of their records scattered in my apartment.

When we got there, I felt she was very confident if she was ever really a murderer, the only reason would be that she was psychopath.

“ Right here buddy! ”

We got out of the car in a typical London neighbourhood, it was dark and damp so I began to feel a little uncomfortable. Olivia took me next to an old building and she offered me to go in there first. I found the courage to open the door.

The interior was very dirty and dilapidated, I saw a small hatch that I opened without suspecting that the next step would be unlikely.

Walking down the stairs to the basement, she started telling me something:

**“ Sometimes life can be hard.
And I don’t want to join a cult.
So to satisfy my needs,
I kill.”**

When suddenly I saw a silhouette in the distance...

4 - “Let go”

Okay, let's take a step back from this situation.

I'm with this strange girl that I found attractive, but damn she took me to a dilapidated room of an old building !

Maybe she likes the combo with dark and romantic atmosphere...

And now she tells me that she likes to kill for her personal pleasure, bro what the ****??!!

Anyway, I still can't visualize the silhouette lying down in the dark.

The more I approached this shadow, the more I was able to distinguish the details, I thought that was a garbage bag!

“ Girl... , what is that ?! ”

“ Oh haha, it's just my friend Henry ” she replied

I really felt insecure.

“ So... Could you help me to hide my friend's body ? ” she asked.

“ What does it mean ? ”

“ It means that you need to take this dead body and find a way to make it disappear, understand? ”

“ No... no! I don't want to be a part of this murder! ”

“ Ok, so you leave me no choice... ”

“ What ?! ”

“ Glad to have known you, boy, you were cute though... ”

Madison.

A novel by Lou-Ann Onillon



1. “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** regarding my lifestyle. Being a wife, having a baby, a fine job, a nice house, were some of them. I hadn't realized that life wasn't going to be that easy.

I hate the dark. I wish night wouldn't exist. I always feel oppressed... and observed. That's why, every morning I get up early in order to avoid any darkness. During these fresh times, the dew is ubiquitous.

Although I mightily despise the dark, I rather like the cold. Feeling tiny drops running down my fingers right after I touch a leave is an enjoyable sensation. It immediately sends chills down my spine, a little bit masochistic I have to say. I take my time, trying to appreciate every second of this peaceful moment. Because these moments are rare. Indeed, I never feel appeased. Something has been bothering me for quite a while now. I still haven't figured out how it could have started, and actually I'm not planning on finding out its origin.

* * *

After I've enjoyed my heaven-like moment, I keep walking on an unknown path. An endless one. Like a maze. A maze I would be trying to solve, to get out of. I have to admit, the city fits this description pretty well, I'm not making anything up, its paths surely are unsure. New York is actually considered as a concrete jungle by some. But I'm not afraid. I don't mind getting lost unless it gets late. However, the one thing I don't dislike about the dusk is the color the sky turns into. I love to gaze at a navy blue sky, cloudless, smokeless, fogless, basically empty. I adore emptiness. A fascinating feeling I unfortunately rarely experience. My mind is never at peace with itself. It's making me sick. I know it won't ever let me be. Oh how I wish my burden could be leavened. How I wish I could leave the earth once and for all. Hopefully I'll find a way.

* * *

I'm facing a building. I was wandering in the streets, without any purpose, not looking for anything. And here I am, in front of an old and dirty-looking bar. It reminds me that I should be looking for a job, now that I have to look after myself. I should also look for an apartment, now that I live alone. I need money and less space in the house. That's a new entry on my list.

* * *

I am now entering a forest, a deep and desperate looking one. To me, the trees and branches' present state are like death. They're all crooked up, intermingled, losing their leaves, falling apart. I hesitate a moment but eventually decide to enter this gloomy place. No wonder no one's here at this time of the day. I'll have to roam through alone. Not a problem for me, but rather a relief. I don't like starting conversations with people anymore. I feel as if I was an actress in a black and white silent movie. The trees are gray, the leaves are colorless, my clothes are black and silence is ringing inside my head. I only hear the sound of my steps. A feeble breeze passes through my hair. Then again, it sends a chill down my spine. That felt refreshing.

* * *

A lake is at my feet. A wide, dark, and seemingly deep one. I feel a profound desire to take a step and fall in it. My mind is reluctant to do it, but my body says otherwise. My reason tells me to stay, my heart tells me to go. I'm facing a contradiction. But my legs don't give me enough time to reflect on this any longer. I feel my fall coming, but I don't want to prevent it from happening. I feel damp, cold, and out of breath, but it feels... good.

2 - “Guilty”

Beat.

I've always loved my husband. So deeply. So passionately. He was so kind, so loving, so sweet. I don't wish he was still here. We spent amazingly wonderful days together.

We met during a sunny afternoon in summer. We were both young, looking for experiences but more importantly, love.

Ô love! How pleasing you are! How ambiguous you are! How hurtful you are!

We settled down after several months spending our free time together, envisioning our future, together. We wanted to be one. Consequently, we married shortly after getting a modest house. We desired a child, a baby, a third wheel on our carousel. How dreamy my life was. I was repulsed, cherished. My husband would ~~hook~~ hold the door for me. My husband would ~~slap~~ caress my cheek at night. My husband would ~~strangle~~ kiss me gently when he came home.

In our delightful life a new being arrived. He brought even more joy in our lovely merry-go-round of a life.

* * *

Looking for an apartment is a demanding task. Especially in big cities like New York. Either you get a desolated, dusty, creaking flat or you get an overly expensive one. There's no in between. But I eventually fell for a, paradoxically, desolated little house. It did look old, dusty and creaking, but it had a strong charm I couldn't describe. I was drawn to it. It was remote from the center of the city, just what I needed these days. I planned on restoring it but my mind was filled with too many intrusive thoughts to bother doing this.

* * *

Beat. Beat.

Our love never deemed. It remained as strong as it had always been. However, everything took a tragic turn when this happened: my two cherished angels died. My poor boy and husband died. Both of them died. They died. They were no longer part of my world. I felt hatred, anger, and confusion. But I became tormented. Something was off. I couldn't explain it.

We didn't get our happy ending.

I ended up in a trial. Fortunately, I was found not **guilty** of my family's death. No one had witnessed the event, thus, the judges didn't have enough evidences to hold charges against me. I have to say, I've always been a woman of values and manners, how would anyone think of me as a murderer? A crazy person? A zealot? Me? Ha ha! How funny that would be.

* * *

My house is situated near the gloomy forest I saw last time. I will get to spend a lot of time on my own, entirely alone, with not a single soul disturbing my inner peace.

* * *

Beat. Beat. Beat.

He's dead. My son is dead. He left me. Him too. They all left without my permission. How dare they? We had a perfect life together. Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. How? Why? Did the Lords of the holy Skies decide to do this? I don't deserve such an end. I want them back. I need them back. Let them come back. I didn't do anything wrong. I. Didn't do. Anything. Wrong.

* * *

I unwillingly walk past my previous house, full of dark and haunting memories. I stand there for a minute. I thought I would be dwelling on the past while looking at this facade. But actually, my mind is completely empty. I cannot think of anything. I am desperately numb. I turn my back and walk in the opposite direction. My legs carry me around.

A few moments later, the forest is right in front of me. Without having the time to process my inexplicable arrival, my eyes start tricking me. A shadow. I saw something. I'm suddenly running. I can't lose it. My heart is pounding hard, and my blood flow struggles to provide enough energy to my body. I would like to stop. If this unknown will wasn't here to keep my legs moving, I would have already fallen face flat on the ground.

The lake. Again. The shadow. Standing still on the other side. I force my eyes to focus on this silhouette. A boy. It's a little boy. Who is he? Why did he lead me here? Another shadow appears behind him. It looks like a male grown-up. It starts strangling the seemingly little boy. Why am I staring at such a thing? I shouldn't be here. One last figure arrives. A woman. She starts beating, and beating, and beating them.

They're gone.

3 - “A poem”

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH.

I grunt ferociously. One could probably mistake me for a wild animal. I take my head between my hands and press it. Press it hard. I want it to stop. I'm going mad. That's for sure and certain. My scattered thoughts are driving me crazy. I scream relentlessly. I feel my vocal chords irritating my throat. Ugh, what an unpleasant feeling. But it's not the most appropriate moment to ponder on such a thing, is it? I don't dare looking up. I don't dare picking at the scene I just witnessed. What if they were still there? Ready to take me away with them? I yell from the top of my lungs.

...

I can't.

...

I have to.

...

FUCK IT!

...

There... They're still here... Giving me a dead stare. I mutter some unintelligible words. I point them with my finger, just like a child would.

“ Miss... are you okay? ”, a feeble voice asks me.

“ Why are you asking you stupid bitch, ” I think to myself. “ Do I look okay to you? ”

I'm the one giving a dead stare now. Out of fright, she takes a step back, then two, and another. Fear is invading her. I see her hand searching into her pocket. She takes out her phone. Tss tss tss, that's not how you help people out! Your mindset isn't great I must say. She starts dialing, with difficulty, her hands are shaking terribly. I know what you're doing, you brat. I know you're calling them. You won't get away with this. I let my arm down, still glaring at her trembling body. She looks so weak and harmless. Poor thing. I stand up, arch my back towards her, and move forward. Now I look like a zombie. I need to catch her phone. Too late, a voice responds. I've been located. The panicking girl stutters. The words don't come out. I see an opportunity. I say out loud :

“ They're here for me. Evil ones. They're going to carry me away. You need to come right now. RIGHT NOW. ”

I hang up, and wait. Patiently and eagerly at the same time. They will soon be gone. The girl had dropped her phone and left in the meantime.

* * *

They're finally here. I had been quietly sitting at the same spot. I stand up and indicate where the daunting figures are. They haven't moved. Great, easier to catch them.

What are they doing? Why aren't they responding to my request? They look worriedly into each others' eyes. They nod swiftly and grasp my body and arms. I'm trapped. I should have known. I should have known they wouldn't have believed me. I slowly lose consciousness. It must have been the prick I just felt. A needle... It must have been... a needle...

* * *

I come back to my senses. My eyes start to adjust to the flashing lights. It's greenish. A dull color. Makes me want to vomit. Why am I wearing white? Solely a light cloth over my body? Why are my feet rubbing the floor? Why am I being dragged?? Do you think I'm a slave or a Native during the Trail of Tears? I start panicking. I look around and see several people who could be compared to me, if it was not for their mad behavior. I try to scream, but a tight cloth in my mouth prevents me from doing so. I struggle, trying to free myself. Suddenly, out of the blue, I hear a melody in G major:

**"Daisy, darling, don't dare defending yourself,
Go sleep quietly on your shelf.
Your presence here is unlikely,
Reach out to us and you'll see,
Darkness will turn into light,
Because your friends in the middle of the night,
Will help you, signed, your knights."**

4 - “Let go”

Everything's silent, drowned in utter darkness. The sole window, placed too high above to be reached, provides a mere ray of moonlight. Not enough to keep me sane. I feel trapped. No. I am trapped. “We mean no harm” they said. But I am no fool. I've seen what they've done to everyone else. Those poor unfortunate souls. Manipulated. Brainwashed. Made completely blind and submissive. Still, some have kept a bit of common sense. They're smart enough to understand that help is needed. That we can help each other out. It's not over yet. I keep humming the song over and over. I mustn't forget it. I shall stay in bed as long as it takes to free me. I know they'll come. I know this song was meant for me. My knights will arrive in shining armor, ready to hop on a horse and run the hell out of here.

* * *

“Daisy... darling... on your shelf... Darkness will turn into light... in the middle of the night... Will help you...”

* * *

I freeze. I hear footsteps approaching. They become clear and loud. I knew they would come. I remain still, calm, patient. I won't move. No, I won't defend myself, just as they asked. The door creaks, opens slowly. I open my eyes just for a second... It's them, just as I had imagined. As bright as angels, ready to take me home, at last. They come closer. I feel a sting. Must be excitement. I keep my eyes firmly shut. Two of them carry me in their arms. I feel warm and protected. So much that tiredness, waiting around the corner, finally takes me away.

* * *

I am briskly awakened. Strong arms grab mine and take me out of... a car?! I try kicking those people. But it doesn't work. They lead me to a familiar bank... I recognize this place. Why are they taking me to the forest? Why there? The very place I fear and despise the most? This is torture. I close my eyes. Hoping the shadows have left by the time. But when I am forced to open them, my skin turns pale. The womanly figure's still beating and beating the other shadows. I shake and mutter.

They ask me to describe what I see. Why do they need me to do that? Is it not enough to see them with their own eyes? But I can't keep this to myself. I share everything with no hesitation. After my rather complete description, they take me back to the car. They seem to drive to another place. They're getting closer to my home. Why would they? They're definitely willing to make me insane. They break into my house, take me to the living room. They leave me standing here, more lost than ever. They start repeating my speech. Every image I described. All of a sudden, the nightmarish scene comes to life right in front of my eyes. My mind's completely fucked up now. I don't understand. Why would the shadows be here? It makes absolutely no sense. I get closer.

I recognize the smallest figure. My boy? My dear perished little boy. He has come to see me! I try holding him, but I stop when the tall and daunting figure starts beating him. However, he's quickly interrupted by a strangely familiar figure. I observe her. I recognize her, yet I don't. It's all so confusing. It... it couldn't be... no it can't be... I could not... I would not... no never... yet, there she is, standing in front of me, beating these two shadows I now recognize perfectly. My husband and my son. Laying dead on the floor. And me, on top of them, beating repeatedly. Endlessly.

I am the definition of a monster. I don't deserve to live. Tears run down my cheeks, I tremble and sob. What have I done? I didn't mean to... I... life was just not as I expected... I wanted it to be perfect... I suffered... so badly... and my poor, poor boy... We were both helpless... I saved him from an even more violent death.

I saved everyone. I am the good one here. I am not to blame. I... I... * thud *





The wood

Eloise PRINCE

1 - “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about my life. I'm in one of the biggest colleges of the world, in my bedroom with my roommate Emma. A morning of autumn before the biggest change of my whole life. First of all, let me explain a few things about my life. I was born and grew up in Germany from a German father and an Italian mother. I don't really have lot of memories of my childhood as I had amnesia until I was 8 years old.

I'm the typical white girl with blond hair and grey eyes, pretty small, whatever, nothing very important. Just the fact I'm the complete opposite of my parents. They are tall with brown hair and hazel eyes, I really don't know why I'm talking about that, I just found this funny but anyways... I don't have any siblings, which sometimes makes me feel very lonely. I think I have said enough about myself so now we can focus on how my life completely changed.

It was 8 am in our bedroom at the Moscow state university. The dew was all over our windows, Emma and I were on our phones and talking about the afternoon because we didn't have any classes. We had planned to go shopping and eat a cake somewhere. After an hour talking about everything and nothing, we decided to get up from our bed and start to get ready for a new day at school. I was wearing white jeans and a navy blue top and she was wearing a green dress. We were on our way to school when we saw the news.

Today was special for every Russian citizen, it was an anniversary, not a happy anniversary. The anniversary of an endless story. It's one of the most famous disappearances in Russia. A whole family who had disappeared along with their car in a wood. Something quite uncommon. I don't know why but I have always been fascinated by this story. I might have been attracted to it because the daughter and I looked the same.

The first time I saw a picture of her was in the newspaper. I was very surprised because she was me but older. Emma agreed with me instantly. She looked like a cousin or a sister of mine, honestly it's a little creepy but as we know we have 7 clones in the world, one of mine is a missing girl (which is not really cool). This day is a really bad memory for Russia and we can already feel it in the heavy-hearted atmosphere. I don't know why but although it had caught my attention, I was always reluctant to learn more about it. Emma interrupted my thoughts by grabbing my arms and starting to talking to me

“Tonight, we're going to the library.”

I looked at her, intrigued.

2 - “ Guilty ”

After a while, we did go to the library. We had a meal at our favorite restaurant in the center of Moscow. I loved Moscow, this city had such a daunting history. The USSR, the Cold War made it so interesting, even more so for a history student. We were walking and talking about our lives, boys, gossips, parties... However the atmosphere was really creepy and these conversations made us feel too cheerful on such a sadly famous day. A lot of people were staring at me, talking about me, but I could understand them.

I felt so bad for them. I felt **guilty**. You may find it stupid but I didn't know why I felt as if it was my fault if they felt like that. Emma saw it and tried to comfort me. She is my best friend so she knew I was sad when I saw sad people.

We had already arrived at the library. We went inside but no one was there. We took some newspapers which dealt with the disappearance of the family and sat down. It's crazy how nobody knew what happened to them, like they were no clues, nothing is clear. I just felt connected to them. Somehow.

After 2 hours of reading everything we could a woman came to us and started talking to us. She was so pretty. Her eyes were so beautiful. They were ocean blue. And her hair was grey and yet she looked so young I was so impressed by her.

« Hello I am Irina, I am the librarian. May I help you? »

I was to busy to answer so Emma replied.

« We are just reading about the Romanov family. »

Irina started to stare at us in a sad way. She tried to find her words and just told us

« I know a lot of things about it. I was here to classify every document about all this stuff. So if you want the whole story, I think I can help you. »

Emma and I looked at each other and we had already had the same idea. We wanted to know the secret. In fact we learned so many things and it was quite daunting.

Irina had been the school teacher for the kid of the family. The father Youri was an important diplomat but also an opponent to the then president Pladimir Voutine, a terrible dictator in Russia during an extended period of time. His wife Elena was a well-educated woman who wrote a lot of speeches for her husband. He got the ideas, she made it pretty.

The couple had two beautiful and smart kids. A boy Ivan and a girl Macha. Quite a few zealots would send death threats to them because they didn't share the same values. The night of the kidnapping was unclear. They were in their car, in the wood, on their way back home and they never reached their destination, they just vanished in the wood, without any witness.

The whole story was ambiguous, It could have been a kidnapping or they could have decided to leave the country for some political reason. As the story was unfolding, Irina was staring at me. Her last sentence gave me goosebumps all over my body.

“ They have another child. A girl. She was younger than the other kids when I was working for them. I'm sure she is alive and doesn't remember about that part of her life ».

Irina was so nice but she had been traumatized by this story. She was shy but very confident

about telling everything she knew. We had been in the library for 4 hours. Emma and I said goodbye to this strange new friend and went back home. We talked about it all as we were walking back to our room.

On the door step, we found a letter. My name was written on the envelope. I didn't know it yet but my life would no longer be the same. I took the letter, went inside and opened it. Inside there was a photo of me and my parents and just a sentence on the back.

"They are not your truth".

3 - “A poem”

It had been an hour since I opened the envelope. My stress level was so high, this day was so stressful, nothing made sense and this feeling of foreboding got bigger and bigger as the end of the day unfolded. My mindset was not great at all. This stuff scared me for real; Why me? I am just a student who wants to get good grades, hang out with my friends and live my own life without these burdensome thoughts.

All my thoughts were scattered. I didn't know what I had to do with them and it was making me feel so angry against myself. Emma looked at me and said

“ Do you remember when the lady at the library told us about the priest who taught religion to children? ”

Honestly, I didn't.

“ Yeah, of course! ”

She knew I was lying.

“ Maybe he knows something about this.”

She was right. It was 8 pm when we decided to go to the abbey.

The road was long, too long. After an hour we finally got there. The door was so heavy and we had some difficulties opening it. This place gave me a weird, dark, twisted feeling as if something really bad had happened there. We looked at each other and saw the fear in one another's eyes. The inside was pretty. It looked like lot of churches but I liked it.

After a while, the priest came to us. He seemed very calm and I wanted to trust him.

“ Hi, young ladies, what are you doing here at this time? ”

He was behind us, when we turned around, he watched me with a horrified face. Emma said:

“ This afternoon, we met Irina at the library Slavika. She told us about the Romanov tragedy. She explained that your gave religion classes to the children, so we wonder if you know something.”

This last sentence gave way to an awkward silence. After a while he said:

“ Yes indeed, I was a friend of the family. They were so kind. Lots of secrets were on their shoulders. First of all they are descendants of Nikolai Romanov the Russian tsar who was killed with his family on July 17th back in 1918. Just a little group of people knew about it. Even today we can't talk about it publicly.”

“ But you are actually talking about it with us right now” I said.

“ If Irina told you everything she knows I guess I can trust you and you have to know everything. Everyone should have known everything for a long time.”

This situation was so unlikely. Why did WE have to know about the whole story? We were two students fascinated by a random story. The priest kept talking.

“ The family got a lot of threats but not only by supporters of Pladimir Voutine but some people knew about their real background. They were targeted by the mafia and many others. I don't know what happened to them in the wood but I am pretty sure that they were kidnapped. One of the sisters was keeping a private diary. She was so smart for her age. He stood up to take the aforementioned diary. I looked at Emma and said :

“ Technically there was not only one girl”

She nodded. The priest came back and gave us the diary. Inside, a poem grabbed my attention instantly.

“Dear little A.
A piece of gold in my life
You are bright like the sun
No one can replace you in my heart
ti amo moltissimo
Or I love you so much

Your big sister”

4 - “Let go”

These seven lines made me feel like I was going to pass out. I might have a big sister and my parents may not be my real parents, my whole life is a lie but can I trust this piece of paper and this diary? I don't know who to trust right now. My life is shattered. Emma just stayed on her bed and stared at me for a long moment to let me understand everything that had happened to me. I eventually decided to look back at her and talk to her.

“ What should I do? Do you really think that I can trust this diary and these people who tell me their version of the truth? I don't know what I am supposed to do. ”

It was midnight. I took a deep breath and called my parents or maybe should I say the people who educated me to have some explanations about everything. Three rings and they answered:

“ Hi Honey! Why are you calling us at this time? ”

“ I have some questions to ask you. ”

“ Yes of course I am listening to you. ”

“ Are you my real parents? ”

“ What are you talking about? ”

“ You know this family who disappeared in Russia... Are they my real parents? ”

“ Darling... ”

“ Answer my question! ”

“ When I was younger, I could not get pregnant and your family had an accident. You had become an orphan. ”



Who I really am

Dylan Gandon

1 - “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations**, but they all vanished. This day should make me happy, but I'm not. This day should be the best day of September, but it's not. I really thought that this was my time, that things would change this year, that I could be more skillful. But I can still dream. I'm Jacob Viouslydumb, and here is my story.

It is September the 3rd, and it's time to go back to school for almost every student. I'm in a new school, in Cleveland, but my habits haven't changed. As usual I wake up at 7 A.M to have breakfast with my mom because dad has already gone to work... He works a lot for us. She always make me her strange carrot pancakes. She told me that carrots help to increase your skills, she knows so many things about cooking, I'm fascinated. When my awesome breakfast is over, I go back to my bedroom, I'm wearing my favorite black jeans, my beautiful white shirt and my brand new shoes. Now, it's time to brush my teeth! Oops... I put toothpaste on my shirt ... I will pick the red one today ... sorry grand ma... I promise i loved your gift! I'm now late because I had to change my clothes, I'm running around the whole house trying not to forget anything, I'm good at that unfortunately. I'm finally on my way out, still running but to the car now, but the grass was a little bit slippery and wet due to the dew.

After changing my clothes for the second time, I'm of course, late for school, on the first day...

Awesome.

I was struggling to find my class, when a teacher helped as I was actually close to tears, so imagine my face when I finally got to my classroom.

I had to sit next to a cute girl, named Clémence, she was brunette, square cut, with piercing eyes. I might have fell in love with her at first sight. At lunch time, since I don't know anyone, I decide to sit next to Clémence. Bad idea, I guess, I tripped over and all my food fell all over her. I lost all my chances with my crush, and my stomach is still empty... definitively not my day. However, as far-fetched as it may seem, Clémence came to talk to me after the bell at the end of the day. I was so anxious to just have a conversation with her, and I think she fathomed it. Her first words are :

“Nice navy blue shirt, and don't worry about what happened today, I always have clean clothes kept in my locker”.

At that point, butterflies had invaded my body, but surprisingly, I was reluctant to have this talk with Clémence. I was unable to say a single word, she has so much impact on me, how is this even possible? I have to tell all this to Sam, my older brother, but I'm too tired. For now I will just stay in my bed and think about Clémence until I fall asleep. This day was endless, but not as bad as it looked this morning.

2 - “Guilty”

Sam, my big brother, just came back from his school trip in New York. It doesn't matter if he's tired, I have to tell him what happened yesterday. He is a zealot of video games so I don't know if “girls” is a subject he's mastered yet. Concerning school, he is very clever, he's an example for the whole family, he studies law to become an attorney to fight against inequalities of all types. He was harassed during his childhood, and it impacted his professional ambitions.

He doesn't know anything about girls, the only girlfriend he had was a fake account on Facebook... Poor Sam. I guess I'll have to deal with this by myself, he only advised me not to stress or feel **guilty** if it doesn't work out between me and Clémence.

While I'm getting ready to go to school, I'm already thinking of what might happen at school when I get to meet Clémence again.

My thoughts of her are ubiquitous.

Today is a special day, I did not stain myself with some toothpaste or jam, but that's without counting on my father. For once he is present, but he spilled coffee on my jeans! I changed my clothes for the 3rd time in two days, and I am, once again, late at school. But as unlikely as it may seem, Clémence is also late, and we meet, just the two of us, in front of school, what a coincidence, or not?

One of the school supervisors witnessed this scene and said "Hurry up lovers, you are late".

Thanks for saying that actually, you're helping me in my quest. Class started, and as we are late, we can't choose our seats, 2 seats left, side by side, today is my day. Faithful to my values, my pen fell on her white sweater, I was on the verge of leaving the classroom crying like a kid, but she did not seem bothered, she even asked me to explain the exercise to her, leavening the gravity of the context and acting like nothing had happened. I was so happy that she wasn't mad at me.

During the break after lunch, Clémence came to talk to me. Yesterday I would have stammered, I would have been nervous or even worse I would have started crying... But thanks to my brother's advice, I'm no longer scared of talking to Clémence. Surprisingly, she was very angry but I didn't have a single idea of why. That was the longest 40 seconds of my life, it was a brand new sweatshirt... How could I know ? In that case I may find myself in a bit of a conundrum.

What does she really want ? It's ambiguous.

That night, back home, after a long conversation with Sam, the doorbell rang. I pondered who could come at this hour?

Why is Clémence on my doorstep ?

3 - “A poem”

My mom asked me to open the door because she was busy cooking. She asked twice then started to get edgy. I was pretending to sleep, I couldn't open the door to Clémence. So my mother did and they started talking. I was spying the whole conversation from the stairs in the darkness and wasn't ready for what I was going to hear.

« Did you move to the neighborhood a long time ago? ”

My mindset is at its lowest. So Clémence was our new neighbor ? This is the most unlikely thing that could happen. How am I supposed to sleep ? So many questions in my head right now, I should have known that something strange was coming up. The next day, the last day of school before the weekend. Morning routine, then we drive to school because it's raining. Lucky or not, Clémence came out of her house running, she was late. Did my mom ask her if she wanted to get in the car ? Absolutely. I'm not old enough to sit on the front seat so we are next to one another on the back seats, Clémence and I, embarrassed. This awkward atmosphere is cut by my mom starting a conversation:

“ Why did you move here Clémence ? ”

“ Have you heard about Columbine ? ”

“ I have no idea of what it is, a music band maybe ? ”

“ You are far from the truth actually, it's a shoot-out which happened last year, in my school in Colorado. So my parents decided not to stay there, and to move to a safer place. ”

“ Jeez ... Have you been hurt ? Psychologically speaking, are you ok ? We don't know each other yet but you can count on us if you need anything. ”

“ That's very kind, thanks, but I'm feeling all right for the moment. ”

We were already there.

We sat side by side and started to talk more and more during the day. We have a great feeling together, I'm so happy that this is happening, I think she likes talking to me... I'm blushing every time she's looking at me. The sun is shining like a diamond in the sky, or like Clémence's smile, so we are walking back home together, butterflies are still flying in my belly.

Back home, mom didn't even say “Hi” to me, she just said « How was your day with Clémence, she is pretty and very nice, is she your girlfriend? ». I don't know why but it pissed me off. I ran to my room and threw my bag away.

I immediately regretted it and started to tidy up my bag and all my stuff scattered on the ground. But something caught my attention. What is this piece of paper ? Few lines are written on it :

**“ *I fathom that our faith
are not far from one another.
Don't try to modify our lives,
And finally listen to your mother.* »**

What was that ? Who put it there and why ? I feel awkwardly scared.

4 - “Let go”

I didn't sleep at all that night. I made numerous scenarios in my dreams. Why ? Who ? When ?

Multiple questions were on my mind, was this linked with what my mom told me when I had got back from school? So many questions, but I have to get ready for school.

First class of the day, Clémence came to me and asked : « How is it going today ? Did you sleep well ? » . I'm so shy that I just answered a little « Yes, thanks », without even asking her how her night had been.

I suppose that I'm thinking about this thing too much, I might just let it go and focus on my studies. But how? Today Clémence and her gang of friends are watching, following and even laughing at me. I don't care about her anymore, I thought that she was different, she was the first one to actually not mock me when she sees me but finally, she is like the others.

Love is an actual loss of time.

I now understand my brother when he told me that girls aren't a priority for him.

I ended the year by completely ignoring Clémence, and all of her friends, and that was a dead end.

* * *

It's now Spring break, and I'm alone playing video games to try to kill time. School ended 1 month ago and Clémence sends me a message on Instagram. Why is she bothering me again?

« Hi Jacob, sorry to disturb you, but I just wanted you to know that your mother had put the piece of paper in your room, after I asked her to, I had noticed that you were looking at me, and I was actually also looking at you.... But I'm even shyer than you, and didn't take the chance. I hope that you will understand me and finally stop ignoring me. This thing is making me feel bad, I miss you ...

*Love you <3
C. »*

This message did not have the impact it should have had. Had I forgotten this girl who was making me crazy ? Or did I just figure out that girls are a waste of time ?

I actually have no answer, but I have to achieve my goal of becoming a pilot. And for that, I have to study hard to succeed.

Girls will wait for me. True love waits.

Don't lower your arms

Jade Lenain



1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about my future, but, you know, life is not easy to plan... Everything changes. So, welcome to my random life !

My name is Ella, Ella Rainbow, yes my name is a bit strange but I like it anyway. I was interested in many things but I have the lazy syndrome, you know. Everybody has this once in their life. I live in Los Angeles with my family. I have one brother and one sister, I love them but not all the time. It might be what they call brotherly love.

My family says I'm a very cheerful girl but not for very long because when something bad happens I cry. I don't know how it's possible but my tears come so easily. I just want to point out that my name is Rainbow... They say that my name was designed for me because my smile is the sun and my tears the rain.

Anyway, I was in a big high school in L.A named Overland Ave. It's a French high school. My dad wanted me to attend this school because he is French.

When I was a little girl my parents took me to France and it was really beautiful. I was 10 years old, so it was 5 years ago and I still remember this place. It was 7:00 AM on November 24th. The dew was shining on the lawn. It was cold, but we were fascinated by the Eiffel Tower. It was so early that there were not many people so we had the whole place for us. Some people were having their breakfast under the Tower. People often come here to get some fresh air and have a picnic to spend quality time with their families or friends. But there are so many cars on the road. The traffic is really endless. It's really bad.

For my first day back at school I was wearing a navy blue dress. It was not my choice because all the students in my high school had to wear a uniform. The establishment said it aimed to make no difference between social class. I think it's a good point because some students can study here thanks to their parents' money but some others are here thanks to their parents too but not for the same reasons. They are lucky to be here because one of their parents works in this school and that's my reason for being here. There were 4000 students. The previous day, I had had this conversation with my best friend Elena:

- I hope we will be in the same class !
- I hope so too, but a part of my mind wants to make new friends and take a fresh new start!
- You say that but when you are at the school we both know what you'll do ha ha ha."

She had said that and laughed because when we got back to school, I cried.

Finally, we were in the same class and that was very nice and made me less nervous. Elena is sociable and nothing scares her. Contrary to her, I'm reluctant to make new friends because I'm scared of anything new.

And when I returned to school, I don't think I took the right path to success...

2 - « Guilty »

So, this was December. I felt better than November. In November the days were endless and a minute felt like an eternity. I felt like a ghost in my class. My teacher says that I'm present, but only physically.

So, yes, my mental state was not great at that time. Now everything is great. I met a new girl in my music class. Her name was Louisa. She was strange but she was also cool. Sometimes she told me that she wanted to kill someone and after that, she became my friend. I would have been her friend for a long time but she used to scare me. Her clothing style is a little bit extravagant and ambiguous. One day she could come with pink jeans and a purple sweater and the next day she was only wearing black. She had red hair and I don't know what her body is like, because all her clothes were oversized. To my mind she is not stable. But when this conversation began her mood shifted and she quickly changed the subject. And I felt **guilty** wanting to know what was going on in her head. So, I don't want to contradict her. You can understand that thanks to this girl I'm no longer the same person.

Before meeting Louisa I didn't want to go to students' parties. After this meeting I was okay to go to parties with her. Indeed, Saturday 22nd I was going to a big party. Everybody said that "*It's gonna be the night of the year !*". My mom's values were quite old-fashioned for our generation. She would be the best, she wanted me to be like her. In a nutshell she doesn't want me to drink, to have a boyfriend, to smoke anything... But I didn't want to listen to her.

Saturday night was coming and I was nervous. I don't know how to dress. Louisa came to help me and after one hour of shopping, she found the perfect dress. For me I was ready to go with Louisa. It was 2 o'clock and I felt tired, so I took my glass on the table in the kitchen. I was not afraid of losing it because there was my name on it. I was going to find the bathroom, after 10 minutes I found it. I took my time to get some fresh air and refresh my face. I joined Louisa in the basement, she gave me a glass and invited me to dance.

- I don't know what's happening to my head, Louisa.
- Just have fun, you have probably drunk too much.
- NO ! I know it's not that.
- Do not worry, everything is fine.

That was the last conversation that I remembered. After that I saw many strange things like an elephant on a rainbow, or just color stains everywhere. This dizziness was really awkward but I liked it. After that, I woke up in my bed and everything was fine. I called Louisa to tell her what was happening and she told me that I had been drugged. She added that she was a witness, because she saw who had put the drug in my glass. I was obsessed about this sensation. I had taken Louisa with me in this hellish loop called cocaine. But after a few days I saw Louisa's mental state worsen because of the drugs. She became stranger than ever and more aggressive. We then became addicted to this thing and I felt **guilty** about her condition because I was the one who had told her to try.

In a party I told her :

- We should stop that. It's wrong.

- No, it's okay. The situation is under control.
- I don't think so. This is beyond your control."

We were angry at one another. *BOOM*

I opened my eyes, I was on the floor. I saw Louisa with a knife. A bloody knife.

She had always wanted to kill someone and she did it. I didn't see anybody else. Who was killed? I tried to wake up but my stomach hurt. I lowered my head and I saw plenty of blood all around me.

3 - « A poem »

Red and blue light. Emergency alarm. Some screams. I can't open my eyes. I have a mask on my nose and my mouth, it helps me to breath. My stomach still hurts. I don't know why it's happened to me.

It was unlikely, I was only here to have fun with my friends. I should have listened to my mom and never become Louisa's friend.

I had been there for one week. I lived in darkness. My mom came to see me everyday, I couldn't see her because I was in coma, but I could hear her. She read the same text to me each day. I think it started like that:

***“Dear, fear
You are always here
You come and you never leave
as a leaf hung on its tree”***

I loved this passage, that is why I only remembered that one. It gave me the strength to give up and to not be impressed by fear. Because, I had always been told that fear was a creation of our own brain.

I don't know why we would do that, and we should all stop.

However, I completely changed my mindset, my vision of things. In fact, I came close to death like other people who were at the same party. It was a terrible event because many bodies had been found, scattered all over the floor. Unfortunately, 12 of them made their way to heaven. For a long time, I believed that Louisa had killed me. But she didn't. It was a shoot-out. The person who had organized this party said that it was the same “method” as the shooting by two boys in the Columbine High School in 1999.

4 - « Let go »

(Three months later)

I left the hospital 2 weeks ago. Louisa came to see me everyday after school and she would tell me about her days and a few gossips. I never thought I would say that one day but I have been missing school. I wanted to find my class, my friends and my routine because we can not say that the hospital is a very fulfilling place. However, just thinking about going back to parties breaks my heart and takes my breath away. This party made me hate those to come...

The day I came back to school, the students thought I was a survivor and had lots of questions to ask me. Some even said that I was a reenactment of Malala Yousafzai's story. I had become popular thanks to what had happened to me. But we all know that people become better known when they die.

People probably want to embellish their image by supporting the "poor Ella".

I entered the school, the security men had not changed and were still standing at each door. The bags were checked. And everybody went to their class. I had a Maths class with Louisa and we heard a scream. We imagined a group of friends was having a little too much fun. Suddenly, when he broke the door, I thought "It's happening again..." He chose one class.

It was ours.

An 18-year-old teenager, Salvador Ramos, killed 19 children and two female teachers at a school in the town of Uvalde, in the US state of Texas. Ella was part of it, and her whole Maths class too.



Lucky day

Killian Gaye

1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about today, like, everyday you will say, I woke up around 6:00 am, opened the blinders to see the night sky and the white moon, then at 6:30 I prepared my cup of coffee then went to my window, opened it and drank that cup of coffee. I was looking at the fresh dew. At 7:00 am I went to my room, took whatever clothes I had lying around, put the mug in the washer, closed it, walked down the stairs because for sure there can not be an elevator and finally went to my garage. At that point, it was 7:30 am, I could have been less late but I am an unlucky guy, so 7:30 am my office was 10 miles away, I took my car, I was so fast for the first time, no trouble on the road, nothing could have stopped me, not a car crash on the road, not even a dead body on the ground.

I got to work, fascinated by how little time it had taken me to get there as it is not everyday I have this hint of luck; my boss was waiting for me in a navy blue shirt, which means he has great news to share so I was like “Oh yeah, this is feeling good”. He told me “Sit” so I did. I’m called Mark Random. He said “Once more, you’re late and I’m kicking you out of this company” then he added “Now get out, you still have a few things to do”. If you didn’t know I work in a company in which you have to create logical applications.

The rest of the day was not worse than the morning but still ... My computer didn’t work for 1 hour, no one was there to help me, then this little slut Carren bothered me with her endless talking for 30 minutes and finally I had to finish off the beta 3.2 version of that application in 3 hours.

At the end of the day I was so tired I was nearly sleeping on my desk but the bell rang which meant we were all allowed to leave. I saw everybody kissing each other but not me. I didn’t have many partners, friends whatever you called that; I was a lonely guy. The night came, I had to make a choice: on the one hand sleep at a hotel downtown, on the other hand take my car and try to drive although I was very tired but I was reluctant to, so I went to a hotel and asked if it was possible to rent a room. The reception lady told me “We’ve got no more rooms available. Sorry, have a great night”. When she told me that, in my mind it was like “I might slap her and leave her just like that on the floor”. After this disappointment, I went to another hotel. Same thing again, I decided to try one last hotel and obviously they were no rooms there either.

My mind was messy. I thought “Why am I so unlucky?” while actually falling asleep.

2 - « Guilty »

I woke up completely unaware of what had happened the day before, I was in bed without any clothes apart from the obvious and was looking around trying to know where I was.

In my house ? In a dream ? Someone came to me and gave me a mug of coffee to help me wake up but I did not pay any attention to it. I was just wondering who the hell that woman was ? She introduced herself as Charlotte, then she told me that she had found me completely asleep in the street and that she had brought me to her house. I told her that I was very pleased by what she had done and that I was capable of doing anything that she wanted to thank her but she answered “Don’t worry, it’s okay, you no longer have to apologize.” She added “Make yourself comfortable” so I logically answered “Thank you I am really feeling **guilty** of being in a house that isn’t mine, it’s not often we see good, caring people these days.”

After having drunk my cup of coffee, I got dressed and visited her house which was very big. Lots of doors, lots of colors. I also discovered lots of things like the fact that she was a zealot of jazz music. She would always play with her hair or she would always be smiling for no reason.

She was a stranger to me but I was already a witness of some of her habits, I had also noticed that she was a defender of values such as racial equality, she had posters with slogans like “Against rape, for justice” or “Live your life 100%”. We sat on her sofa and talked, trying to get to know one another so I told her about my job, my life which was not as great as hers, my habits then she explained what she was doing in life : “For my part I work as a florist so you know I sell flowers if you want some, you can buy them from me.” I answered “You are a good salesperson.”

We talked of other things and I wanted to get out so I went to the toilet and she quickly stopped me from entering the room which appeared not to be the toilet. In fact, at that moment, she became really ambiguous, she was very careful of every action I was doing and even more she would always look straight towards me. Then she went to the place where I was not allowed to go, I waited for 10 minutes but she wasn’t coming back, I began to feel very cautious and asked myself what I was doing here.

Why was she being so gentle with me ? So I went to the door and tried to get out but it was locked, I wanted to open a window but she finally came back from the mystery room with a knife, it was the beginning of a long chase in a house that was completely unknown to me while it was not for her...

3 - « A poem »

I was hiding in a completely dark cupboard upstairs, in complete silence. I could hear her footsteps up the stairs, I could hear the creaking of the floor. I was trying to convince myself that it was probably impossible for her to find me.

My mindset was almost totally focused on the idea that she would never find me, yet she entered the room in which I was and said with horrific a tone “ You never should have tried to open that door now you’re going to pay for this, wherever you are hiding you can be sure of one thing, I will find you, I will play with you, I will enjoy eating every piece of you”, then she immediately left the room, in fact I was holding my breath because of the fear she was making me feel, I let it all out and she instantly came back the room. I told myself I was probably going to die.

She was looking around the room to see where the noise had come from, she wasn’t finding anything until the moment when I looked above myself and saw a corpse attached to the top of the cupboard, I lost control and screamed.

She slowly opened the door and saw me, she was holding an axe and attacked me, I avoided it, I ran to the stairs, she was running just behind me, I took a quick look behind, she was preparing to throw it again.

My mindset was uneasy. Either you avoid the axe and fall in the stairs or you take it in and die.

I ran down the stairs as fast as I could. I can only remember her voice: “You should have fought back”.

* * *

I woke up in a cell, tied. I thought myself : “Why does this kind of thing only happen to me, how can I be here, why me ? Why me ?”.

Indeed that event reminded me of the story from Jeffrey Dahmer between 1978 and 1991. He was a man-eater who would slaughter gay men most of the time, he used to torture them, making sort of a hole in their skull although they were still alive and then he would pour hot water down their frontal lobe.

I was like “Yep, so why not me?”, I was desperate, my soul had escaped my body, I wasn’t myself anymore, nevertheless I had hope when I noticed pieces of paper scattered under the bed of the cell, with poems on them, they were all testimonies of the awful experience they had been through, one of them was still blank and I thought to myself “Let’s express myself one last time”.

Here is what I wrote :

**“I always used to be the H from HAWAII
I am useless and too much
I might be unlucky for the rest of my life
and such
is what I’m going through.”**

4 - « Let go »

I had been in the cell for three weeks now, everything was the same, activities were redundant, food was poor and uneatable, spirits were completely down, yet I was still hoping that one day I would leave this dark place.

* * *

Four weeks now, everything was still the same, but for some reason, I was feeling something different, the feeling that something was going to happen, because as rare as it was, she came to see me and get some news. In fact I felt that I had to try to be as emotional as possible to see what was going to occur, but hope was useless, she was only here to listen, she would then go back to whatever she'd have to do.

Later that day she came back, sat, and told me a story, that was the moment I was hoping for. After a few minutes talking, I saw her keys which were swinging, but I wasted so much time thinking to myself "What should I do?". I finally choked her, grabbed the keys, opened my cell and ran up the stairs. I didn't know if she was dead or alive, so I took the time to take the objects that were the most valuable in terms of money, then I turned on the oven so that the house would finally burn away and explode.

Before that I took some pictures of the conditions she was living in, in case I was accused of anything. I found myself on the doorstep, the freedom of outside was calling me, I was feeling bright, happy, countless emotions overwhelmed me, I took a step down the stairs, but tripped and fell flat.

An axe had ripped off my back.



THE STORY OF HOW I OVERCAME MY WORST FEAR

JEANNE MARINONI

1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about that day. It was Friday 18th of May. It was a usual day, a usual Friday morning in Seattle. I woke up at 7:00 AM, had breakfast with my mum and left my house at 8:00 AM. It was raining, like everyday in Seattle. I remember that I thought on my way to school that that day was going to be calm, like every Friday in my life. The sun was already up and the dew on the grass was almost gone. I've always liked to walk in the morning because this road is amazing. Around me there were many different flowers and I walked next to a small park where I could see people walking their dogs, squirrels climbing into their trees or kids laughing with their friends.

I was watching them when Emy, one of my dearest friends showed up and asked me if she could walk to the High School with me. I agreed and she started an endless speech about what she may do with her boyfriend this weekend. I am used to listening to Emy every time she has something to tell, actually I am used to listening to everyone. Listening must be my greatest quality. I like to hear the stories of all my friends, I can listen to them for hours without interrupting them, but I must admit that I rarely react to their stories. My friends like to call me "Miss Yes" because I am so afraid to tell my opinion that I always agree with everyone, even if this puts me in the worst situation.

Emy was still looking for future activities when we joined up our friends in front of highschool to go to our first class.

During the first two hours of that day, everything was normal and I was enjoying my last day of the week. I wasn't prepared for the next event.

I came to my maths class when Miss Sol, the only music teacher of the school, came to see me. She was smiling, as usual, and she was wearing a very long navy blue dress, which I found really original for a teacher, but Miss Sol doesn't care about what people might think. I find this quite amazing. But let's go back to the reason of her presence. She asked me if she could talk to me in her class, alone. When she sat behind her office, I had a very bad feeling. Indeed, behind her smile she seemed rather anxious : she moved very quickly and she kept avoiding eye contact with me. I was starting to think about what I could have done wrong at school. I couldn't fail my singing exam because I was the best music student and I always had really good grades. Miss Sol knew that, because I always sing alone with her, because I can't stand people of my class looking at me.

I was so nervous and lost in my thoughts that I was not actually listening to her when she started to talk to me. And what about if I was not her best student anymore ? It would be awful because music is my favourite subject and certainly the only one I'm fascinated by.

- "I know you're going to be really reluctant to accept this role but we both know that you're the most qualified student here and I would be extremely thankful if you took your chance..."

I didn't really know what she was talking about...

- "What role ?"

- "Tess did you listen to what I said at least ?" Miss Sol asked me, without the smile this time.

My embarrassed face must have spoken for itself.

- "The main role of the musical we are going to prepare next week ? I just told you that it could

be a really great opportunity for you. You know... to help you with this not-talking problem. I'm sure you must have wanted, at least once in your life, to overcome your fear and sing in front of people. I've seen the happiness in your face when you're singing and you have to show people what you are able to do with your voice. You have to stop being afraid of what people might think of you."

I was so surprised that I didn't know what to answer at first and I kept looking at her without saying a word. After a while, the only thing I could say to her was :

- "I can't."

She closed her eyes for a bit and said:

- " I have already talked to the director of the musical and I've suggested your name. He's waiting for you to come to the auditions next week..."

2 - « Guilty »

(one week later...)

It was Friday 25th of May. You all remember what happened last Friday, right ? You know, when my (ex) favorite teacher, Miss Sol, came to see me to offer me the main role in a musical ? Oh I see, you all want to know what happened after these great news, don't you ?

I'm sorry to tell you that nothing happened. I listened to Miss Sol's speech, when she told me that it would be a huge opportunity for me and that I had to think about it during the weekend. Oh, don't worry, I thought about it. But if you hope that I have changed my mind, you're wrong. My answer was still no. However, I talked about the musical with my mum and she basically told me that it was a relief for her to know that I was going to, finally, talk and sing in front of people. She seemed to think that I no longer was the same girl, who was so afraid of people's opinion that she didn't dare talking. Her reaction made me feel quite **guilty**, so I decided to make an effort for her, to prove her that I could be a different kind of daughter, and maybe the star of the musical, as she told me.

Anyway, what you are going to read is the story of the first day of auditions in high school. When I woke up, I had the feeling that I was going to throw up at any moment, and when my mum brought me my breakfast, I had to run to the bathroom.

When I got to the theater room, I had to refrain from running out of it immediately. There were so many people around me that I immediately felt really anxious. By chance, Miss Sol was here, talking to an old man who must have been the director of the musical, and when she saw me next to the door, as if I was ready to leave at any moment, she waved to tell me to come. I took a long and deep breath and walked towards them. My teacher introduced me as her best music student. The old man, whose name was Remi Fassol was indeed the director of the show. He told me that he was really excited to hear me sing and asked Miss Sol to introduce me to the other candidates. She agreed and took me with her, far from the director, and near all the girls crying and singing before their turn on the scene. I expected her to give me pieces of advice for my audition, but when I looked at her, I saw that she was kind of upset : she explained to me that she did not really like to work with Mr Fassol because he was very tough and he has already fired many of her students. So I let you imagine that I am really nervous hearing that. And what if I simply wasn't good enough?

To distract me, Mrs Sol told me that Mr Fassol is quite a dramatic man, who loves romantic movies and who is a Shakespeare zealot, especially "Romeo and Juliet". I was laughing with her when a girl, about my age, came to see Miss Sol.

She had just finished her audition and she was describing her performance to our teacher, looking really proud of herself. Miss Sol decided to introduce this girl, so I learned that her name was Emily Shy and that she was one of "her most talented students, just like you". I had mixed feelings about Emily ; she was quite an ambiguous person ; she seemed quite talented but also rather arrogant when she was telling us about the advice the director had given her. We were listening to her when Miss Sol received a call and had to go, leaving me alone with Emily who did not stop talking about how good her performance was and how impressed Mr Fassola was. I barely knew her but I already felt that there was something weird about her. She looked so confident and she did not stop talking about herself and her skills : she kept telling me that the main role of the musical was made for her, because she knew how to dance, how to act and how to sing perfectly. When she started laughing at the other candidates' performances and criticizing them I understood that we really didn't share the same values. She seemed to be the kind of girl who would always be confident, who would feel superior and who would do

anything to win.

I felt really nervous when I imagined that Emily was going to see my audition in a few minutes, I didn't have her confidence and I may not be as good as she is. I was quite impressed by her, and I couldn't stand the idea of her being a witness of my pathetic performance on the scene.

I felt relieved when Mr Fassola called me and said that my turn was coming in 10 minutes, so I left Emily and I went to the wings to rehearse before my audition.

I had been rehearsing my scene for 5 minutes, when I heard voices not far from me, it seemed that there was a couple arguing. I tried to remain focused but the voices were closer and closer to me. But, 2 minutes later they were still yelling and I recognized the director's voice with Emily's. I decided to go tell them that I needed a peaceful environment to rehearse but their conversation struck me.

- "You know that Miss Sol would never let me do that, she is already convinced that I am not fair with the other candidates" said Mr Fassola.

- "But you know that if I don't have the main role of this musical, I will not be able to attend my dream school in New York !" Emily answered.

- "I can't always put you first, you know..."

- "Please Dad !"

This was precisely when I realized that I wouldn't get the main role of the musical.

3- « A poem »

I should remain focused. I have to remain focused. But how could I ?

So they are related. More than related actually, he is her father. I wonder if Miss Sol knows. I think she would have never asked her students to take their chance if she had known. She should have known, all of us should have known. Now, getting the role is completely unlikely for us. All those talented girls who performed earlier are going to be devastated. I have no idea how to describe my mindset right now ; I've lost hope of course, but I'm also starting to feel a sensation of injustice. I mean, it shouldn't be this way. I deserve my chance, we all do. But how can I fight ? Especially against Emily and her father ? I am not brave, I am not the one who stands up against injustice. I feel terrible, and I'm starting to think that I must give up. I always knew it : this role is not mine.

I am walking around the room, waiting for them to call me, when something strikes my attention. Among all the flyers, scattered on the ground, there is a post-it. Just a tiny post-it on the floor, as if it was waiting for someone to read it.

So I think we all know what happens next... :

**“Show them who you will become,
Prove them what you can overcome,
Sly as a snake,
Don’t ever let your goal escape”**

Just this poem. A four-line poem. But this small poem has an unexpected impact on me. It is almost as if I was finally out of the darkness. I'm done with questioning myself. Whoever wrote this is right. I don't know who they are, but they just give me a reason to fight. I am not letting my goal escape from me.

Right now, I imagine myself as Amanda Gorman at the inauguration of Joe Biden in January 2021. Her speech inspired me so much, the way she denounced things amazed me and I really admire her. Like her, I want my performance to inspire the whole audience. I want to show that I was made for this role. Not Emily, me.

I am ready.

4 - « Let go »

Tonight is the night. The musical. I have been waiting for this for two months. Miss Sol says I am ready, but I have never been that doubtful. I am more confident that I have ever been but it is still not enough. Tonight may be my only chance...

Hold on, I forgot to tell you... Of course I got the main role ! I was "amazing" during my audition, according to Miss Sol and the others. I didn't believe them when they told me that I was the one, I couldn't believe that I was good enough. Of course, Emily was totally upset as you can imagine.

Anyway, I am here, very excited about tonight's performance. Excited and quite anxious actually. And what about if I failed ? What would Miss Sol say ? She would be so disappointed... And Emily would be so glad, she would probably replace me on stage. Two months ago, I would have certainly let that happen, but today there is no way I won't perform tonight.

My mother just came to see me, wishing me good luck. She is leaving for work but she will attend the show tonight, to see me overcome my worst fear. She told me that she would never have believed it : me playing and singing on stage in front of so many people. This used to be a nightmare to me before. But now, even though I am quite nervous, I see it as my biggest opportunity.

So here I am, walking to high school. I feel like I am going to be a brand new person after the show, I don't know how to explain it.

Miss Sol greets me, smiling as she always does, and tells me how excited she is about tonight. The director, Remi Fassol, is also waiting for me, but without a smile. He welcomes me saying how much he trusts me and how much he would be embarrassed if the musical failed. I understand it as a "Don't screw it" kind of injunction. Miss Sol rolls her eyes and takes me away from him in order to talk to me.

- "I always knew that you had the ambition and the talent to become "someone". Tonight is your opportunity, you have to seize it. You cannot go back, you have come all this way to shine and this is your moment. Make me proud".

I thank her and go practice with the others.

Later, ten minutes before the show, I was doing breathing exercises when Emily, whom I was trying to avoid, came to see me.

- "I hope you know that you won't be able to make it. You are not talented enough and way too emotional to take this responsibility. My father is just going to be mad at you. If you want to give up, they would understand for sure."

After her little speech, I think that I have never been that confident, because even if she doesn't believe in me, I do. So I look at her, I smile at her and I walk on stage, readier than ever.

Audience cheering

CHASE-ING



Lisen Gautier

1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about my future. I was 16, a pretty basic highschooler from Sacramento, I had friends to hang out with and a loving and supporting family. You might think nothing could go wrong with such an average life... That's what I was thinking too.

One morning, I woke up with a really painful headache and bruises all over my body. I had spent an awful night fighting against a creepy ghost chasing me around in my sleep. I was exhausted. As usual, after stretching and yawning like some cat waking up from a long nap, I turned on my phone to scroll through social media for 5 to 10 minutes before getting up, but it was 10am! I jumped out of my bed, brushed my teeth quickly, got dressed and ran to school the fastest I could!

It was cold, I couldn't breathe properly and started to feel dizzy. Suddenly, nothing. Just like a phone, it was as if my battery had died, and all I could see was a black screen.

A moment later, a teenage boy about my age appeared in front of me. It could have only been a passerby, but his body, as light as air, his navy blue smoke-like appearance, and his undetailed face was making me think otherwise. He reminded me of... the ghost of my last nightmare! Moreover, the background was still black, there was nothing else around. It was only him and I, facing each other. We made seemingly-endless eye contact, I was fascinated by what was happening before my eyes. Then, he somehow smirked, turned around, and walked away, as his silhouette faded away...

I blinked, and when I opened my eyes again, I was in my bed, tucked in about 3 to 4 warm blankets, surrounded by my father, my mother, and what looked like a doctor. Their faces went from worried to relieved in a couple of seconds, and I was just awkwardly there, under their cringy staring look.

They started asking me what had happened, how I was feeling, if I needed tea or hot chocolate... but the doctor, who probably saw how annoying they were, told them to remain quiet, which they did.

- 'Tell me, what do you remember Hazy?'

I couldn't stop thinking about that mysterious boy, but was it a good idea to tell them about him, about his ghostly appearance? I told them 'There was a teenage boy, he didn't talk to me, we were just staring at each other without saying anything, but I don't know where he went...'

My parents and the doctor looked at each other, surprised by what I had just said and told me 'Actually, someone definitely saw you and called your parents to bring you back home... but it was an old lady who lived nearby and saw you from outside her window so...'. They laughed, and the doctor handed me a pill. I asked him what kind of pill it was. 'Oh don't worry, it's just an anti-psychotic pill.' I burst in tears. Why would I need one of those crazy people pills? As unreal that guy may have looked, I saw him. And he saw me!

I clearly told the doctor how reluctant I was to take them, as tears rolled down my cheeks.

I looked through my window, and saw it was still dark outside. 'What time is it?' I asked. 'It's 7:30am'. 'How is it even possible? Last time I checked my watch it was 10am!' I said, completely lost. My mother tried to reassure me 'Listen, sweetheart. You are really sick, and have a really bad fever. You've been sleeping for about 2 days. Now try drinking that soup I made for you honey.'. I drank it as I was contemplating the dew that had appeared in the garden. The grass and the bushes were more white than green. The cold weather had hidden the natural colors of our garden's vegetation. During spring, it was filled with joyful colors, whistling little birds, and a bright sun, but right now, that winter atmosphere had just dissimulated them. It was as if nature had lost its life, had lost its will to live, had lost everything. Nature, right now, was mirroring my mental state.

2 - « Guilty »

Four weeks had gone, and my life since the unfortunate event that had me staying in bed for a week was pretty much back to normal. But something inside me had changed. I would go to school every morning, as usual, but my mind was now always full of weird analyzing thoughts. My eyes would keep tracing around, always fully aware of my surroundings, as if something unexpected was about to happen right before my eyes and I needed to be a witness. My ears would focus on every single sound, and my brain would deeply analyze them. Each of my 5 senses now felt stronger than before and my mind could no longer get any rest.

One day, after a long day at school, I came back home expecting no one to welcome me.

But my parents had decided otherwise. They were in fact waiting for me with a woman I didn't know, who seemed to be in her sixties.

'Hey darling, let me introduce you to Ms Allingham. She's a therapist specialized in teenagers like you!' my dad told me with a seemingly-fake enthusiasm.

'Huh? What is she here for?' I asked, perplexed.

'She's here for you to talk freely. You know we've been really worried about you since the day you were found outside, unconscious. You've been acting a little off lately, and that story you made up about the boy made us understand you're probably getting hit by that phase of puberty when all you think about is boys. But don't you worry. You're still young, you still have time to find your soulm..."'

"SHUT THE F*** UP Y'ALL! Did you guys become some sort of zealots of psychology?! I have no problem with you being worried about me, but right now you all are the reason I'm mad!"

"Oh come on Hazy. First of all you have no right to raise your voice at us like that, we're your parents. We brought you up, we know what's good for you. Stop acting like that and making us feel **guilty** for taking care of you!" my dad replied with a strict tone of voice.

"Umm... I'm sorry to interrupt. Hello Hazy, I'm Ms Allingham, but you can call me Betty. What if we just relaxed and talked in private?" the therapist said with a soft and soothing voice.

"Mmh'kay" I mumbled.

We went upstairs, in my bedroom. I sat on my bed and Betty on my desk chair.

"Hey Hazy. I know the situation may feel ambiguous right now, but I promise you can trust me and my values."

Betty started explaining what her job consisted in: helping young people. But I have to admit I wasn't really listening to her. Her voice was so soft and soothing to listen to. She seemed really caring and to love her job fondly. She knew how to calm me down just by speaking. Her aura made me feel comfortable, she definitely knew how to make people feel better. And from then on, just by listening to her mesmerizing voice, I decided I would put my trust into her hands.

Suddenly, he came back. The ghost, the creature, that maleficent navy blue thing was back. But that wasn't the most surprising thing. No. The fact that Betty could see it too was also surprising.

But it really caught me off-guard when she told him 'Oh hello, Chase. We were waiting for you. Come on in!'

3 - « A poem »

My eyes started watering. And suddenly, everything was all blurry. Images, sounds... My whole body was shaking and going numb.

'I gotta wake up... I gotta wake up... I gotta... It's just... one of those... nightm-... AAAHH!'

'Hazy! You need to calm down! Breathe in, breathe out...'

I felt like I had completely lost control of my body. I dissociated and could hardly focus on anything that was going on around me.

'Hazy please, pull yourself together! We have no time to waste. And Chase, please. Stop laughing or I'll send you back to the outer world.' Betty called out, as this dumbass, childish and immature ghost was crying laughing, rolling on the floor, and struggling to... breathe... if I may say. What did I do to end up in this unlikely situation?

He cleared his throat and apologized, with quite a familiar smirk.

I was speechless.

'Chase, please stop talking. Hazy, we must tell you something important. Firstly, I'm not a normal kind of therapist. I'm what we call: a spirit therapist. I-...'

'Yeah... I'll stop your blah-blah. Don't thank me. So, basically, I'm your big brother but you've never gotten to actually know me because I'm dead ha ha. 9/11, Twin Towers, you know? But wait 'til I tell you. Y'know what the funniest thing is? Wait, wait, wait. You're not ready ha ha. So, I was running in fear, like everyone, and... hehehe... I stumbled on scattered broken car pieces, twisted my ankle, fell, and the building collapsed on me. And then, just darkness. I'm not a runner ok? I'd never been in a "run for your life" kind of situation. Moreover, I hadn't warmed up. Hah... I should've thought about that one detail. I wasn't in a Saturday workout kind of mindset though.' He proudly smiled.

...

What. The. Actual. F***. Am. I. Supposed. To. Say. To. THIS?!

'I'm sorry Hazy... Chase never listens to me...'

Seeing my horrified facial expression, he declared:

"That, that is unfortunate. To get to meet when one is alive and the other, dead."

Here, I headed. Trying to heal her, his and here your heart."

4 - « Let go »

I felt completely lost. I didn't understand a single thing he meant with these words. Why and how did he want to "heal" anyone's heart? What exactly was he thinking of?

I kept thinking and thinking, but didn't seem to be able to get it.

Therefore, I asked Chase: 'What do you mean by "healing"?'

His answer was definitely nothing my consciousness would have ever been able to imagine, nor expect. It thunderstruck me, it made my heart pound painfully, it took my breath away.

...

My parents had been struggling for a long time before having their first child, Chase. The odds for them to get a child naturally were 5%, but they got blessed and they managed to have one. Unfortunately, Chase passed away. And the older my parents were getting, the lower the percentage was getting. When Chase died, they lost the only actual symbol of union and love they had been able to build together.

...

After 3 years of mourning/grieving, they had made the huge decision to adopt.

That is how I, Hazy Slumber, ended up here.

That is why him, Chase Slumber, found me in my sleep.



That bird flying away

ANNA MESCHIN



1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about my new school, however I still was a bit reluctant to move to a city I had only once ever been to. I am, or at least was, a pretty nervous person and moving in and out had always been a rather stressful situation to me. By the time I am writing this, it has been two years since everything I will be telling you about happened and guess what? I just turned 20.

* * *

I am James Riverstone and apart from my parents being the wealthiest company directors in America, I am a normal person, nothing more than a common teenager.

My parents, because of their work, have to travel a lot so I have always been switching from one school to another, even in the middle of the year. Obviously I wasn't happy about that because I barely had time to make proper, close friends and it is during my freshman year that I began to feel the loneliness hit me. With it came depression and self-consciousness. I didn't know it yet but everything would change the following year.

Let us go back in time to my third year of high school. A couple of months before my first day at school, my parents told me, out of the blue during a family dinner, that we would be moving to Boston. I knew I didn't have the choice so two weeks later, I was packing my favorite navy blue pants in a huge suitcase which had been following me ever since my childhood. The following week, I found myself in the plane that would take me to my so called new home and then came the first day of school. As always, I was panicking like crazy, I had just never gotten used to the look of my new classmates staring at me as if I was some kind of weird kid from somewhere beyond our universe. They might have been fascinated by my absolutely basic facial features or maybe they were just curious which would be way more understandable.

I have always thought the dew was extremely relaxing when sticking my head out of my bedroom's window as I have just woken up. Nevertheless, on the first day of September, it was my first day of high school and nothing could have lessen my anxiety. The tightness filling my stomach had been close to making me throw up the delicious pancakes made by my parents' maid. With all the strength I had left in my body, I picked up my bag, took my dark coat covering the uniform I had to wear and seconds later, I was on my way to my new private school. When I got there, just as I expected it, many rich kids were standing straight with their perfectly arranged uniform, pulled back hair and straight faces, it was close to being creepy. The day went by until lunch. That's when I first met Davy. He was the only human looking person in this prison called school. He seemed bored with his pouty lips and chin laid down on his crossed arms. He was sitting on the opposite table from mine so I decided I should go to him. I walked over to him and sat down on the empty chair on his left. He lifted his head up and looked at me with his big shining doe eyes. A smile quickly made its way to his lips. I was not good with relationships though so I just stupidly waved at him which made him laugh. I felt comfortable so we began to talk and he went on and on, making me aware of a few things I had to know concerning this high school inducing people I shouldn't be hanging out with whether it is because they are too focused on themselves or because they are willing to do everything just so the newbies would feel like wanting to leave the school. He gave me his number and just like that, I had a brand new friend. The day went on and nothing special happened apart from endless classes and mean teachers recalling you how dark your future would be without studying.

The next morning it was my birthday. I woke up and the first thing I heard was the sound of a notification on my mobile. I glanced at it and it was from an unknown number. It said « Welcome to the upside down of the world with no codes, no « normal », you have one quest but it is your task to find it and achieve it. Good luck James »

I thought it was nothing but who could have known this nothing would lead me to everything.

2 - « Guilty »

The message was so ambiguous, what was I supposed to do? Was it even real? Probably a joke from some random stranger, right? I went down the stairs still half-asleep in my pajamas. Down there, I witnessed something I never thought I would. I found my mom in some strange outfit. She was wearing white knee-length socks with a straight blue, red and yellow skirt but it wasn't elegant, it was flashy and messy as if a child had plastered all three colors with his hands on a piece of cloth. It was unlike my mom. She would usually wear a pair of black or white pants with a blazer or an extremely expensive coat. But still, I didn't pay much attention to it since I was not fully awake. I just said hello and went back upstairs with the hope that she would have changed her clothes by the end of the morning.

Back in my room, I grabbed my phone to double-check my messages. The one from the unknown number hadn't gone away, it was still there and moreover, it was the only one I had received which was unusual because my dad had the habit of sending me a message early in the morning once at his office. I tried to send him a message but the keyboard wasn't working. It was odd and such things happening right after my nap had always got on my nerves easily, therefore I began to type faster and harder on the screen and it still wasn't working. I got so angry that I threw my phone down on the floor and my mind went blank. After regaining my thoughts, I was about to pick it up when a blue light spread around it formed a huge circle. My mouth was now fully opened due to the surprise.

The next thing I know, I was screaming at the top of my lungs when a little monster popped out of the circle. He reacted by screaming just as loud as I was. It startled me and I jumped back which led me to fall back on my bed. The « thing » laughed so hard that tears were streaming down its face. I stuttered « What are you? » and it answered with a goofy and slightly arrogant voice « What do you mean « What am I »? Isn't it obvious? ». I was taken aback by the question. How in the world was I supposed to know? « I'm your elf » he continued. « What do you mean you're MY elf » I insisted. Anyone, even not being a fantasy zealot, would have loved to have an elf as a companion but at that precise moment, despite its cute chubby cheeks and big eyes filled with the hope that I would recognize it (and it made me feel guilty if you ask me), I was scared. « That makes no sense! But let's say you are... well... tell me a little bit about yourself then » I replied after a moment of deep thinking. « Okay » he replied brightly with a smile on its face, and then went on « My name is Leon, I was born... well let me think... a long time ago, doesn't really matter » and laughed nervously. I was no longer scared and Leon seemed so genuine and passionate while talking even though it wasn't a conversation about some great matter. We talked for over an hour and I discovered a lovely little elf full of great values like kindness or selflessness. Moreover, he seemed so reliable. Anyone would have said it was too early to be able to describe someone I met an hour ago but I had such a good feeling about this beautiful little creature that I just couldn't help it. He told me so much about his life and a lot of uncanny adventures he had gone through before and all of them were inspiring. Once Leon gave a man who had just got fired two thousand bucks even though he barely knew him.

I was about to ask him even more questions because I needed answers about my mom and well, I was expecting he had something to tell me about the message. But the words got stuck in my mouth when everything began to shake. A strong wind shut the door open. I began to panick and stole a glance of the elf who was looking terrified so I screamed « Leon, what's happening? » to which he replied, just as frightened as I was: « He's coming »

3 - « A poem »

“Who is coming?” I asked confused and terrified at the same time. He replied “I’ll explain later, now is not the time so just follow me”. The elf flew down the stairs. Without thinking twice I followed him. Once outside we kept on running until we could find a safe place to regain our breath. We had been running for ten minutes when I realized whatever had shown up in my house was now gone. After a while, the elf stopped in his tracks and turned around to face me. “We are here” he declared. I looked up and saw something rather unlikely... the towers... they were intact. I asked in complete shock “How?”, “How what?” he responded. “How are the towers still intact, they’re supposed to be gone” I continued. Confused about my statement, the elf spoke up “Did you hit your head or something?” I sent him a death stare before saying “Listen, those towers are not supposed to be there anymore. In 2001, two planes crashed into them and made them collapse entirely. It was a terrorist attack. So tell me, how can they possibly still be intact?”. A smile slowly made its way to the elf’s face “Oh I get it. It did happen actually, but only in your universe. There are no such things happening in mine.” I was honestly confused about what he had just said but decided to just shrug it off.

A couple of minutes later, I signaled him to step in since I didn’t want the “thing” to find us. Inside the building, pieces of broken glass were scattered everywhere on the floor, there was no light except for my elf who suddenly decided to glow. It was all darkness. Fear was taking over me little by little. I was trying so hard to focus on finding something to eat or drink but I couldn’t help thinking about my mom. Tears streamed down my face when I realized I had left her alone in the house with the creature. Leon must have heard my weeping, worry was written all over his face, mixed with sadness.

“Is something wrong master?”

“Please don’t call me master, just call me James”

“Okay, what is it James?”

“I should have thought about my mom, I coldly left her behind...”

“Oh no don’t worry about that, Lingarousses can only see the ones they are chasing.”

“Are Lingarousses what was coming for us earlier?”

“Yes, they are neither alive nor dead, they’re spirits” he explained.

“So to sum up: I am currently in a parallel universe, with an elf as a guide and crazy spirits chasing after me. And on top of that, since that’s not enough, my mom has gone completely nuts. Perfect, that’s perfect. I guess there is no way for everything to get back to normal, right?”

“Actually there might be.”

“How?!”

“You have to sing a song, in fact, not a song but a poem.”

“What kind of poem? What does it say?”

“Here”

He reached out for my hand and folded a paper within my palm. I unfolded it and read it out loud:

**“Happiness was like a bird
I can see it but could I reach it?
May myself be my mentor
In chasing that bird flying away,
Happiness I tried, gratefulness I found
May I become that bird flying away”**

I found myself dumbfounded.

“What is the meaning behind it?”

“It’s about your mindset. Anyone who finds themselves in this universe is here for a reason. Just like you are.”

“It makes sense when I think about it.”

“Does it?”

“Yes, before coming in here, I was unhappy, and ungrateful for what I have and my goal is to find gratefulness in order to be happy. Is that it?”

“You’re smarter than I thought. However, in order for it to work, you have to become the bird. So tell me James, may you become that bird?”

4 - « Let go »

After over an hour of loud sobbing, my eyes were so puffy that I could barely see anything. We decided to go outside checking whether the spirits had come back. We walked through the door frame but I had such a bad feeling about this. Some kind of weird feeling took over me and I began shaking out of the blue all the way from head to toe.

I turned around but couldn't set an eye on my elf. He was gone. Just like that. In the blink of an eye, I had lost him. Once again, I started crying out of anxiety and loneliness.

“Why are you crying?” a voice spoke out of nowhere.

“Leon? Is that you?”

“Of course it is me I just turned invisible you stupid-head!”

“AND YOU REALLY COULDN’T JUST TELL ME ABOUT YOUR INVISIBILITY POWER?”

“Sorry I thought you knew.”

“Well as you can tell I didn’t and how could I? You never told me about this. Am I supposed to just read your mind? Because let me remind you that I DO NOT, unlike you, have any of those powers. I am a human, neither a spirit nor an elf. I actually was a very casual human being until this... THING... happened and I was brought into your world with a crazy mom and some unreal half dead spirits chasing me out.”

The elf was speechless, unable to get a single word out of his own mouth. I kept on talking while my anger was fading away :

“And you know what... I am tired of all of this. I never asked for it and I just want to see my mom and dad and the very few friends that I have. Why does it have to be so complicated?”

I then suddenly opened my eyes and realized I was back in my room with my phone in hand.

Against Herself

ALYS VURANOK

1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about that day.

I woke up and made coffee and I saw the dew in my garden. I enjoy my spare time but sometimes I forget I don't actually have the time and like every day in Seattle there are endless traffic jams! In the car I was fascinated by the sky which had become navy blue.

My mom had repeated that she wanted to come that day but I was reluctant to have her with me.

On my way to work, I had a forefeeling but I did not think it was important. Everything was fine until 7pm.

* * *

During this time she received a message from her mother saying that she couldn't come. She felt reassured but she also felt that something was going to happen.

At home Alia was suddenly overwhelmed with information... Therefore she called her mother immediately to know if everything was ok for her. Now Alia knew everything was ok. Besides outside everyone was restless and she thought those news were far-fetched even if she's anxious. Alia wanted to do good around her so she went outside.

* * *

I was outside and everything seemed gloomy. I made my way out of the crowd to try to see what was frightening them all. It might have been a fire. People were still running and the shadow was becoming bigger but I couldn't figure out what it was, however I did feel threatened.

2 - « Guilty »

When the night fell, I would start to panic because Alia hadn't given any news since she had asked me if there was anything new here. I had enough. I had to do something to keep myself busy and when I was young I was a zealot of scary comics and I had become schizophrenic, thus I was afraid of everything.

I was a witness of a lot of things and I have been found **guilty** of a few things I didn't do. After this story I would no longer read scary comics. I became aware of my daughter's values.

Our relationship is ambiguous because we are not really close but I don't like this duality. My daughter is my everything and I want to go to Seattle. I took my phone and must have called her about twenty times.

3 - « A poem »

Two days later she still hadn't given me any news but I had a feeling that my daughter could save us from this beast.

* * *

I know I didn't give any news but I think so that I might be able to win this fight as MLK did back then.

I was walking in the street to find this creature but I found something on floor. It was a piece of paper.

It said :

***« Do what you want
I must be above you
As the mountain that you climb
Then you go back triumphant
And with the pride of the successful too. »***

This was a very poetic message and I guess it meant I had to pay closer attention to each sentence. For me...« above » means..."high" as in powerful. Something big.

Had I ever climbed a mountain in my life? Actually, yes. I went to Mount Garibaldi when I was 10 years old but I don't think that the creature would go over there. Maybe the mountain means something else. I feel scattered. So what will I climb ? The difficulties? No, it might seem unlikely but I think it is about my job. It may simply be above my workplace.

So if I win against him, there will be no more danger for my country. I must go over there. The closer I get, the darker it is and the fear is daunting but now I feel stronger than him.

4 - « Let go »

Yes. I'm sure I can win against him.

"Who are you ?" Alia asked.

"I'm you but the dark side of you." the beast replied.

"WHAT? HOW? I...I don't understand; you are the dark side of me ?"

"Yes ! You are constantly ignoring me although I'm a part of you and this is unacceptable. You must be proud and accept me."

"I don't want to and I can't because you belong to the past and you remind me of so much pain."

"WHAT ? NOOO! AAAAAAAAHH! (he begins punching her)

She beat him too but she couldn't really touch him, it was as if he was some kind of a ghost.

"Why can't I touch you ?"

She tried to hit him again. And again. But nothing happened.

She started crying and she felt exhausted.

* * *

Alia woke up with a start and realised that this was only a nightmare.

She then took a day off to recover and spent the day with her mother, whom she went to visit for a whole weekend.



Gaëlle Monneron

The Dew

1 - “Diana”

I had great expectations about my father's studio. I loved the fact that he had hidden a magic world in there. Now I'm here, in front of one of his paintings, one that represents a garden, with a little wooden bridge and a river. All these elements in very cold colors, he had named it “The Dew”. On the bridge, a gorgeous woman who might have been fascinated by the sparkling water, seems to be walking gracefully. I felt something unique. She started staring at me, as if she might have discovered a secret part of me.

“She blinked !” I screamed in fear. Why ? A painting is supposed to be motionless. She started to walk on the bridge to sit on the grass, still wet in the morning. I really want to follow her, as if I could jump inside the painting. “Elizabeth...” Did she just call me? Or was it my imagination ? “Elizabeth... Come with me and you will live in a world of pure imagination...” What does she mean? In my memories, father always told me to never follow someone you don't know. But my curiosity was too overwhelming so I stepped right into to the painting. And blacked out.

* * *

A few minutes after, I woke up in the grass. I had totally changed. I was wearing a little navy blue dress, but it seemed to have been painted, I could see the lines of the drawing, and I smelled like paint too. I looked at my hand, they had different layers of skin color. All the elements that made the painting seemed endless. Was I right when I said that my father was a magician? I recognized the woman and started to walk towards her. She turned around me, but didn't stop walking. “Excuse me ? Miss ?” I started to call her but she may have been reluctant to talk with me.

“Miss, please help me, I don't know where I am?”

“I don't have the time, little girl, I'm in a hurry.”

I was scared. How was I supposed to go back home ? I followed her in the painted forest. Everything was beautiful. I was like a dream. I must have fallen asleep in the studio, but if my father found me, he was going to be very angry.

The woman stopped walking.

“What is your name, young girl?”

“I'm Elizabeth, Elizabeth Vinci.”

“Eli... Elizabeth is that you?” She seemed devastated.

“Do I know you ?”

“I'm your mother, sweetheart...”

“Impossible, my mom went on a trip, my father told me, he couldn't have lied to me !”

“I was not on a trip, I died, darling, when you were only 2 years old.”

“Daddy always told me the truth. I don't believe you.”

“My name is, Diana, Diana Vinci, I was married to Edward Vinci... You were born on the 25th December 1804, on Christmas Eve, you were my favourite present. I remember you, how little you were and how pretty too. You're still very beautiful, my girl...”

“So daddy really lied to me... How did you die?”

“It was an accident, a fire in our house, I didn't have the time to go out... The last words I said to your father were **I love you.**”

2 - “Hat Man”

When Diana told me her story. I was totally lost. Why hadn't my father given me this version? I didn't know what I was supposed to do...

“I have to go, I want to go home.”

“I understand, we have to find the Hat Man, only he will know the way out. But can we just talk about it, because yes, I'm your mother but I don't really know you...”

I was scared. I always wanted a mom but now that I had one and I didn't really feel happy about it. I had my little life without her, I felt like she left me but I felt very guilty about what I thought.

“I have to see the Hat Man. Daddy might come back, and if I'm not at home, he's going to be very angry, maybe even more if he sees me in his studio.”

“Why? You are not allowed to go in his studio?”

“He always said no, and now I think I understand why...”

“Oh, I see. So let's go find the Man.”

She turned around, and kept walking in the painted forest.

The atmosphere was very peaceful. Everything I saw felt like a fairy tale.

At the edge of the forest, there was a dark brown wooden door with a golden lock. Diana opened it, I saw a river of colors. And then, there was a little bridge with a tiny boat.

“Do we have to use it?”

“Of course, it's the only way to reach downtown.”

“Downtown?”

“Yes, it's the place where all the characters come, talk about their day, it's a very friendly place.”

“Okay, so let's go!”

The boat was a little tiny, but big enough for both of us.

As we reached the shore, I saw lots of lights and the noise of a crowd came to my ears. We jumped off the boat and started to walk, but my eyes were trying to grasp every fine detail.

Out of nowhere, a very skinny and tall man came to us, he had a very ambiguous style. He was wearing a purple suit with a very clear blue shirt. His face seemed full of happiness, everything on his way felt sparkling. He was like the sun. And I knew who he was, on his head, there was a hat, a beautiful satin hat: the Hat Man.

I ran towards him, screaming his name “Mister Hat Man! Mister Hat Man!”. He didn't say anything, but came to us with a very beautiful smile.

“Yes, little miss?”

“I really need your help, I have to go back to my world, the real world.”

“Oh, oh, the real world, are you Elizabeth Vinci ?”

“Yes, but how do you know me?”

“Your dad talks about you every time he comes to visit us.”

“Are you my uncle?”

“Ha, ha! No, clearly not, I’m only a character in his imagination.”

“And he often comes to see you?”

“Of course he does, I’ve been his best friend for many years, maybe decades.”

“So, if I understand well, my dad knows we can actually get into his own paintings?”

“You didn’t know that?”

“Obviously not, my dad never showed me his work.”

“That is a very sad situation.”

Everything he said always came with a perfect smile. I liked him a lot, he seemed like he wanted to protect everybody. Diana came to us and explained to the Hat Man what we wanted. He said that we had to go through two other paintings to find “the objective”.

I asked him what he thought about my father. He told me that he was very gentle with the paintings that he drew and particularly when he finished and started to talk with them, my dad is an art zealot. Diana didn’t say a lot of things, she would just stare at me, as if I was going to disappear, that made me feel very uncomfortable.

The Hat Man explained that he had never forgotten the day when my father had painted “The Dew”.

“Did you know I would be always a part of the real world? It fascinates me.”

“I really want you to come with me, when my dad is not at home, I feel alone...”

“And do you want me to come with you?” Diana asked.

“I don’t know, I like my life with my dad, maybe I feel lonely but it’s a friend that I need.”

“Oh, alright...”

I knew I had hurt her, I felt very sorry but I didn’t want to apologize.

“Don’t be that rude with her, I know it is very difficult for you, but for your information, we can’t come with you.”

I didn’t answer. I just started crying. I was totally lost and this awkward situation hurt me.

“Elisabeth!”

That's the only thing I heard through my tears.

3 - “The star”

I tried to calm down. I didn't know where I was but in front of me, an enormous painting with an elegant woman in the middle. It looked like a war painting.

“It's “Liberty Leading the People” by Eugene Delacroix, a french painter.” The Hat Man was a few inches behind me, I hadn't heard him come next to me.

“What does it symbolize?”

“The woman in the middle is named Marianne, she's the symbol of freedom in France. The rest of the painting relates to the French Revolution back in 1789.

“How impressive it is, the height, the details, the colors, that makes me feel nervous for the characters How long did it take him to paint this?”

“We don't really know, but to me, more than a month. Look at all the little pieces, the shadows, the fear in their eyes, the dead bodies scattered on the ground. But in the middle, the glimmer of hope, this woman who encourages them to not giving up, she's here for them, they all watch her, weapons in hands.

“You really like this painting, right?”

“Yes, a lot. I don't know why but it made me feel empowered and gave me goosebumps.”

I loved the way he talked about this, I knew his passion was art. In his eyes, the sadness was more present than what he wanted to show.

“Are you all right, Hat Man?”

“Of course I am! Why are you asking me this ?”

“I see in your eyes that you hiding something important. If you want to talk, I'm here.”

“It's very kind of you. Don't worry, I'm feeling good.”

I knew he didn't want to share all his life. I didn't even know his existence before today.

Diana didn't say a word. She was still in the darkness. It was my fault if she didn't talk with us. My words moved her more than I could imagine.

“Diana... I'm sorry about what I said before, I don't ever want to be hurtful like that. I'm just scared about the future, I just discovered my mother is still alive, but not really alive, maybe all those events are in my imagination, maybe all those things never existed...”

I started crying again, the tears were running down my cheeks.

“Come on, you don't have to be sorry, I know it's difficult to realize it, you're young, but if I can comfort you, it's not a dream, believe me, I'm, as you said, real. In a way.”

I went right into her arms, cried all the tears I had left in my body, repeated that I was so sorry and I had always dreamed of having a mother. She started crying too and it was a very special melody.

“I'm sorry to stop this beautiful moment but come on, I found something.”

The Hat Man showed us a silver plate with a carved message on its surface.

**In this particular world
I write those specific words
To give you hope.
Don't cry
Don't feel sad
The river is waiting for you.**

**Only imagine
How moving those paintings can be.
Beware of the Star
Who can burn your eyes.**

“Who is the Star? And why do we have to pay attention to her?” I asked

“I don’t know but it’s uncanny that the poem is about our eyes when we are actually in tears.” Diana said.

If I followed her idea, maybe she was the Star and she was dangerous for us. Should we worry about her? But a star is yellow and she had dark hair, it might be me, I was blond, very blond.

4 - “Somewhere”

It was very scary for me to imagine that I was probably very dangerous to us. The poem was still ringing in my head like an echo. It resonated more and more.

We were following the Hat Man thought a dark tunnel, there was water dripping down the walls, the temperature was becoming colder and colder, the atmosphere was heavy... when I heard a voice whispering my name.

And...

The sun hit my face. I opened my eyes, trying to understand where I was and discovered that I was back in my garden, surrounded by flowers and it was Camille, the maid, who was calling me.

Was it all a dream ? I was supposed to be in my father studio, why was I here?

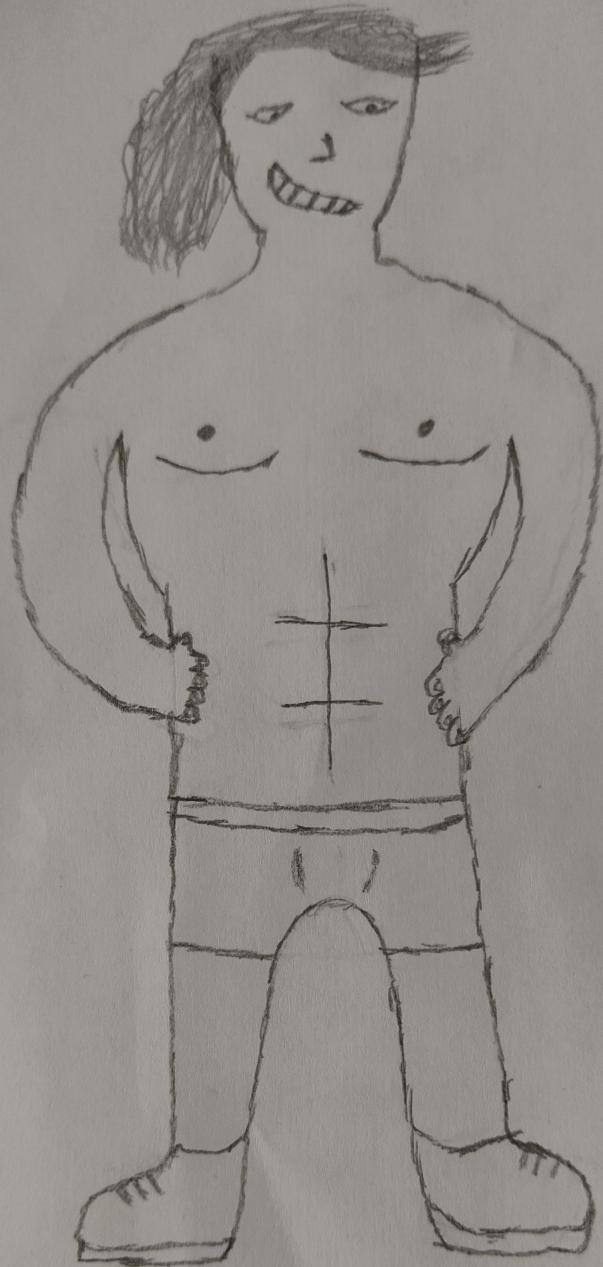
“Eli, your father wants you in the living room, hurry up !”

I ran to him and when I entered, he was with a woman with black hair.

“Elisabeth, let me introduce my old friend, Diana.”

I was in shock. The woman I considered like my mother in my dream was here, in front of me. I was at the same time so happy and also a little bit scared. Maybe all the characters were real?

My dream had became a reality. I was going to have a mother.



Muscles and a Heart

By Simon Vayer

1- “A good day as always”

I had great expectations for that day, after all I had never had a bad day.

7 am. I woke up early today, I had to go to the grocery store to buy some food. I walked to my wardrobe, oh sorry I mean my gigantic wardrobe: it's a huge room full of closets, the walls are painted with an awesome navy blue that I love, in front of the door, I chose to put a poster of myself because I find myself so fascinating on this picture, there is also this huge trophy that I won at a surf competition. At first I was a bit reluctant to put it up here, but then I told myself that it's always good to remember how I had ridden these endless 5 meter waves in front of all these boys and girls who were so amazed by my skills. Maybe one day, I will renovate this wardrobe. I'm not a big fan of those brown closets, they look a little outdated, in fact one of them doesn't have a door anymore, so my clothes aren't properly protected from the moths, and there are at least 6 of them so it bothers me.

As I was dressing, I looked through the window and I saw that there was still dew in the grass of my garden, so I put on a sweat-shirt, it could be a bit cold outside.

I left my house and went to the grocery store. As I was walking down the street, I saw that my expectations were right and my famous luck was still there, in case you didn't know I'm lucky and I mean very, very lucky, so I was walking down the street when a panicked woman left a restaurant to tell me: «Sorry to bother you sir, we bought too many things for lunch and we don't have enough customers, may I ask you if you want some of the extra food? We'll give it to you for free as we don't have any time to find another solution.» Obviously, I accepted, who could say no to free food? And it was almost exactly all the food I had planned to buy at the little store, there was butter, pork, potatoes and even a bottle of milk. It was a brand new restaurant and this woman seemed really nice. I'll check it out one day or another but I still needed some apples and a little bag of that beef jerky that I love so much. So I kept on walking, and I knew where to get my apples, there was a giant apple tree in old Mr Smith's garden, when you are in the street you can see one of the branches, so I walked under this branch because I knew it was the moment of the day when Mr. Smith usually tries to get an apple by landing a kick on that poor tree, and he did so, and once again I was lucky an apple fell off the branch I was under, right into my basket, next to the butter. I only needed one last thing, but I didn't know where I could get the beef jerky for free, I thought my only solution was to go to the grocery store.

In the grocery store I saw him, Ludovic Mepepette. I had known him since we were lovely little boys and he was my number one hater. Obviously many people hate me; they're all jealous of my awesome luck, or could it be because I punched his face while trying to catch a butterfly when we were children and his nose might have been a little broken but I think he's just jealous of me. I hid behind a pile of soda cans until he went out the store, then I bought 10 bags of beef jerky because I didn't have to buy the other things since they had been given to me for free.

After that I went back home, and I spent the afternoon bodybuilding while looking at myself in the mirror. It really was a good day.

2- “An unexpected encounter”

I had an awkward feeling about that day, it hadn't happened for a long time, but I didn't care and I had breakfast. It's the most important meal of the day; after all I can't skip it. As I was drinking my protein shaker, I saw myself on TV, it was me, no doubt about it, there is only one me and it's me. The mayor was telling the population that I hadn't attended his meeting about saving the poor people who live in the street, he probably wanted me to feel guilty, and if it had been anyone else it would have worked, but not for me because I knew I was innocent, I knew I had told him that I was no longer part of his little “Look at me, I'm helping people” club, or did I?

I left my house for my usual Wednesday running, and in the street, everyone was looking at me. It didn't bother me at first because people were always looking at my crazy big arms, but this time they seemed really mad at me, maybe that thing with the homeless people was more important than I thought.

But, as I was thinking, I wasn't looking in front of me, and I made that poor woman fall. Usually I wouldn't have cared but this time people were already angry at me, and there were a lot of witnesses around, so I helped her stand up. I helped her because I have values of course. But then I recognized her, it was Safa Natix. I met her in high school and we had a pretty ambiguous relationship... she was the president of the “Richard Luckman is the best person in the world” club, she was really kind but you know it's a bit awkward when someone is following you all day long. I was hoping that she hadn't recognized me, and I was really disappointed when I understood that she had. She was as annoying as the day I told her to get lost, she was acting like I am the most important human being in the world. At first it felt quite rewarding because I had always loved when people looked at me but at some point it became really annoying. So that was when I had told her to leave my house in a very polite way.

I woke up from my day dream when she said:

“Oh Riri, I'm so happy to see you”.

“Haha, not me”, I said.

She didn't care and replied: “It's been so long, I missed you so much and you even held my hand to help me get back on my feet; that's awesome, now let's go to your place”.

“Wait, what?”, but she had already left, she was probably more confident than when we were younger, I liked that so I followed her, in fact I didn't really have the choice because she was heading to my house.

When we got there, she stopped, because obviously she didn't have the keys, but when we got in, she said:

“Okay no time to talk. Follow me”.

“Hey wait”, I said as she was pulling my arm.

She went to the bathroom, put her feet in the toilet (yuck), pulled the flush and then we both disappeared into the damn thing.

When I woke up I thought it was just a dream and then I saw her face in front of me. When I stood up I saw that we were underground, but most importantly, that there were thousands of people screaming my name, Safa, then told me that those people were all members of the “Richard Luckman is the most wonderful being of the universe” club, I thought it had closed after high school but it hadn't and it got even bigger than before, now there were zealots everywhere, thousands of pesky zealots all around me!!!

3 - “I'm in so much trouble”

A few hours had gone, and my mindset was still scattered, how had I ended up in this situation? How had a simple running session turned into something that bad? Such an unlikely situation, I know that I had always said that everybody should love me but maybe not that much. How could people build an underground complex just to get my attention?

Stop!!! Enough questions. I need to focus or else I will fall apart. Focus, stay focused, stay cool as you always are, worse things happen every day, like the eleventh of September, a handful of freaky guys won't scare me, our great country has already vanquished the greatest fears we could imagine, we Americans are fearless.

But then, Safa opened the door and it made me flinch. I wasn't scared, she just surprised me.

“Are you ready to talk to us now?” she said;

“Yes I am...”.

In fact I wasn't but it was always better than staying in this dark cell.

She smiled and then told me to follow her, so I did so because what else could I do?

“Here is our school where we teach newcomers your story and how you could save us all”

She said that without even understanding how creepy it was, so they had spied on me for years and now they're telling everyone what I do in my everyday life.

Forget what I said about being fearless, I'm completely horrified and I might cry at any moment now.

“You know that you shouldn't have done that, I'm not that awesome, I'm just an ordinary man.” I tried to lie as best as I could.

She laughed, of course everyone would have guessed that it was a lie.

“You're a funny one, aren't you?”

“Ah ah, yes I am, that's one of my many talents”

“*Even if my plan failed, I can still find another solution, they love me, so they wouldn't hurt me I guess?*” I was thinking when she told me:

“Finally. Look, everything you can see is yours”

And I could see a lot: there was a huge warehouse, full of soldiers shouting my name.

I had to run away, I had to leave this place, and quickly.

“I need to go to the bathroom, I saw one right there, I'll be right back.”

I left without letting her answer, I needed to find a way out. I had always dreamed of having an army to become the ruler of the world, I deserved it, but I never would have guessed that it would happen one day. Was being narcissistic as hell really the best way to live my life?

“*I'll think about that later, the only thing that should bother me right now is how I can escape from this hellish place?*” I thought as I was walking as fast as I could.

On my way, someone said “Oh my Richard! It's him, our savior”, before passing out. So I literally was a god for them, and what about that savior business? Safa already called me like this before, what in the name of god was happening to me?

At that point it had already been seven minutes since I had left Safa to go to the bathroom, she would soon understand that something wasn't right, I had to find the exit and quickly.

I saw a door that looked different from the other ones, it surely was the exit. Without thinking twice I took it and I found myself into a dark place.

“Crap! This isn't the exit, no time to lose, I need to leave this place.”

But as I was starting to leave this fake exit, something caught my attention, a shiny gold chest, I couldn't leave without knowing what was in there.

So I looked inside it and there was a paper, it looked ancient, I broke the seal and looked what was written inside:

**“What you thought was cool
will be your doom
your ambition was limitless
but now you can be gorgeous
there are two monsters you have to slay
but one isn't on your way”**

“What is that? First I'm a savior and now I'm a knight in shining armor. Is someone making fun of me?” I threw that damn piece of paper on the wall, and against all odds, the wall collapsed, and there was a glimmer of light.

“Finally, I found it, the exit”.

4 - The final battle”

I had finally broken free from this terrible place, now where was I?

All I could see was a huge corn field, there was corn everywhere, when you look to the left what do you see? Corn. On the right? Corn. In front of you? Corn. Behind you? The door of the bunker I had just left.

I heard noises from that same door so I started to run as fast as I could, I ran so fast I probably broke the 100 meters dash world record.

After a while, I looked behind me and I saw two soldiers, if we can even call those crazy followers “soldiers”.

Thanks to my daily running habit, I was running faster than them, then I saw a building and I immediately knew where we were.

The corn field was owned by the famous pop corn company “Popi Pop”, which means that I am right next to my house, but what will I do when I get there? They would still hunt me, but currently that was the only viable option I had.

Two hours later, I finally got home, I was exhausted.

When I came in, I was horrified, there was Safa on my sofa, she said:

“Come on, what are you doing? You can’t leave us now that we are about to conquer the world for you.”

“Listen Safa, I don’t want to be the master of the world, It thought that that was what I wanted but you opened my eyes, I don’t want to be like you, you’re crazy”, I put all my wrath, tiredness and despair in my answer, I thought that everything would be over after this answer, in a way or another.

But then she said: “Oh Richard, you silly Richard, do you think that we really need you? You’re just an image, I am the one who rules, you’re the one they look up to, while I do the dirty things behind their back. You’re just a puppet for me to take over the world”.

I was stunned, she looked ready to do what it takes to accomplish her goals, no matter the cost. I was scared, for the first time in my life, I was really afraid.

The only thing I thought was that I had to flee.

I used my last bit of energy to turn back and run once again, but when I got outside, I saw a giant robot version of myself, Safa told me:

“We built it using data we collected about you, he is you but bigger and stronger”

I didn’t know what to say but I understood one thing: if he is like me, he has all my strength but also my weaknesses.

I started to run, I ran like I never did, I wanted to show this robot that he is nothing but a cheap copy.

When I finally got near the robot, I realized how huge he was, he was at least 30 meters tall.

I took a metal bar that was lying on the floor, and then jumped on his right foot, I started to climb, I had a goal: the back of his knee, because if he is like me his knee is as weak as mine.

Once I was there, I grasped a metal bar and started to hit the back of his knee, he started to shake, I knew I was doing damage.

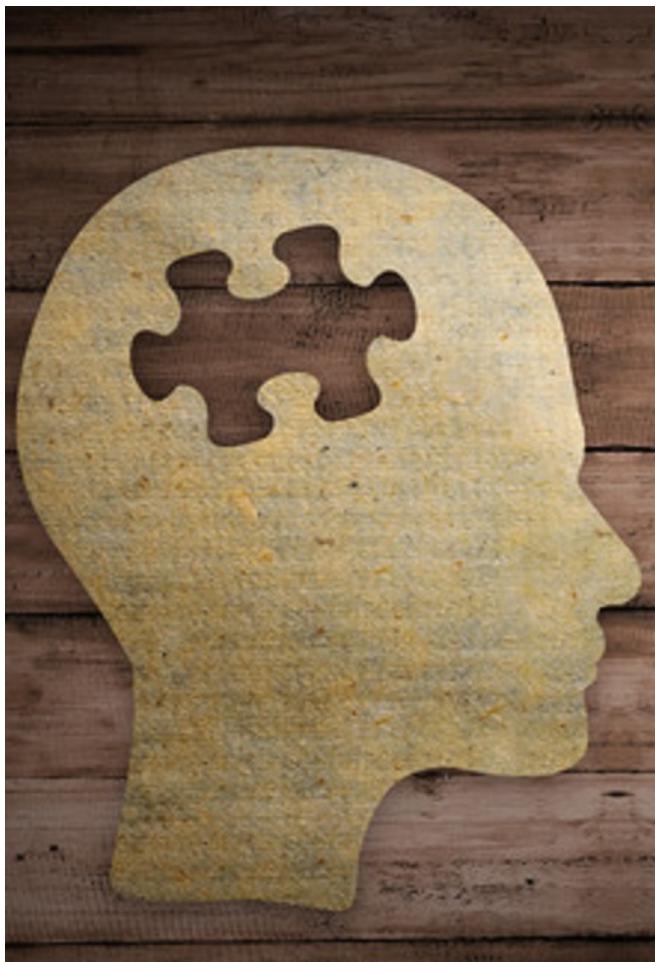
He was shaking so much I almost fell, I had to remain focused.

But then he fell, his knee was so damaged that he collapsed. No time to lose, I rushed to his face and started to repeat the process but this time I did it on his neck to break the connections between his brain and his body.

His body stopped moving. I had made it, I could not believe it. Just by myself I had taken down a giant robot with my face on it.

When Safa arrived she looked hopeless, she almost broke in tears, she didn't know what to say. But it wasn't important because she didn't get the time to say anything, the cops were looking for her. One of the people of her cult realized how freaky what they were doing was and decided to denounce her, with all the evidences he took before leaving, she had no chance of being found not guilty.

It was finally over, I went back home, started living my life again, but it wasn't totally like before all this happened, something changed in me, I started to help people in the streets, I even went to the mayor's club to help homeless people. After I apologized many times, he finally accepted to give me a second chance. Maybe this whole thing had made me a better person after all?



Margaux Roussel

Unsafe flight

1 - “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about this trip. It is the first time that I will be traveling so this is the start of a real journey for me. I am really living it like the fulfilment of a dream, a dream that I have had since my childhood. Actually, I can't really remember how long it has been in my head, anytime I try to think about it, I feel as if it was just there, like a part of me. I've always been into reading thanks to my mother. When I was young, she would always read bed stories to me from books she borrowed in a book store down the street. I will always remember the first time I went to this store. I hadn't even set foot inside and I was already fascinated by all I could see in front of my little child eyes. It was divided into different rooms, one for each category of books. The main room where we were in the entrance was very large and the colors on the walls were dark.

All the walls were adorned with endless shelves, which gave the impression that the room was an infinite hall where we could be attracted into the book world.

I would often come here after school to read a book or two and bring them back home if I had not had the time to finish them, thus my mother and I would share about them at dinner, reading has always been for me a way to escape the reality. And one day when I was in the space dedicated to stories for children I found a book with a beautiful black and grey craft cover, it was a little torn which probably meant it was pretty old. This book was obviously not in its place in the shelves, maybe even not in the right room. At the end of the book I could read it was based on a true story and David, the store owner, always told me that it was real and that one day I might be lucky enough to visit this magic place. And I guess he was right as it was bound to happen.

A feminine voice got me out of my thoughts. «Sir ! Please move forward !» the secretary lady called from the office in her beautiful navy blue uniform from the airport company on which we could see an elegant golden bird that had been sewn. I raced towards her among the crowd of people waiting like me and she gave me my boarding ticket with a similar logo.

Later, precisely when I was walking up the steps to the plane, my hand got wet with the autumn morning dew on the ramp. I surprised myself feeling reluctant to go but quickly managed to hunt all these thoughts off my head. Indeed, today was the day, the day I will fly to my dream destination, and I couldn't let anything stop me from doing it.

2 - “Guilty”

«Ah ! Here we are, finally sitting in this plane, I can't believe it !», my friend shouted while sitting with relief. I got to sit next to the window, it was a good thing since it was a long trip, just watching outside and being able to look at the clouds like I would do in my childhood lying in the grass of our garden and imagining the heroes of stories I would have read about coming to life. This could keep me awake for hours so I would not feel bored at all. Moreover, this time I will get to see them just near me. My friend who was noone else than the book store owner, was inspecting every option of our seats and especially the screen in front of us, and testing things the airline company gave us like the little toothbrush. In spite of our age gap, an ambiguous friendship had grown between us since I was a child. He was the type of guy who was always in his own world, the type of guy you can't really annoy, simply the guy that never loses his temper, just like me except he's way more outgoing, always shouting out and expressing his happiness and joyful vision of life, sometimes he would be so excited that people would compare him to a «positive thinking zealot», always wanting to share his values about positivity.

We were comfortably sitting, and right after taking off we soon fell asleep. As soon as i opened my eyes, I suddenly felt a kind of weird tension, and realised it wasn't the sun or some children noises that had woken me up, but the reflection and the brightness of a mirror that a man was trying to position in the right direction wanting to get the best view of a beautiful and valuable ring, that was worn by a lady behind him. Suddenly, he got up on his feet, passed by her and with an expert hand, got to steal her the jewel without being spotted by anyone but me. Then he quickened his pace to the restroom, smiling and greeting the plane lady. I asked myself what I should do, indeed, it seemed like I was the only witness. At that precise moment I was no longer sleepy at all and hurried to wake David up so I could tell him about what had just happened, while the **culprit** was walking back to his own seat.

3 - “A poem”

Time had passed by since the stealer's intervention and while we should have been telling a member of the company and the authorities about that, we spent our time thinking about what I had seen and about the man that we both had in sight, still confident in his seat. And we agreed on something, this man was in an awkward way a perfect look alike of the main character of our famous favorite book, the one at the book store. From his physical traits and especially his clothes to the action he had undertaken, chapter 1, page 6, we knew this book by heart, and right in front of us the ring's stealing scene just became a reality. It was rather unlikely to assume we were, in a way, living in the book or that it had come to life but we had to be sure and this is when, pushed and cheered up by our curiosity, imagination and yearning for adventures, we decided to craft a plan to try to discover who this man really was. The fear we should have felt in this kind of situation had completely vanished, as if hidden in a place of our head full of darkness and we would only really feel excitement. After all, it was maybe a good thing to be aware that this story was based on true facts.

We first decided to have an observation phase and quickly spotted something that caught our attention by the odd nature of the man's occupation to kill time. Indeed he was looking at numerous pieces of papers scattered on the table in front of him, trying to give the words a meaning, and so to assemble a text by making countless moves to put them back in order so that he could read the hidden sentences. When we realized he had finally finished his work, David used his camera to zoom in on the text he had assembled and we managed to read it. It sounded like a poem, a poem that we knew well too:

**«Every man has a duty, whatever he does and is due for,
Mine is to make ill-intentioned men
Become as brave as Churchill,
And then arise in the heart of the nation.»**

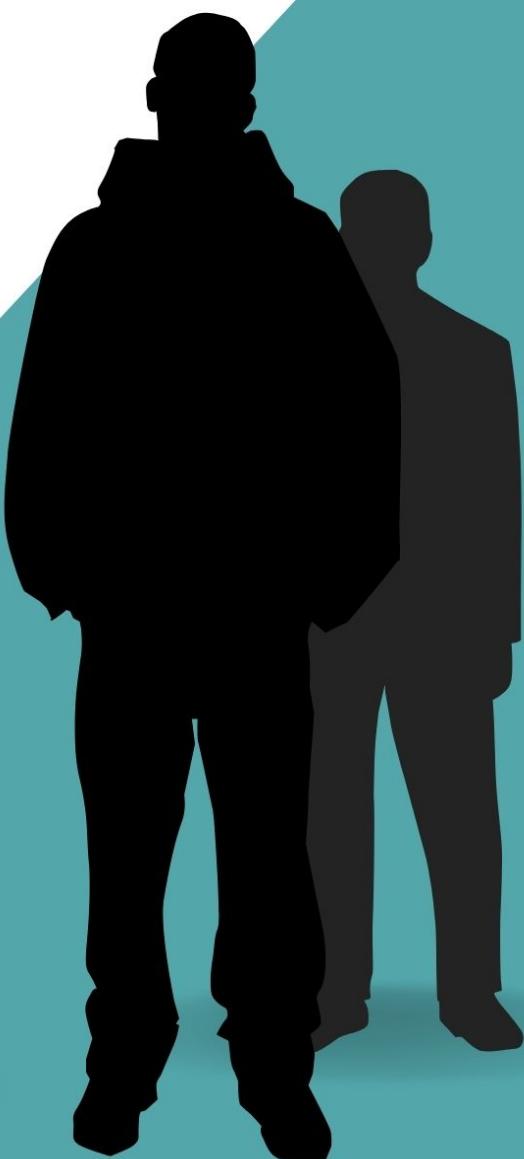
4 - “Let go”

We had both read this book countless times and we knew each line of every page which composed it like the backs of our hands. We obviously knew what would happen once these pieces of paper would have been reorganized and these words put back together. A halo of light started to appear all around the seat of the ring's stealer, this light coming from the riddle message. Right after, within a minute, the cabin was entirely bright, making everyone blinded by the sudden flash besides the panic it brought on board.

David and I only had the time to feel a weird sensation of fainting and we were brought back to the airport, waiting for our boarding tickets, and as soon as I could refocus on where I was, I saw the culprit trying to flee, unnoticed. It only took me two seconds to understand what was happening. This man, by solving the paper jigsaw, had unlocked the power to travel through time and it was now our duty to chase him so that he could not use this super power to spread evil.



MIKE DEVICE



Zélie thuault

1 - “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about my new university in Indianapolis, it had got great reviews in their website and all of the alumni said that it had been the best years of their life. I was also fascinated with the look of the university, it looks so impressive and big contrary to the college of my senior year, I was clearly so excited and couldn't hardly wait to study there.

2032, my name is Mike Device and I just turned eighteen years-old this year. I know my surname can be a little bit confusing because as much as I know I have definitely nothing related with technological stuff and I was very bad at that subject at school so it does sound a bit ironical. However, I don't know if it can help you but actually I don't know my parents and I live in a dorm with other people like me and the people who take care of us gave me this surname so I didn't have my say in this except to accept it without an explanation. Anyway my life is about to take a new turn.

I'm saying goodbye to all of my friends before I go, I didn't think that it would turn out so emotional but in fact we have known each other for a couple of years now and it makes me a little sad, especially my best friend Paster 125. Yeah his surname is not ordinary but he is totally normal and he helped me all of these past years with my hearing problems and I am very thankful! I took my luggage and went to the airport in New York very early in the morning because my plane for Indianapolis was leaving at 4AM, I was so tired and I had a lot of packages so it didn't help. When I got off the plane at 8AM after what seemed to be an endless trip, I witnessed the dew of Indianapolis and it was very refreshing, it was like my new life in this city was welcoming me and giving me courage. A man with a big sign in his hands with my name on it was waiting for me, he may have been waiting for me for a long time because my plane landed late, I felt sorry. His name was Paul and he was all dressed in navy blue but he made me feel uncomfortable because he never stopped smiling. It was really weird but maybe he just wanted to look friendly. On the way to the university, he was very nosy, overly inquisitive. I think that I had never seen such an outgoing man.

Today I'm taking my first class, oh I forgot to mention that I am taking psychology classes, I am very passionate about what people think or how the brain works differently for each of us and also I have a part of me who really wants to help others by offering my knowledge. But it is also ironical because I have hearing problems so listening to others can be a little difficult. Also, for you to know more about me I don't deal very well with what people can tell about me, their impressions of me, like I'm very reluctant to accept the opinion people might have of what I do or how I act, this generates anxiety deep inside me. Hence the regular appointments with a doctor to help me with this. But fortunately my problems didn't ruin my first day of school and I love it, I make friends and I feel like I chose the right subject to study so I'm very happy about this. And I don't know if you wanted to know I've never seen Paul again but I always feel like someone is watching me but maybe it is not related!

I live on the school campus and my room is bigger than I had expected, I decorated it with my posters of a Mexican group, Dear Mind, that I am obsessed with! I also put some gifts that my friends gave me before I left, to always think about them and “not to forget them” as they said. Tonight I'm going to the bar with some classmates to get to know everyone better so I'm very excited to be there.

I am at the bar, we are just 5 people, curious about one another. I thought we would have been more but never mind. There is Nathan, a tall man with a good sense of style and a very smart look, he always adds fun facts about anything we might talk about, maybe he want us to notice him. There is also Meline a small blond girl who has a very deep voice so it's really weird because it doesn't fit at all with her physical appearance, this make for a striking contrast. I'm always surprised when she talks! Next to her there are two boys, they are real twins, they look very similar and actually I don't know who is who, it's very confusing! One is Bryan and the other Ryan, we can guess that the parents didn't have the time to think more... This is an awkward group of friends but I kinda like it. Weirdly, it suits me very well!

2 - “Guilty”

It's been quite a few months since I got here, in Indianapolis. To be honest my grades aren't that good because instead of working I go to parties and it doesn't help at all. I mean who can blame me? This is the lifestyle of a student!

I'm always with the same group of people that I talked about last time, as yet there is a weird person who keeps following me everywhere I go. His name is Tech-Po, yeah I didn't know that we were allowed to name someone like this. He attends the Sociology class and sits right next to me and instead of looking at or listening to the teacher, he keeps looking at me. This is very disturbing and sometimes I think that he might never have seen a charismatic person like me! Never mind he is not a bad guy so I let him be with me and I think that he is more interesting than I expected. But that is what I thought before my friends told me that they saw Techpo in front of the building of my boarding school, last Saturday night, smiling and looking in the direction of my window. Since that day I've been so afraid of that guy, he acts weird and he is quite ambiguous. Nobody knows what he is thinking about or if he has any friends at school.

This week I decided that I couldn't keep living like this and that I needed to work more. Yes! Work more, this is my new value. So, every time after school I will go to the library and study for my final exams.

Right now I am walking towards the library but I'm feeling a bit nervous without really knowing why.

I entered the library and..... “What is happening here??”, Everyone is running everywhere and screaming !

What a paradoxical situation, this is a library and everyone should be calm and quiet but it's the contrary, so I guess that something bad is happening or might have just happened here. Oh ! maybe you're wondering why I don't seem afraid or in panic ? As you know I lived in a dorm with many people before and this kind of situations was quite usual.

Anyway, a witness of what happened came to me running with a frightful expression on her face.

- Mister ! Mister ! Do you have a phone ?? Can you call an ambulance please ??
- Yes of course, I said. What happened here ? Why is everyone panicking like that ?
- Please just call an ambulance !...
- Calm down, breathe.. I can't call an ambulance if I don't know what is going on ! -

Suddenly, someone took my phone out of my hands and said:

- I'm going to do it. Actually I am more than a witness so I can explain it !
- You're what ?? I said shocked of what I had just heard without knowing who was talking.
- I'm just joking, keep calm bro ! Ahahah - said a voice from afar.

I can still feel my phone in my pocket and it's strange because everything seems to be calm around me. My head hurts a lot and I can't see anything.... Wait what ? I can't see anything ? Why??

- You're closing yours eyes Mike, that's why.

- Ho, yes this is true - I said while opening my eyes.

Everything was blurred so I could not see who had just talked to me, but as soon as my eyes readapted to the light of the room, I saw TechPo right here to my right. But in fact I was also in a hospital room so I didn't give any attention to him. What am I doing here? The last thing I remember, I was in the library hall. My mind was unclear and I can't put words on what I am living right now !

- I have...

- Yes I know you have a lot of questions... but you need to go to the police before because you are a witness. TechPo said.

- What? But how, I don't remember anything about what happened ??

- Yes, but in your dream you couldn't stop screaming "*the culprit is right next to me !!!*"... I think you said it like a hundred times without exaggerating. So the police is waiting for you. TechPo explained.

- Wait ? **Guilty** of what ?

I tried to understand.

- As far as I know, someone assassinated a man named Nathan, I think...

- Nathan ? My friend ?

- The police thinks that the culprit was in a total rage after the analysis of the body, but they can't find any witness except you.

- But there were a lot of people in the library at that moment ? How it this possible ? Techpo please... Stop playing with me and be clear !

My head is hurting so much, I feel like all this is a nightmare ! I want to sleep.. Please.. Then my eyes closed and I don't remember the rest.

- There was only you in the library when the cops came in.

3 - “A poem”

The books were scattered in front of me, a red liquid dripping on them and the smell of blood was overwhelming. I tried to move but my body was like a rock, I looked around me even if my vision was blurred. When I started to feel free about my movement I stood up and walked around, I was back at the library. A dead body was lying on the floor right in front of me, I didn't know who that person was. My hands were feeling sticky, I looked at them and they were covered with blood. Was I the murderer ?

A little boy was standing nearby, looking straight at me. Actually I couldn't see his face but I could feel some kind of loneliness in him. He disappeared right after I blinked.

* * *

I woke up in the hospital bed yet again, I thought it was a bad dream but a realistic nightmare. Techpo was sleeping on the chair next to my bed, it was nice to have someone caring about you. He woke up ten minutes later, and told me that he was going to ask the nurse to bring the breakfast.

I switched on the television on the music channel, there was a song that I really liked, Sugar man by Rodriguez. I couldn't understand why they banned such a good song when it came out.

Techpo came back with the breakfast. I couldn't explain why but I felt very safe with him even if the days before I said that he was a little bit weird and ambiguous. So I decided to tell him about my weird nightmare...

He jumped out off his seat as soon as I finished telling my story. He looked so confused while it was just a nightmare, nothing to worry about. This was unlikely from him and I kinda regretted telling him about it. He told me that he needed to call someone and that we would talk about what I had just told him later but that I should not worry about it.

He left in a darting way so he forgot to take his target. While I was trying to grasp the target on the floor, a piece of paper fell down next to it. I took it and since my curiosity is legendary, I decided to read it.

“Are you crazy?

Society rejects you because they think you are crazy?

Please, instead of committing suicide,

come with us on a fairy trip by testing our virtual reality !

But be careful, there will be no looking back...

So do you want to be the main protagonist or the cattle of society ?”

. . .

What I had just heard was worrying and I absolutely need to call the master. After all this work and time, we can't let this experience fail just because of him, we need to find a solution.

- Hello, Techpo here, the mindset of Mike Device has been damaged.

4 - “Let go”

As soon as I had read the message on the piece of paper, I ran to the hallway and I saw Techpo on the phone. I tried to approach to give him his piece of paper but unfortunately I heard his conversation and I think that I was not meant to hear it.

Everything seems so unreal at that moment. Why would my brain be damaged ?

Techpo looked at me with a different look, this type of glance that doesn't fit with his typical behaviour. At that point I knew that something had changed between us and maybe it had been planned since the beginning.

A feeling of great emptiness overwhelmed me. I felt so lonely, so misunderstood. I always felt lonely but a lot of people were there to compensate this feeling, people always appeared at the right time. .. Maybe it was just an illusion..

I felt anxiety, anger, a lot of it. I couldn't control myself, hatred controled me.

Everything was blurred around me and people started to panic and move in all sorts of ways.

(Black out.)

I woke up and Techpo was right next to me on his phone, there was someone on the other side.

- Yes, I think he started to rememeber things, it sounds bad..... Do I do it ? Yes.. okay ..

I can't understand what he is talking about. But I saw him looking at me, he didn't say anything, he was just staring at me. The atmosphere felt sad suddenly.

He approached with a type of syringe, I think, I couldn't see straight.

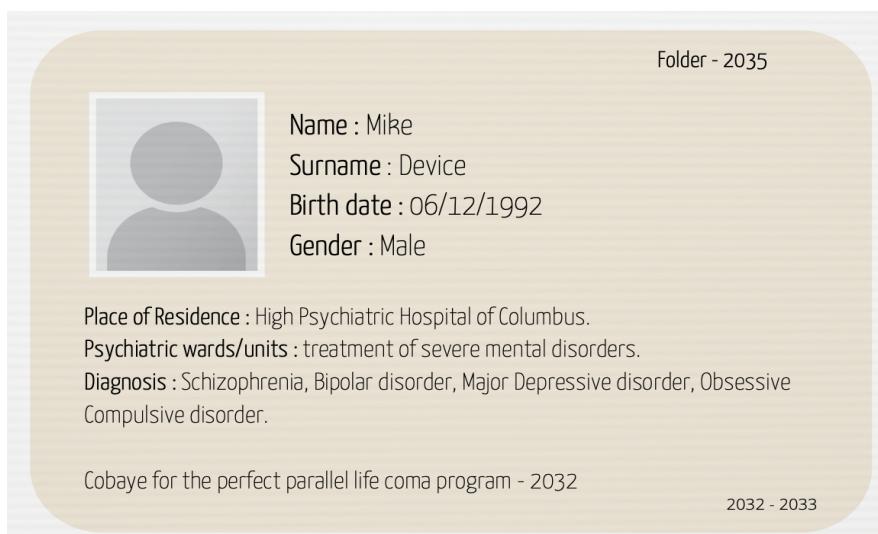
- I'm sorry, really...but it's time to come back. Techpo said

I started crying without a reason, but this is how my body reacted. Techpo stabbed me with the syringe and I fell asleep on the spot.

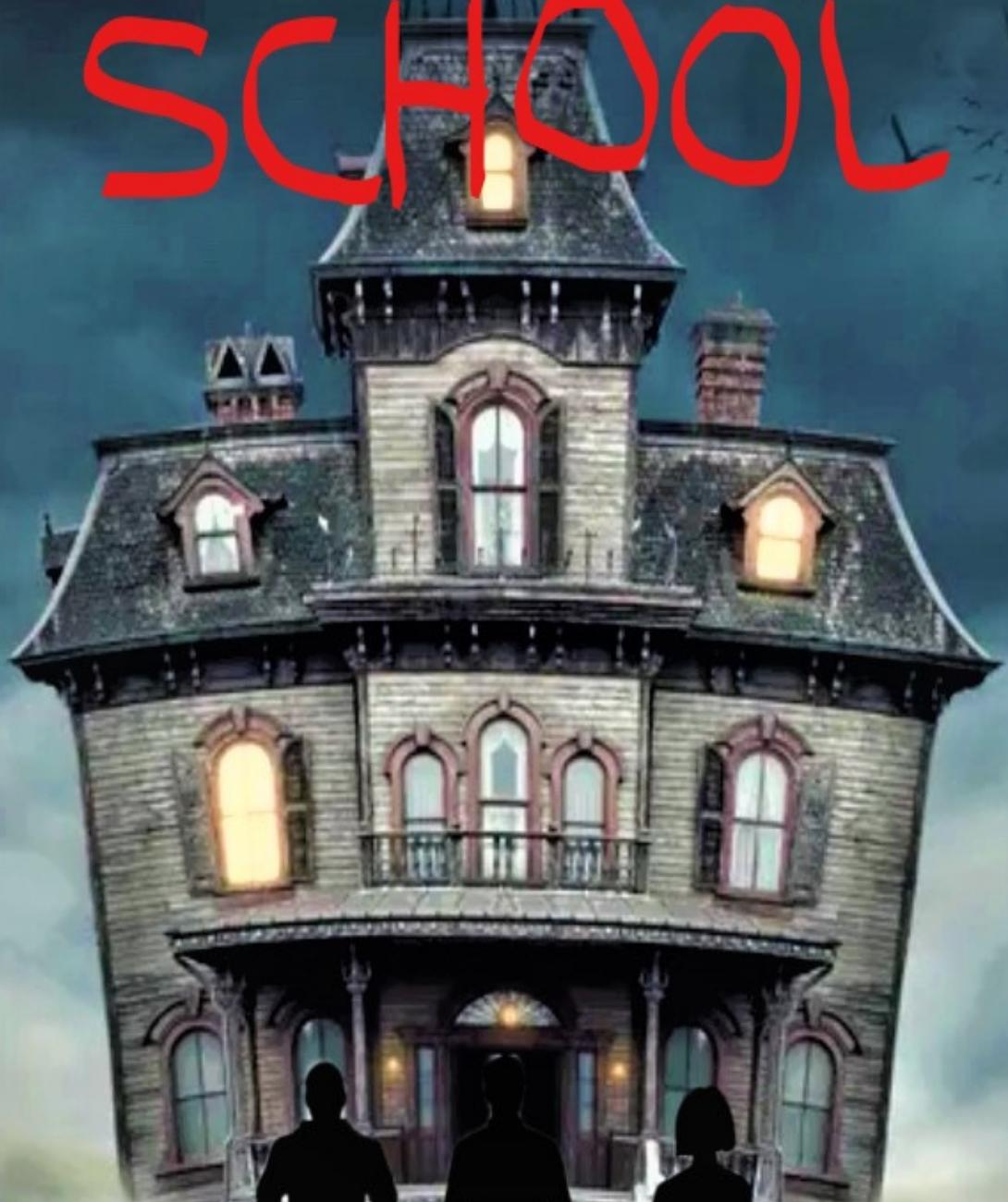
. . .

- Yes, he is back to reality, we don't know how he is going to react to the alarm. I think our experience worked very well but there are some adjustments to be made in order to make it perfect. We will send him back to High Psychiatric Hospital of Columbus .

I send you his folder.



ST NICOLAS SCHOOL



Lilou Carrel

1 - “Great expectations”

I had **great expectations** about how this adventure would end.

Let me introduce myself, My name is Agatha, I am 15 years old and I live in one of the most dangerous cities of the USA: Philadelphia. I have always lived with my two best friends William and Lewis. From my bedroom, I am able to gaze at the dew and it makes me feel less nervous. With my two best friends, we love putting ourselves in dangerous situations and that is exactly why I'm telling this story today.

Flashback: That day was a day like any other. I was with Will (William) and Lewis in the park, and like everyday, we didn't know what to do. When suddenly, Lewis had the fantastic idea of hanging out in the forest near the park, so we decided to venture there. At the edge of the forest, we could feel a strange atmosphere, as if we were not welcome. “What about to going back to the park” Will said. He suddenly seemed reluctant to venture into the daunting forest. However, we decided to ignore him and to keep on walking. This forest seemed endless. We could feel the stormy weather and black birds were flying right above us. All of sudden, we found ourselves in front of a Catholic boarding school. We could read “St Nicolas School”, that must have been the name of the place. We could also see that the place was dilapidated and that a deep silence reigned all over the place.

We were brave enough to enter, but suddenly the floor started to shake and we were sucked into a time machine. We found ourselves in the 80's, every wall was painted in navy blue. I was fascinated, just like my two best friends.

2 - “Guilty”

We decided to explore this place cautiously. The house was cold and sad, it seemed to have been unoccupied for many years. But, this consideration was suddenly interrupted by a kind of whistling. I glanced at Will and Lewis whose eyes were full of awareness. This image of my two friends reminded me that when we were little, we would often go to the bunker right next to my grandparents' house and there was always an old man sitting on a chair who stayed there all day long staring at us and every time we stumbled upon this man, we had the same face as Will and Lewis at this precise moment. When I could suddenly see something that could be mistaken for a ghost.

From that moment, I no longer felt the trust that I had at the beginning of this adventure. We stayed there without knowing what to do or say. When suddenly our mystery guest decided to speak: "Welcome my friends! Let me introduce myself! My name is Lucky and I am the owner of this place". I was skeptical to see and hear a ghost speak, it seemed far fetched and he was happy in the way he spoke, but he had all my attention. "You just entered a magic place" he continued "Now, let's play a little game! Many years ago, somebody stole an object which was valuable to me. Your mission consists in finding a witness who was present and to collect several clues in order to find the culprit. You will have to accomplish three tasks, you'll discover the ambiguity of each one at the appointed time!" then he vanished.

3 - “A poem”

We decided to make our way without wasting any time. We arrived in front of two doors: on the one hand a blue door and on the other hand a green door. Between them, there was a sign where we could read “Give the right answer, and you will find the good door!”. We looked at each other in turn without really understanding what was going on.

“What year did the United Kingdom leave the European union?”. We tried to rememeber. After 3 long minute exploring the knowledge scattered in our brains, Will had like a flash of genius and find the answer. He placed himself in front of the door where we could read “January 31st 2020” and the door opened itself. We walked through this door with a proud and confident mindset following this achievement.

The moment of euphoria was brief because when we turned around we realized that we were in complete darkness. Suddenly fear seized me. For a few minutes that felt like hours, the light came back. I was already regreting to have ever entered this house. We should have remained outside. At the end of the corridor I saw a little box. When I opened it, there was a letter. “What is it?” Lewis asked. “I don’t know”. We opened the letter and discovered a little poem:

**“To be happy is the main goal of life,
To be happy is like a long calming river,
A river with some ordeals to overcome,
A life can not be happy without some unexpected turns.

But, with every cloud comes the sun,
A sun which will shed light on the way,
The best way to find happiness in your life.”**

4 - “Let go”

I decided to put the poem in my pocket and open the door in front of me. Behind the door, we found a large room with a box at the middle of it and another door further down, both closed with padlocks. We quickly understood that we would have to find a code to be able to access the next room. Looking around us, we noticed numbers written on the walls: 4-9, 2-3, 3-8, 1-6. After a few minutes, we tried to follow Lewis's logical skills, which was to put the numbers to suit the order of the firsts numbers: 6-3-8-9. When we entered the code, the box opened itself. In the box, we found 2 keys. One to open the door and the other for... I don't know.

Once we were in the last room, we found our “friend” the ghost again. If I understood his monologue, we had finally reached the last mission. Lucky started to walk in our direction and stated : “Congratulation my friends!!! You have successfully completed all your missions and now you have reached the last one.”. After a short silence, he started speaking again : “Now, you should find a way to open this treasure box behind me!”.

We all looked at each other in turn and quickly realized that the only thing we had in our possession was a poem and a key. We first tried to open with the key but without success. It was when I started to read the poem that I saw the lock light up. So, I resumed my reading until it stopped glowing. I tried to open the box again and the latter let a kind of grimoire appear. I wiped the dust that had settled on it and was able to read “The Memory of St Nicolas”. Lucky eventually opened a secret door and turned around before telling us “You did it folks! You're free now” and he disappeared.

THE FORGOTTEN SPIRITS



Aurélie Simon

1 - “Amy”

I had **great expectations** for the first time that I would meet a ghost. I was not prepared at all, of course, I discovered that day that I was different from the others.

It was a Monday, I was walking on the grass in the morning , when the dew was actually still fresh, on my way to high school. I was fascinated by one thing this morning, I felt a person next to me, but nobody was there at that time, maybe it was only an illusion? No. I remembered that during this trip I was feeling sick, I had to stop for a second because my stomach hurt a lot, and then I realized where I was. Not in the right place.

I was in a forest, the trees were so big and the sky had a navy blue color that created a horrible atmosphere, very weird. And this when the person that I felt next to me appeared, she was flying in the air and her skin was very white. She said: “I’m Amy, nice to meet you, sweetie. I know that your name is Sierra, right?” I didn’t know what I was supposed to do or say, so I only gave a quiet “Yes” to let her speak more. So she continued: “Don’t be shy, I know that it’s weird, completely weird! But I have a big mission for you, sweetheart. You’re the only person in Seattle who can see a dead person like me, so please accept my mission!”

I wasn’t feeling good, like not at all, and I nearly fainted. I said to Amy: “Sorry, I’ve been feeling sick since I left my house, what’s the mission?” She took a glance at me with a lot of compassion and said: “Oh no, it might be my fault. When a ghost is next to you for too long, I think that you’re feeling sick. I’m so sorry. So here is your mission : you have to help my friends to make contact with their relatives. When they died, they didn’t have the time to say all the things that they wanted to say to their friends, family, or animals. So, with you, Sierra, we can help these poor people.”

Very moving, right? But at first, I was really reluctant to fulfill that mission. Why? Because my only preoccupation was to go to school to take a Maths test, the most important of the year. So I said to Amy: “Sorry Amy but now I have to go to school and we carry on talking, I’m sure that I could have a lot of problems with my teacher so please, help me to go to school!”.

After a trip with Amy when she took me in her arms to let me fly with her, I arrived at school on time, a very unexpected situation. I was walking to join my friends in the classroom and I saw another person who was very similar to Amy in front of the door, I closed my eyes for a second and when I opened them again, the person had disappeared.

When I eventually got home, Amy and I had a long conversation about ghosts, the mission, her life before she passed away... So I learned that Amy had died at the age of 20 in a car crash, she was meant to become a successful actress in the United States thanks to her amazing skills, but also thanks to her dad, who was an actor too! She also told me that my gift was probably due to the fact that Amy and I actually had a common relative.

2 - “Edgar”

After approximately one month, Amy and I discovered that we had a lot of common points, and it was actually very cool even if she was a ghost. Sometimes when I was at school, I saw and felt a presence like Amy, but it was actually not her. It was like the first day that I had met Amy. I told her many times that it made me feel uncomfortable, she only took a glance at me, but her eyes only seemed to express... fear.

At the end of my school day, I went back home without Amy, she had told me that she had a lot of things to do, maybe with her ghost friends? I don't know. She was sometimes a very special ghost, stubbornly focused on her mission. When I finally got home, I felt a strange atmosphere. It was only two seconds after I had seen a silhouette flying in the air, in my kitchen! That kind of situation was becoming less and less unusual.

So after a long conversation with this new ghost in my life, I learned that he was called Edgar. He had died of cancer at the age of 61 and he wanted me to meet his daughter. He told me that when he was at the hospital, he thought that he would have the time to see her one last time, but he didn't have enough time to make his dream come true.

Edgar cried and told me:

- You're like Maria, you know? A very listening person ... I would like to see her like I did every day of my life before this f***** cancer. Why, Sierra, why?
- Sorry, Edgar ... I promise you that we will find your daughter Maria, alright?
- Thank you, Sierra, thanks a lot ...”

Edgar and I rushed to the first train station we could find. I only sent a message to my mum to tell her that I was at my best friend Tiffany's. We talked a lot during our trip. Edgar would have liked to bake with his wife one more time, pet his lovely dog one more time, or go to the cinema one more time, but now he could no longer do all these things. He was a very sensitive person, with a simple life and beautiful values.

I told to Edgar quietly :

- Edgar, I think that's the time for us to get off the train...
- Edgar woke up.
- Oh sorry Maria ... hum, Sierra sorry, ambiguous situation, I was dreaming and I was with Maria...
- No problem, Maria's workplace is only a 5-minute bus ride away, let's go Edgar!
- I'll follow you!

Once we got there, we saw five police cars. Loud noises, a lot of people who seemed terrified,

and a fireman truck too. We heard people who seemed to be policemen yelling:

“DON’T STAY HERE! WE ONLY WANT THE WITNESSES TO STICK AROUND. IF YOU'RE NOT ONE OF THEM, YOU HAVE TO LEAVE QUICKLY! GO, GO, GO ...

I heard a woman say:

- I think that the culprit is the man who killed all the women last week, you know, that psychopath ...”

I saw Edgar on my left, he was shocked and had fearful eyes. I walked towards him to see what he was looking at. It was the fireman truck, but not only that. A lady with a lot of blood on her, between life and death. I understood that it was Maria.

3- “Judy”

Six months had gone by and Edgar had lost his daughter, it was very difficult for him, and so he lived with us now. I was too close to him, so Amy and I just suggested him to stay with us, like a family. But now we had a problem, another ghost had appeared in my house, my mom thought that I was crazy.

The only thing that I knew about this ghost was that she lived in New York when she died and that her name was Judy. She was around five years old, and she loved to sleep in my bedroom. Today, Amy and I were motivated to ask her some questions to try to understand why she had been around for one week now.

Amy started slowly:

- So sweetie, can you tell me why you are here now? I'll understand if you don't want to.

Judy replied :

- Hmm, I can try... to help you but... I, I have some fear in my belly, like butterflies, but they are mean...

- Okay, do you remember where you were before you turned into a ghost?

- I was in New York with mom and a lot of people were running, but they were also yelling at the same time.

I asked her:

- Were they terrified?

- Yes I think so, I had turned around and seen a lot of smoke far away and this is when I lost mom.”

Judy started crying.

* * *

Two weeks after our conversation with Judy, we concluded that she had died during the 9/11 attack. That morning I had found in my scattered clothes on the floor something unlikely, a poem written by Judy's mother.

It said:

**Without my little beauty
The world seems only scary
Come back my precious star
Who dances into the darkness of the sky
Find the place where we are
The best in their eyes**

- Nona

I knew that Nona, Judy's mother, was a very famous singer in New York, but I actually had no idea if she was still a singer nowadays. Her mindset had changed a lot, according to Amy, who had been looking for some information about Nona, and she seemed to now be focused on a number of charities helping children in need. With Amy and Edgar (who were very curious)

we wanted to see the place where Nona used to sing before because her poem let me think that she was to be found there.

Without knowing anything, Judy followed us and, in my opinion, it was the best decision that she had made. Why? Because she guided us to her mom in this large concert place because she had heard her mom's lament. When we finally arrived in the concert room, Nona looked at me with her wet eyes, and she asked me:

- Is Judy here, miss? I, I feel that she's here.

-Yes Nona, she's here ...

4 - “Sierra”

5 YEARS LATER

A lot of things happened during my high school life, especially with the ghosts. I saved 34 ghost spirits who today live their dead lives peacefully and without any regrets. Amy and Edgar had also left me, their absence had been longer than the others, we were so linked that they didn't want to leave. But they had to.

I had occasional visits from other ghosts, so I thought I would be helping them all my life. That's why I chose to study psychology to understand people's reactions better and therefore analyze the different aspects of the brain more efficiently.

These adventures I went through, in spite of the obstacles I had to overcome, made me more mature day by day and able to understand people better, their stories and especially the fact that it was necessary to listen to the others and not to forget to tell them that we love them, when we can still do it.

If I had one piece of advice to give: Look at the world around you and appreciate it... for what it is.



LOIS LERICOLAIS

MY BRIGHNESS

1 - “Great expectations”

“I am pretty sure you didn’t kill Mr Sebastian Malone and Miss Aimee Macbeth. » said Mr Spellman, the officer in charge of the investigation. She was there, in the same room as him, but her mind was still in the classroom. The images came and went all the time, without a single moment of relief, she had the feeling that her brain couldn’t breathe, that she would have to deal with those horrific flashbacks for the rest of her life. The smell of blood and gunpowder, the navy blue walls, which had actually become actually red. The faces of her friend and boyfriend, so pale, hopeless, the desks, scattered all around the classroom... She could never forget. Never.

The officer tried to ask her other questions, but he soon realized that she was reluctant to say anything. He just watched her return to her cell, heavily burdened with what she was accused of.

He was pretty sure that she was innocent, but had no idea how to prove it.

She was laying on her bed, closing her eyes to try to remember.

Let’s go back in time: a few months ago, the beginning of the holidays, the beginning of everything.

Mary, all her friends used to call her just Mary, because she hated « Rosy » but no one knew exactly why.

So, Mary and Aimee lived in San Francisco, Aimee’s mother had a flat in the town center, so the girls would use it during the holidays. They went to the most famous club in town, and met Sebastian. They attended the same highschool but didn’t really know each other. You know, Sebastian was the popular boy, cool, rich, handsome. Aimee went partying lots of time with him, she was as popular as him. Mary could have been popular too, but she was a bit shy. Mary was that type of girl : not really popular but everyone knew her because of her beauty, also because Aimee and her were the prettiest duo of the highschool, Aimee used to play with it, Mary always remained humble. She was brilliant, lovely, curious, she always took care of everyone, more specifically her family.

Sebastian stayed with them the rest of the time they had in San Francisco, and him and Mary started to date, he was fascinated by her...

Back to Sacramento, they spent all their time together. Everything was so perfect, they had the type of relationship that every girl could have dreamed about, even if he was very impulsive sometimes. Sebastian’s father was absent, all the time, so he would party at least 3 times a week. His parties were quite famous for their excesses, drugs, alcohol, the police would be called everytime...

Everything was so great, until the Sebastian’s father, William, came back home.

2 - “Guilty”

He came back during one of the biggest parties Sebastian had ever set up. There were about one hundred people, and no limits. Sebastian's drug dealer was selling his stuff all around the house. Unexpected, William arrived and started to scream at everyone « Where is this little piece of shit? » The frightened guests stared at him and then pointed their fingers at Sebastian who was already lying on the floor because of what he had taken a few minutes before. Mary was trying to help him to stand up but he was too tall. William suddenly jumped on his son, and started to hit him with all the strength he could put in his fists. Sebastian was shouting and crying and begging his father to stop. All the people there were so shocked that they didn't move. They were standing around the scene which was too ambiguous to do anything.

When the fight was eventually over, Sebastian was on the floor in the foetus position, Mary went to cuddle him, and William left the house, following all the poor witnesses who had to leave that horrible scene. The party was over.

At that time, Mary knew that William wasn't a good person, like Sebastian used to tell her. When Sebastian came back to his senses, Mary asked him if it was the first time.

- Of course not, he answered. It started when my mother left us, me, my brother, and Dad. I always looked like my mom, it was not a problem before, but then he started to insult me.

- What did he say?

- It began with « You are nothing in this family, just be like your brother... » and now it is getting worse...

- Oh my god, that is horrible.. How is your brother ?

- Exactly like William. A violent zealot, but he's gone now.

When Mary left the house, she sent him a message : « I want your father to die for all the things that he did. » Mary knew that William would not feel **guilty** at all, he hated his son, and hitting him was just a way to express his madness towards his ex-wife. His values were deeply wrong.

* * *

When she opened her eyes again, all she could see was the grey wall of her cell. It was nearly the time of another police interview. She knew that Officer Spellman really thought that she could kill people, and so he had decided to keep her there for fear that she might kill again.

Suddenly, 3 police officers came in her cell and took her away, and when she was finally able to say something, they showed her a CCTV reel, which showed Sebastian killing his own father.

3 - “A poem”

She sat there, just watching that horrific vision, it was quite dark, so she couldn't see precisely what he was doing. She could only glimpse at blood, splashing everywhere. According to her, it was highly unlikely that her Sebastian could have done that being sober. It was true that when drunk he was very aggressive and violent, but he had been clean for 2 months before he... Too hard to think of that for the moment.

The officers started to ask questions, too many questions, but her eyes and ears just repeated the images of what she just saw again and again. She couldn't think of anything else.

“Would you say that Sebastian is a psychopath?”

She opened her eyes, watched them, their disgusting mindsets ; she became out of control.

Crazier than you've ever seen. She wanted to kill the police officers like the terrorists tried to kill Queen Elizabeth II in 2020. She frightened the officers with her screams, but they did tie her down really quickly, making her unable to move. When she calmed down again, she read the tattoo of the officer who was keeping her down :

“Darling,

If I were the moon,

I would like you to be

My brightness.”

It reminded her the words Sebastian used to tell her, she burst into tears.

Her mind was obsessed with him.

AXEL PAUMARD

ReLife



1 - “Great expectations”

He had **great expectations** about his professional life. James Unemployed, a 25 year old young man who had been jobless for 3 months. One night, James was on his way back home , not paying attention to anything around him, he was oblivious to what was going on in the street, but suddenly, a mysterious man appeared and he said:

“Hello James, I know who are you , and I know you're having a hard time trying to find a new job.”

James panicked because he didn't understand why this man was even talking to him. However he didn't know why , but he didn't have the feeling that this man wanted to hurt him so he listened to what the man had to say:

“So, my name is Darene, I work for ReLife laboratory, I have been watching you for 1 year and I chose you. You are my subject. Let me explain! ReLife Laboratory is carrying out an experiment on unemployed people. This experiment is irreversible. If you swallow this pill, you will go back to high school for only one year to take your exams. Be careful, all the people you will see will never remember you, and you will also lose all your memories. In return, you can have a good job”

After Darene's endless speech, James couldn't believe his eyes and ears and he was really fascinated by Darene's offer.

“I'll think through the night and I'll give you my answer tomorrow”

The next morning, James had remembered an important detail. He didn't ask for the address of the laboratory to be able to give his answer . So, he returned to the specific spot where he had met him, the sky was a daunting navy blue and the dew was refreshing his face .

When he got there , a small tag on which he could read the address of the laboratory had been tied to a bench. As if Darene had anticipated James's mistake ...

James immediately headed towards the laboratory but he was still reluctant to accept the offer.

2 - “Guilty”

Eventually curioisty had gotten the best of him and it was time for James to swallow the pill that would allow him to start his student life again.

He suddenly found himself in his high school classroom. He didn't have the time to take it in but when he looked at his phone, he noticed that his face had changed although his mind had not. His face had totally become younger, as if he was a child !

Although he was shocked by this sight, he wondered whether he did not actually enjoy it ! And at that moment, as he was still thinking, he heard a little voice behind him, and when he turned to the left, he saw a beautiful girl who was wearing special clothes with many colors, he immediately understood that she was a manga zealot. James felt attracted because he also liked reading manga when he finished his work but he no longer did. Her name was Gaellie and they began a long, flawless conversation. At the end of the high school day, he went back home, and just like a ghost, Darene was waiting for his return. He seemed angry and James didn't have the time to put his bag down :

“I forgot to tell you that you mustn't get attached to people. I saw you talking to a girl and this conversation seemed ambiguous so I'm warning you now: at the end of this year you will never remember the people that you will have met during this experiment”. After Darene's statement, James had understood that Darene had witnessed his every move all day long and he felt guilty even if he had only intended to make a friend .

The following day, an unexpected event happened and made James question a number of things.

When he went to high school, James overheard a conversation between Gaellie and Darene and he understood... nothing. But he soon discovered that the girl with whom he had spoken , Gaellie , was also a subject of “ ReLife Laboratory ”. So they were two subjects; they were going to have to lie and that was not part of James's values but that was not even the main issue.

The main issue that they had was that they were not allowed to get attached.

At all.

3 - “A poem”

One day later, James went back to school and made yet another mysterious discovery. He found a piece of paper on the floor that intrigued him. So he picked it up and read it :

**“ IN THE BLUR OF YOUR MIND
EVEN IF THE DARKNESS SEEMS TO CALL YOU
LIKE THE THICK INK OF A PENCIL
THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY OUT
TO FINALLY GET RID OF IT !
THE FEAR YOU WILL FEEL
TO ERASE IN THE FUTURE
AMONG THESE SCATTERED DIFFICULTIES.
TO BE ABLE TO BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED
ONLY DEPENDS ON YOUR MINDSET”**

James immediately understood that this poem had been written by Darene. It read like an enigma. For him, this poem was so well-written that it resembled those of Shakespeare. James ironically questioned his lack of interest in his studies when he was younger.

The next day , James found Gaellie in the classroom and learned that she had also found a poem on the ground the previous day, this confirmed that the poem came from Darene; there was a message hidden behind these words.

On that day, he also learned that the end of the year exams would come soon, and that the schedule had already been set. It was finally going to be the moment when he would be able to take his destiny in his own hands so that he would no longer be unemployed.



Manhattan nightmare

Zoé Legros



1 - « Great expectations »

I had **great expectations** about July, 4th 2021 because that was the day I was to ask my girlfriend to marry me but a little thing changed my plans. I died.

The dew on my corpse would hint at the fact that I was killed at night, I don't know how I was killed but I know one thing, he hated me! My navy blue suit was so filthy, I must have been dragged on a wasteland, I wasn't killed on this street.

I remember when I was 10 years old, I said to my mum I wanted to be killed because the story behind a murder was always so intriguing but now that I've just been killed, I find it a lot less cool.

Oh my god, why was my body placed on Times Square. I hate that street and so many people saw me DEAD.

My wife ! Where is my wife ? I want to see her or maybe not after all because when your husband dies, you must be sad.

This July 4th was an endless day for the whole family but above all for me. I was reluctant to go out last night but if you don't party on a Saturday night in Wall Street, you're a loser and I'm NOT a loser !

And WHAT A NIGHT ! We started in Upper East Side with a before at my best friend Michel's house but we took some drugs and the only thing I remember is a striptease club. I don't know what I was doing in that club but luckily I'm dead, otherwise my wife would have killed me (O the irony).

I know I am bothering you with the fact that I'm dead but I was so fascinated. I have so many questions such as « How was I killed? » or « Why? ». My body was transported in a body bag for more analyses , and we got the report pretty soon.

I was stabbed 172 times ! This is so intense !

The NYPD think it's a crime of passion so I must know the f***ing killer ! But we don't have a single clue so a long investigation is awaiting us. Three hours later, my wife was questioned . She said she didn't know anything but I think it's wrong because she wasn't even crying or she may have never loved me (this is the sad part) . I think she might have killed me...

2 - « Guilty »

Who is my wife ?

Her name is Emy Escobar, she's the most beautiful woman in the world but she is also the most dangerous. Why ? I just know one thing about her childhood, her father was killed because he was a drug lord in Columbia. She came to the USA when she was 18 years old and we had our first date when we were both 19.

Now we are 29 and she's still alive but I'm not. I think she's guilty because even if I loved her, she's a psychopath like her father. She's aware about my ambiguous relationship with my secretary and she would have killed me because of that.

She's so mad, we just had a baby with Jessica ; it's nothing .

She's really selfish.

We could have figured out a 50/50 agreement with Jessica but no need now I'm dead!

I'm a really good investigator, she would always do that little gesture with her hands when she was lying.

My body was transported by ambulance to be taken to a laboratory, in order to be thoroughly examined so that we could determine the cause of my death. The investigator said the murderer could not be my wife so I have to start over from the beginning.

Let me think ... Oh one day I saw in the street a religious zealot and we had an argument about his religion and it was really violent because we didn't share the same values. He started to act really crazy and he told me he wanted me dead (LOL) . I no longer go there any more.

One of the witnesses said something interesting about the reason of my death. Who is this man ? Wait it's Michel, my best friend. He said he saw a man running with a knife. I feel really lost, I can't find my murderer, I'm too stupid. I deserved to die.

Wait, who am I ? I'm Jonathan Skull, I used to be a big boss on Wall Street, so I can find my murderer. I think it's that crazy preacher, he wanted my death. I can picture him kill somebody, he's really... wait, why was my best friend arrested ?

3 - « A poem »

Is this a joke ? You're supposed to have a good reason to kill someone! I feel like the Twin Towers on September 11th, my life is collapsing! Why ? Since we were kids we have known each other , how can you do that to your best friend ; everything I did, I did for him in his interest ... NO NO NO !! my murderer can not be my best friend. I know him. I'm going to let the police do their work but it simply can not be him .

When we were little, he had written a poem for me:

**I don't want our friendship to totally end,
I need you ! You're my best friend.
So can we make a promise to stay together until the end ?
A vow to each other to always be best friends?**

This poem has been ringing in my head everyday since I was 10 years old. His mindset isn't the mindset of a murderer, he has a kid , he would never ruin his life to kill his best friend, it's totally unlikely.

The news say that the police have a lot of overwhelming evidence. I'm fearful.

So his wife was right, he has a great darkness in him ! Ok ... he killed me, but what for?

I don't know. I'm going to look for evidences but they are scattered in different police stations and it's going to take time (I have plenty of that now).

* * *

They found the weapon that killed me and his fingerprints are all over it.

It undoubtedly makes him my murderer. I'll just have to wait for the trial...

4 - « Let go »

Three months later

Michel's trial has begun and I still can't believe it but I will finally know the reason for my murder and why the person I loved the most, after my wife, was able to do this to me !

He looks devastated in court, I wonder how he feels. He finally realizes what he did but now we want the truth. I want the truth!

* * *

You will never believe me, I'm leaving the trial and I'm still skeptical ! He pleaded « demonic possession », he would have killed me because he was possessed by the devil , how is that even possible ?

I know you're telling yourself « But you're a ghost... »

YES!

But a demon ! And the worst thing is that apparently he would have had an exorcism performed on myself...

I refuse to believe that I died killed by a demon, I wanted to die of an O.D ; this way I would have been the perfect protagonist for a horror story aimed at stupid teenagers! I WOULD BE A F***KING STAR ...

- Honey, wake up !! You're having a nightmare !
