

CHAPTER ONE

The challenge
Blah, blah, blah.

The master had been talking for a while and as I usually only listened to the lecture with one ear. Already I'm not interested in French, but in conjugation, is the maximum risk of falling asleep. It is without that's probably why I got involved in the this story. Numbed by a captivating lesson on the compound tenses of the indicative, I lowered my and I got trapped. There is no other explanations. However, I should have understood by seeing Mr Mathéi's enthusiasm. It is important to know that the face of Mr. Weatherman, as he is known, reflects his mood. And here it said "sunny day".

- And as I just told you, it is
It is important to be welcoming, he said.
A murmur of voices went up in the classroom.
Restless voices, as when discussing a
school outing or a sports event. Except that
There, no one agreed.

- This is great!" cried Darsha.

- Yeah, hell yeah!" added Benji.

Some of the students seemed excited by the announcement made by the teacher. Others, almost as many of them do not seem to be excited at all. Kristy pinched his nose in disgust and Angelo said growled:

- Do we really have to?

- You don't have to do anything," replied Mr. Weather. However, it is preferable that the person who will be housing the correspondent is willing to do so.

Apparently I had missed an episode. A correspondent? What correspondent? Darsha has shook his head and sighed.

- My parents will never agree.

- Neither are mine.

Ines whispered in a shy voice:

- I would never dare to talk to him, so inviting him
at home...

Now I was wide awake. Why do
so many stories? I dropped my radiator and tipped over
my chair to lean towards Darsha, my friend
since kindergarten.

- Hey! Can you explain to me what's going on?
She didn't have time to answer me. A
the class, as loud as it was.
than a thunderclap:

- Elias!

Caught in the act of chattering, I jumped up
like a devil out of a box. The master told me
with a black look. If his eyes had been
I was sure I would have been struck by lightning. I put
my chair on its legs and wisely crossed my hands
on the table.

- Yes sir, I did with a hypocritical smile.

- Perhaps you could share your conversation
with us?

- Er...

I thought quickly. In these cases, there are
two ways of responding:

- Either you take responsibility for your chatter and
you take a punishment,

- Either you deny everything and try to
to get you through.

- I was telling Darsha that...

Mr Weatherman's eyebrows came together to
form a bushy line over his eyes.

Storm warning on the horizon.

- ... I told him that I thought it was great
too. I look forward to meeting the correspondent.

The master's eyebrows relaxed and a
The lightning flashed across his face. He even seemed to
pleasantly surprised.

- This is to your credit.

- I don't believe a word of it!

Angelo stared at me with a mocking eye. In
On the surface, this boy seems perfect. In reality, he is
perfectly unbearable. I also find it
is a very bad name, because frankly,
he is no angel. If he is handsome and excellent
student, he never misses an opportunity to do so
knowledge. His favourite activity is throwing
jokes to make his fan club laugh. He
loves to make fun of others in general and me in particular
particular.

In short, I had just lied to Mr. Mathéï and Angelo. I had just lied to Mr.
Mathéï and Angelo

could not miss this opportunity to show me
in front of the whole class.

- Don't pretend to be more interested than
He said mockingly. You're also getting away with it.
cards, from this correspondent.

- Are you calling me a liar?

Although he is technically correct, his air of
superiority raised my temperature. I have
felt the blood boil in my veins, exactly
like milk about to overflow from the pan.

- That's enough, boys," scolded the teacher, "this
This is not the time for bickering. I will
reminds us that it's about finding a family for
welcome the correspondent. He arrives in barely
two weeks and we have to prepare for its coming.
Does anyone want to participate?

His question fell flat. No one
seemed willing to invite this stranger into his home.
Even those who were enthusiastic earlier on did not
were no longer flinching.

- Well... very good. Tell your families and
We will discuss this again tomorrow.

A cloud passed over Mr. Weatherman's face. He
looked disappointed. Angelo raised his hand.

- Perhaps Elias would agree.

Since he is so happy that the correspondent
come to our class, he or she just has to offer to
to host it.

Our eyes met. In this fight
silently, Angelo challenged me. Is it possible to
I was going to chicken out? With a blink of the eye,
I took up the challenge.

- Of course I agree! The
can come and live at the house, there is no
has no problem.

I returned a winning look to my
opponent. But Angelo did not have the reaction that
I expected. Instead of looking dejected, a triumphant smile spread between
his ears slightly
detached.

Until the bell rang, I couldn't get rid of
the unpleasant impression I had just made on myself
have.

CHAPTER TWO

An extra correspondent

When school was over, it was all about
the arrival of the pen pal. Some students were looking at me
in the corner as he hurried off to the bus. Angelo has
I had to get up and walk over to him to taunt me:

- If you're scared and want to give up,
there is still time!

- I'm going to pretend you didn't say anything, I have
grumbled with clenched fists.

He snickered as he walked away, Timéon and Kristy on
the heels. Benji patted me on the back and exclaimed:

- Hats off to you, buddy! It's really ballsy to
your share!

But Darsha proved to be more perceptive.

- Admit that Angelo cornered you. Every time he

provokes, you can't help but retaliate. Now you is going a bit far. You don't know what you're getting into!

This time it was too much. They were starting to annoy me, all of them, with their comments!

- I don't see what's so extraordinary about it to welcome a boy into my home. The house is well big enough for that, and my parents are very cool.

My friends stared at me with wide eyes. A little the way one looks at a sleepwalker who walks while he sleeps. We don't know if we must wake him up, because he may react badly.

- What's the matter? Don't you believe me?

Finally, it was Darsha who took the floor. She had lost his confident tone now.

- Look Elias... I don't know how to tell you to say so.

- The correspondent... continued Benji.

- What? But go ahead! You start to freaking me out right now!

- The pen pal who is going to live with you is a Alterian," said Darsha in one breath.

It was my turn to widen my eyes. Benji has continued:

- Several institutions are participating in a diplomatic exchange programme. Our school volunteered.

- Finally, the volunteer is you," finished Darsha.

My best friend is really good at pushing the nail. The information reached my brain.

The correspondent.

Was.

An Alterian.

- An Alterian from the planet Alter? I asked stupidly.

My best friends nodded and I absorbed information as the pond swallows the stone. *Ploc.*

I had just accepted that an alien was living at my home.

So I reacted as I always do when I feel that I am being overwhelmed by events.

I played the guy who doesn't get it.
- Well! I don't see what the problem is! This
will be a great experience... I have always dreamed of
meet an Alterian for real. I'm sure we'll
will get along.

I added tons and the others appeared
convinced. I was so persuasive that I almost believed it
myself. With my head held high and a smile on my face, I
I got on the aerobus. As I flew over the
city to get home, I felt my optimism
deflate like an undercooked soufflé.

How was I going to break the news
to my parents? Because they are full of stuff
(tidying up, homework obsessed and
strict about manners), but cool, I had
perhaps a little advanced...

*

I thought about it for a long time. I had to come up with a
strategy to make my announcement. In the evening, I
so we waited for dinner time. This is the only time
where the three of us meet. I had decided to
to get in condition before attacking head-on. I have
enjoyed dessert, a giant cookie with chocolate chips, and
chocolate, to tell about my day. I talked about my
math grade (just average), canteen menu
(creamed spinach) and it worked quite well,
my parents were not at all suspicious. There, the air of
nothing, I slipped in that I had offered to house the
correspondent who came to our school.

- There is only one? my father was surprised.

- What country is he from?" asked my mother.

I let the chocolate melt on my tongue as I
waiting to respond. You might as well take advantage of the good
things before they send me to my room.

Then I took a long breath and let out
like a burst of fire:

- The correspondent- is Allegheny- and- he- will- spend- a-
week - at home.

There, I said it.

My father swallowed his mouthful and said

spit into his towel. My mother did a little grimace, as if she had found a slug in the his cake. Without giving them time to place one,

I sent my fatal argument:

- Mr Matheï thinks it is important to the relationship between our two countries is very good. nations depend on it.

In fact, I was adding a little bit to it. It wasn't exactly what the master had said, but it was not not wrong either. Years ago, when we had discovered the existence of the planet Alter, it was thought the end of the world had come. The men had fear of being invaded, colonised, pulverised, worse than in *Alien Isolation* (I never got to play it, but I hear it's terrible). And then, when the human beings had understood that not only the that the aliens were not only peaceful, but that they were also had no intention of moving to Earth, they had relaxed. The reason for this calmness came from also two incredible discoveries:
More than half of the Alter planet is made up of water.
The main food of the Alterians is the plastic.

Since there is not enough water left on Earth, but
too much plastic, in the end, the men
are very happy to trade
with this planet.

I waited for my parents to tell me that it was
You can't, you don't think about it, you've lost your mind,
You've really done it all to us.

I had it all wrong.

My father swallowed a large glass of water and
he finally stopped coughing. My mother put down her little
spoon on his plate and folded his napkin, a sign of
that she was thinking.

They looked at each other. Then they looked at *me*.

- He will sleep in your room, it will be more
reassuring for him, Dad decided.

- It's certain," added Mum, "he doesn't live in the
door next door. He needs to feel comfortable here.

Any more and I would fall off my chair.

Parents, we think we know them by heart, and
then one day you find out that they are able to
bluffing. And we remember why we love them.

CHAPTER THREE

Landing

I didn't sleep much the night before the
my correspondent came. I lay there
looking up at the ceiling, wondering what it was
looked like. In the morning, my eyes darkened, I asked
my mirror. What should I wear? What to wear
is best suited to accommodate a child who lives in
billions of miles away? Finally, I chose
my usual clothes, t-shirt, jeans, trainers. The
boy in the mirror sent me a smile. All
was going to go well.

The correspondent arrived at half past nine,
precisely as the master had announced. It is necessary to
that with teleportation, the journey did not have to be
take him more than a few minutes. It had taken him more than
time to come by airbus from the teleport to the school.

We were doing French when we got the
knocked on the door. The director, Ms Lemarteau, is
I entered with a stiff step, followed by my correspondent
who was trying to imitate his walk. As he
the impression that he was being overly diligent.
marching for a military march. The effect was rather
and small laughs escaped into the room.
class.

Ms Lemarteau turned around to understand
which amused the students, and the correspondent, too
right as a soldier at attention, waited for her to
to tell him what to do. New laughter erupted, immediately
extinguished by the glare of Mr. Weatherman. The
The director walked up to the board with dignity,
the correspondent on her heels. She scraped her
throat, swallowed saliva and started talking without
to hide the tremor in his voice.

- Well... Hello," she stammered. The children,
uh... I'm happy to introduce... *Ailletac*.
She wrote AYTAC in capital letters on the
numeric keypad.

- Sorry to contradict you, Ms Lemarteau,

corrected the correspondent in a friendly tone, but I
Let me point out that it is pronounced "Etac".
- Yes... well, uh... very well, actually
Mme Lemarteau with a little nervous laugh.
She cleared her throat again and told us
stared at.
- I count on you to welcome
warmly greet your fellow student and make him/her feel comfortable.
She didn't look comfortable at all.
She waved her fingers vaguely in greeting.
and went out with a clatter of dry heels.
A dead silence fell over the classroom.
Since the beginning of the school year, this was the first time that the
time Mr. Mathéï had achieved such calm. He tapped
the shoulder of the Alterian.
- Welcome to you!" he said, and a smile blossomed
under his moustache in the manner of a bud that
blossoms in spring.

Aytac nodded ceremoniously and,
like my friends, I tried to detail it
on the sly, i.e. without any discretion. The
poor man stood there like a pole in the middle of the
in the middle of the stage. With his patent leather shoes,
his dark grey uniform and burgundy tie to
He looked like he had just come from Hogwarts,
Harry Potter's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Harry Potter is
the hero of an old series of books that my father
inherited from his father. They date from the last century, but
I liked them so much that I read them all twice). Anyway.

Aytac looked really cheesy in his costume
elegant. However, its appearance would not have been
so disturbing if that was all there was to it. No, the most
was the colour of his skin, a skin that was as dark as a
blue than the blue of the sky which diffused a light
He is a soft, drawing an aura all around him.

It was downright impressive.
- I bet it glows in the dark, whispered
Angelo to Timéon.
Aytac, who probably hadn't heard,

was always at attention, waiting patiently that we had finished examining him. They looked at him as if we've never met aliens before, this which was the exact truth. Of course, we all already had some seen on our connected screens, but having one in real life, right in front of you was beyond comparison. For example,

I did not expect my correspondent to be so small. At first glance, he was one head shorter than we do. He was approximately the same size than Darsha's sister who is in first grade, so that he was our age. His hair was also snow-white, they covered the whole of the his perfectly round head with short curls as tight as a knitted stitch. It looked like that he had a lot of little springs on his head.

Several handfuls of seconds passed and the Master broke the silence by clearing his throat:

- Get back to work, he ordered. The best way for Aytac to integrate into the class is not to change our habits.

I suppressed a sigh. Did Mr. Matthéi seriously thought that doing grammar was more important than meeting a child from a different another planet? The master gave me a look.

- You are going to sit next to your correspondent, he told Aytac. Darsha, you can give him your

What is the place for this week?

My pulse began to beat faster and I puffpuffed in my fist.

- Help, you're not going to leave me like this

I mumbled to my neighbour.

- No choice," replied Darsha on the same tone, and she got up to stand in front of me.

The face-to-face meeting with my correspondent was

When I arrived, I couldn't go back.

CHAPTER FOUR

Check

Despite the insistent looks, Aytac did not give up head to the back of the classroom. He sitting on my right, dialled the opening code from his satchel. He took out a brand new pencil case, and a state-of-the-art erasable notebook, put them on the table in such a way that they are perfectly symmetrical with my own. Next, he stood parallel to me without addressing me. speech. I was worried to see him so close!

I noticed that her hair had the look of plastic, a bit like very thin scoubidou that were bouncing around. The grain of his skin was as smooth as glass. Suddenly, with the same that you want to touch the envelope of a snake, I had an itch to feel the smell of the her skin under my fingers. The instructions that my mother me all weekend and then they swirled around in my skull:

"Be nice to him. Think about how you would feel if you were in his shoes. It's not so easy to come in from another planet! »

So I kept my hands flat on the table, while squinting furiously to observe it without that he doesn't notice anything. Standing on his chair, he contemplated his notebook, still closed. From the corner of my eye, I saw that Angelo had leaned dangerously back and craned her neck to stare at him. For As far as discretion is concerned, he could go back to the drawing board!

And he was not alone. Most of the students seemed to be more concerned with scrutinizing the correspondent to do their grammar exercise. My mother was right, it couldn't have been easy to attract attention. I got close to some centimetres to blow him away:

- Don't worry, they'll get bored. It's a because they have never met an Alterian in real life

before you.

Aytac swiveled towards me to plant his eyes
dark blue in mine. *Bing!* No one had
never looked at in such a direct way.

- For me too, it's the first time," he said.
revealed in a ceremonious tone. (He hesitated). Would you
offended if I asked your permission to observe you
more carefully?

Also surprised by the way he spoke like a
dictionary that he was unsettled because he asked me

I nodded. I hadn't bothered
to ask him for permission, me!

For a long minute, Aytac examined me
with intensity. I felt a little tingling in me
tickle, from the top of the skull to the
tip of my toes. I felt like I was being scanned.
When he had finished, he held out his hand to me.

I hesitated. Yet, earlier on, I had been very
I wanted to touch it. Slowly, I slipped my
palm against his. He had a handful of
hand was very firm and his skin was warm, which made me
frankly surprised. What I expected... A
Ice coldness? To an electric shock? I was
inwardly called a fool.

- Nice to meet you," he said.
whispered politely, my name is Aytac.
"I know", I almost replied, but I understood
that he was probably waiting for me to show up too.

- My name is Elias.

Without losing a strange smile on his face
On the face, Aytac said:

- I think you're right, Elias, these demonstrations
curiosity will quickly fade. Finally, I
I hope so, because right now I'm a bit embarrassed.

His smile had not moved a millimetre,
It was like a mask for him. I realized that he
was trying to hide his embarrassment. Suddenly, it was me who
I was ashamed to have looked at him the way I had. I was
proposed by pointing to his notebook:

- If it helps, I'll explain the lesson.

If Darsha had heard me, she would have laughed,
because French is not my strong point (to be honest,
maths is not my favourite subject
either). And if there's one thing I still hate
more than conjugation, it is grammar.

Aytac assured me that there was no need. He has
selected a stylus from his pencil case and opened his notebook to
the first page. Then he did all his exercises
at lightning speed. Sure that he had just beaten the
record for the fastest student in the world!
- I'm done," he said, putting down his stylus.

- Really?

I took a suspicious look at my
neighbour. The sentences lined up perfectly in
a tight and sharp writing. All that's missing is
that it is fair!

- I assure you that these are the right results," said
said Aytac.

- You have a digital database in the
head or what?

- No, but in my house you learn a language
foreign language from kindergarten. I chose Terrien and I
I'm pretty good at it.

- Seriously?

I bit my lip as I thought about everything
what I had heard about the Alterians.

That they were a bit stupid, that they lived like
and a lot of other things. I have
looked down on my own notebook. The stylus in
I hadn't even started writing.

I was the one who felt like a loser now.

- If you wish, I can help you," offered
Aytac. It's not that complicated.

I shrugged, not convinced.

Then the strangest thing happened to me
never happened. Aytac started to explain the
grammar lesson and I finally understood the difference
between direct and indirect object complements. In one
split second, it became so clear that I had to
the impression of feeling inside my brain

the little cogs turn and organise themselves perfectly.
When the exercise was over, I looked at the boy with the skin
blue, stunned by what had just happened.

- How do you do that?

- I had nothing to do with it. You did everything.

- Well... then thank you, I murmured.

He had done me a great service.
With a sudden inspiration, I handed him the
hand. Instead of shaking his, I gave a little
taps in. Aytac shook his head and his curls
wiggled like springs.

- It is an Earth custom, I commented in
showing him the rest. This is called a "check".

I folded my fist and he imitated me, a small blow
one against the other, snap your fingers and the trick is to
played.

- A "cheque"? he repeated, bewildered.

- A "tcheck". It is used to greet each other, or to
show that we are on the same wavelength.

As I said this, I thought that the check I
with him was probably the most important one.
the history of the universe.

If I had to rewind the film, I would say
that it was at this point that the alien and I
we became friends.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mockery and spaghetti

In the canteen queue, I told them Benji and Darsha how Aytac had helped me by French. I still couldn't believe that I understood the lesson.

- It is as if the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle were loose had come together in my head. All at once, everything has become easy!
- You're very nice to have explained it to him, a Darsha points out to Aytac. He shrugged and brushed off the compliment with a small wave of the hand.
- I don't get any credit. Sometimes you just have to get confidence to do so.

In addition to being intelligent, Aytac was modest. He I was beginning to like this Alterian! While we had been discussing the issue for about ten years minutes, I noticed that the other students were watching to stand one metre away from us. Just like if there had been a security perimeter around my corresponding. A kind of invisible barrier that he It was essential to avoid crossing it.

- Is it me, or does it look like we've got a contagious disease? I asked.
- You have to give them time," interpreted Darsha. It's not every day that you meet a extraterrestrial. (She added to Aytac's address). Without to offend you.
- I'm not offended," he replied, "it's just a matter of not every day that I meet an alien either.

We sat down at the end of the table, and the students who followed us took care to sit down at a certain distance. I pretended not to notice. but it was really getting on my nerves. nerves. It's true! They were all abusing their worried faces and murmured comments

in a low voice. Were they afraid that Aytac would devour it alive? However, the Alterians were not cannibals!

We started our meal. For starters, pâté followed by spaghetti bolognese and of a chocolate dessert. For Aytac, the cook Mr. Lignac had concocted a special platter. He had recovered the packaging of the food on the menu this day: two white trays (which must have been (e.g., to contain reconstituted meat), film balls and an assortment of yoghurt caps to drink in different colours. It was really good presented, each dish on a different plate.

Aytac took a first bite.

- Is it to your liking?

He is very greedy and believes that to be
You have to have a full belly to be happy.

- Yes, it's delicious.

Aytac explained to us that he ate all the kinds of plastics that exist on Earth, from polyethylene to polystyrene to PVC and polypropylene.

- Ah, so it's all right! I said and we burst out of the room.
laughter.

- I think that's very thoughtful of
of the cook for preparing this meal for me," said
Aytac by biting into a piece of the tray.

- You know, it's nothing but waste that goes to
To the bin!" said Darsha.

As soon as she said these words, she blushed more
strong as a tomato forgotten in the sun.

Aytac shook his head to say that he was not
offended. He was just surprised.

- You mean it's all wasted?

Darsha, which had turned grapefruit pink, has
explained:

- No, those that are clean and sorted go to the
recycling... but not all.

- And you've never even seen the dumpster
of a megamarket! I added. Because there, they

throw the unsold products under the carpet.
the pretext that the expiry date has been reached.

Benji, with a mouthful of pies, has some
put a layer on:

- Everyone knows that a lot of stuff is still consumables, but they prefer not to take any risks.
- And after throwing the food, they water it of toxic products so that no one could recover.

The alien's eyes opened as round as
the yoghurt caps on his plate.

- Your customs are really... disconcerting, he noted.

Suddenly, a loud voice rang out from two tables
of us.

- And did you see what the martian eats? Ugh!

In every case, Angelo had placed himself there on purpose.

Far enough away not to interfere with our group, but just close enough to observe us. He had the look of a cat about to have fun with a mouse before biting it.

I advised Aytac to ignore it. I had
Angelo would eventually tire of it.

- If we respond to him, it will get out of hand and we will be leave the canteen.

And that was out of the question, because the spaghetti bolognese, it was my second dish favorite, right after the ketchup fries.

- Hey, look," persisted Angelo, "he eats the waste! Better than a garbage truck... Beeeurk!

He stuck a finger down his throat and mimed someone throwing up. I sighed and ordered
to my brain not to boil over. Darsha

attempted a vague "leave us alone" which was met with a
as much effect as a glass of water thrown on a building
in flames.

Angelo came back to the charge several times,
each little spike sticking out like a needle
in my head. Aytac did not move, his smile a fake one

again glued to our faces. Behind our backs, the laughter
were swelling like a huge wave. The attention was
directed at us, I felt all eyes available
to enjoy the show.

Angelo shot another arrow:

- I can't believe that this *monster* is allowed
to eat with us! It's really scary.

This time it was too much. Jaws clenched,
I was about to get up to fight back when Aytac
stopped me. His cheeks had taken on a strange hue
turquoise and her skin was lit up with a bluish glow.
- There's no need to intervene," he said, "it's nothing.
But it was wrong, it was not *nothing*. The words have
sometimes sharp edges, they can hurt.

Aytac closed his eyes as if to calm down.
To tell the truth, he didn't seem really upset,
only sad and... focused.

In front of us, Angelo continued his act.

- Hey, blue boy! Aren't you hungry anymore?

What is it that...

Suddenly his voice stopped dead, suspended in mid-air.
He flew in mid-sentence. Before our astonished eyes, he
froze and looked comical as if he had just been
take a flash in the eyes. Then, without warning, he
dipped his head in his plate of spaghetti.

- But you're crazy!" exclaimed Timéon, who was sitting right in the middle of
the room.
next door.

He had been splashed and tried to wipe the sauce off on his jumper. It was all over him. Angelo raised the head, with an almost frightening slowness. There was an unusual silence in the refectory. Something has moved in the room, too invisible as air, but as solid as the ground beneath our feet. The laughter exploded. Previously intended for Aytac, they were now directed at Angelo. It must be said that the vision was irresistible. The spaghetti was like a little snake on his head. face, glued together by the bolognese sauce that was dripping in his neck. Pieces of minced meat

were getting into his nose holes.
- Ahhh, gross! I threw, delighted to see my enemy in this situation.
- Do you eat like dogs now?
mocked a fifth grader. Straight into the bowl?
His eyes were as bright as if he had a fever, Angelo stared at Aytac. My friend held his gaze without blinking.

- Why did you do that?
Angelo.
Everyone knew she was in love with him. Yet, at that moment, his mouth was clenching in forming a small disgusted pout.

- I... I slipped," Angelo stammered in a voice wobbly.

He blinked a few times, as if he was woke up after a bad dream. He caught a towel to wipe himself, but he only spread it out further. the sauce on his face. So he threw in his napkin and dignity on the table and stood up. With a step numb, he left the dining hall to the booing of the students.

The canteen supervisor found it very difficult to restore calm. And even once peace is returned, she could not extinguish the good mood

The general mood in the refectory.
I gave Aytac a questioning look. I
did not understand what had just happened, but a
one thing was certain: no one was paying attention to him anymore
now.

CHAPTER SIX

At loggerheads

In class, everyone was talking about the incident
of the canteen. Squared away in his chair, Angelo had
cleaned his face, but red marks were smeared on his face.
the collar of his sweater. He hadn't brought home a
only once since the beginning of the course. The teacher has succeeded
to bring calm to the classroom by announcing the
afternoon programme.
It was time for conjugation.
- Can you tell me how the
more than perfect? he asked.
A sigh escaped me. The *more- than- perfect...* I don't
I couldn't see how something so boring could be
be *perfect*. The master looked around the room.

The students suddenly started copying the title
of the lesson or admiring their kit, captivated by this
what was inside. Anything rather than being interrogated.
A cloud of weariness passed over the eyes of
Mr. Weather. He turned to Angelo I-know-all.
- Does anyone know the answer?
Angelo swallowed his pride and a slow smile came over
his lips. The kind of annoying smile that proclaims
that everyone else is a fool.
He opened his mouth to destroy us with his

intelligence when the creak of a door chair interrupted him. Aytac had stood up and with a little bow, he said:

- I think I know, Professor.

The master rubbed his chin between his thumb and his index finger, which he always does when he is surprised.

He explained to Aytac that he did not need to stand up.

- Just raise your hand to ask for the speech.

- Very good," Aytac agreed. I didn't know this use.

He sat down and then recited the lesson as well precisely that if he were to read the French textbook set on the table:

- The perfect plus- que- is formed with the auxiliary "have" or "be" conjugated in the imperfect tense of the indicative to which we add the past participle of the verb. Caution, when the auxiliary "to be" is used, it is not necessary to remember to agree the participle with the subject.

The mood bordering on sunny, the master has whispered: "this alien is extraordinary! » and he went to the blackboard.

He was so happy that he unpacked his kit exercises in the manner of a magician who pulls out flowers from his hat. Unlike me, he did not Angelo, on the other hand, seemed furious. He had his sore loser face. A bit like Aytac

had just sprinted past him and crossed the the finish line. He pressed his lips together so hard that they crossed out his face with a horizontal line.

"Well done to him ", I thought for the second time. time of the day. But I would have done better not to rejoice. For as long as I have known him, I would have had to know that Angelo's angry expression was not a sign of anything good.

The course has resumed. As for the grammar, Aytac explained the lesson to me and I was managed to conjugate my verbs in the most perfect tense.

- Well done, you're making progress!
master and I felt a little proud, almost as proud
as if I had just scored a goal in football.
Far ahead, in the front row, Angelo watched
in my direction with a contemptuous smile. He has
whispered something to Timéon, provoking an outburst from the
enthusiastic cackle. Aytac's skin emitted a
slight phosphorescence.

- Your comrades do not seem to be giving you any evidence
a lot of respect," he remarked as he tended to the
his words.

- It's nothing to say! Angelo and I are in
since kindergarten.

- Do you shoot each other with knives?
choked Aytac. This is extremely dangerous!
I stifled a laugh.

- Well, no, "being at loggerheads" means
that we can't stand each other... It's a bit tense
between us, if you like.

My correspondent looked thoughtful. He said
said that he understood, and that he was happy to enrich
his vocabulary. A thin smile lit up his
face and pointed to Angelo.

- I'm pretty sure I don't either.
don't blame the boy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Welcome!

We took the airbus back to the
The day had been an emotional one.

Now that I had done the friendship check with
Aytac, I wondered why I had been so concerned about this.
anxious to meet him. So, having

It's not really helpful to be shocked by the unknown.

My parents were waiting for us. Finally, they did
but you could tell they were busy with something else.
like the nose in the middle of the face they were watching for
our arrival. My father must have been simmering
a special extraterrestrial meal because we hardly had
As we walked through the door, he burst into the living room.

He had put on a kitchen apron all stained with
red and said: "I've been waiting for you kids! "by
brandishing a sharp knife. Aytac had as
and his eyebrows are furrowed.

They were so high that they almost flew off. Fortunately, they did,
mother came forward in her turn. Dressed in a suit
elegant, she cast an appreciative eye over the suit
tie of our guest, then a furious eye on the
my father's knife. Dad immediately understood
the message (mum is very good at communicating
with his eyes alone). He made the knife disappear
behind his back with a small, desolate grimace, as he
explaining that he was preparing some grout for the
strawberry. Satisfied, Mom opened her arms wide and
without making a fuss, grabbed Aytac and kissed him.

- Welcome home!" she said happily.

She slapped four loud kisses on the cheeks
of my correspondent and hugged him
soft. Tetanized, Aytac began to glow with a
turquoise light.

- Erm... hello ma'am, he stammered
when she finally released him. Pleased to do your
knowledge.

A little hesitant, he turned to my father, he

surely feared the same fate. Dad
the hand that was only held out to her, the one that
not the knife. Aytac then thought he had to do a
check, he clumsily tried to reproduce the one
that I had taught him in the morning. There was a strange
exchange of gestures: Dad was trying to imitate Aytac who
was trying to imitate me. The result wasn't great,
but it is the intention that counts.

- Uh..." said Dad, "welcome to you.

My correspondent then took out a box of
chocolates from his sphere-shaped suitcase.

- I don't know how good they are, I found that the
The golden papers looked appetizing. I suppose
that on the inside, it must be the same.

I couldn't help but laugh.

- It certainly makes you want to!

- Thank you," said Mum, glancing at me.
supported, it's lovely of Aytac to have
thought to please us.

She loves chocolate and the glow of greed
in his eyes was not feigned.

- So take your friend to drop off his
business, Dad suggested.

I took Aytac to my room.

He followed me without saying anything and just observed
the room with a pensive look. The posters on the walls about
every square inch; the desk cluttered with
everything but notebooks; the toys that were lying around in the
all corners.

Probably only in his Alterian room,
it was tidier.

For dinner, we sat in the dining room.
to eat. Tonight's menu was amazing: fish and chips
for the main course, strawberries for dessert. I was enjoying myself
in advance. For Aytac, Mum had collected
compensated polystyrene balls in a delivered package
by drone last week. As for Dad, he had
spent the week cutting out multi-coloured strips
in different containers. As proudly as if he

had baked a five-tiered cake, he placed it on the table several plates filled to the brim.

- I didn't know what you liked best, I hope you will find your happiness.

The Alterian put his hands together and pressed them against his cheek and tilted his head. I thought he wanted to sleep, but no. It was just his way of saying thank you.

- So, how did this first day on Earth? asked Mum.

I chewed a mouthful of fish and Aytac a polystyrene ball.

- Not too bad, I finally said.

- Very well, Aytac claimed.

Mum rested her chin in her palm to show that she was waiting for the next step. She has a radar to detect problems.

- Really?

- Let's say that some humans are still a little shy," explained the Alterian, "but I am that it will get better as soon as we have got to know each other better.

- Okay," said Mom. I guess you have to be a little intimidated, too. You're happy to be among us?

- Yes, ma'am," Aytac agreed. Travelling, discovering new horizons, meet new people, and people, I am lucky to have this experience!

My correspondent was so excited now that he was flashing with emotion. He spent the rest of the meal to tell us about his planet. Freshwater seas that constituted 60% of its area, fields of plants grown to make plastic. From species of vegetables that looked like our apples land was used to produce a good part of the the diet of the Alterians.

- Do you turn potatoes into plastic? he asked, flabbergasted.

- That's right. In my opinion, this is the most

of the universe.

After all, why not? His plastic had the same taste for him as Chips do for me. I have took one from my plate, crisp and golden brown and I bit into it. Happiness.

- I understand exactly what you mean,
I made a second helping.
And I swallowed another fry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Team sport

The next day, Aytac put on the same outfit chic than the day before. In his half-opened suitcase, I had time to see seven suits and ties perfectly identical, one for each day of the week.

After a quick breakfast (cereals for me, bubble wrap for him), we went to school. Benji and Darsha came to say hello. The others still didn't dare to approach me, I began to believe that we were going to spend the week in quarantine. I would have liked to explain to them that there was no reason to be afraid! That it didn't matter, that they came from different planets and that they were

to be suspicious of him without trying
to know him.

But I didn't say anything. I didn't know how find the right words to convince them. Benji and Darsha did not say anything either. Nor did Aytac. The tie tied around the neck and the hands crossed, he entered the classroom looking straight ahead. Mr Mathéï had observed the emptiness around my He seemed to be in a state of reflection. Eyes as dark as a grey day before the rain, he waited until everyone was settled. During For a moment he was silent. He made two back and forth, smoothing his moustache, from his desk to the door and from the door to his office, and finally stopped as he was about to start a third.

On the digital board, he opened the calendar,
selected the current date and typed in the activities of the
morning. Normally, on Tuesday, we start with a
dictation to start the day off right. At the

In place, the teacher wrote:

Sport: team games.

There were joyful exclamations, except for this one

Kristy's little pest who asked why we don't
was not spelling, as usual.

- This one always has to be done

I commented to my neighbour. She's doing the
pair with Angelo!

Mr. Météo, who appeared to be in a very good mood, said
said that no, today was not an ordinary day.

We were going to show our guest how to
was having fun on Earth.

He went to get his whistle and invited us out.

We went around the building to the gym,
fully covered with anti-slip rubber.

- We're going to do a dodgeball," he said.
announced.

This is a traditional game of touching
opponents with the ball. Everyone appreciates
this sport, especially Angelo who practices the
hand and has a great impact. It makes me
to admit it, but he is the best in the
most sports activities.

- Yes, you'll see, it's so cool! I said to
Aytac.

Unsurprisingly, Angelo seemed delighted. He stretched his
fingers to make the joints crack.

- I bet no one will be able to touch me!
he boasted.

He stared at Aytac with a mocking pout. For
speed and skill were required, in addition to the
to be enduring. In fact, I was not sure that Aytac,
with its small size and stiff appearance, manages to make

a touch. I gave him a comforting pat
on the shoulder.

- You'll do fine, I said, while
thinking "this is not going to be a piece of cake...".

The teacher explained the rules.

- Two teams compete head-to-head on
the field. The aim is to "take prisoner" its
opponents by touching them with the ball. If a player
Aim to catch the ball without it falling to the ground,
then it is the one who threw it who goes to jail. The
winners are those who capture all the members
of the rival team.

The groups were formed. There were six of us from
on either side of a demarcation line. Of course,
I was in the camp of my friends, while Angelo was
was with his own people. We were in trouble...

Mr Mathéï kicked off the event. The other
The team dominated us right away. In less than
five minutes, three of our players were stuck in
prison. If this continued, we were going to be eliminated
one after the other without even a touch to
to save the honour. I was already imagining Angelo
showing off, glorying in his victory... Fortunately,

Darsha has pulled off a masterstroke. While
Timéon had just aimed at her, she intercepted the ball
without it touching the ground. Timéon, went to place himself in
grumbling in the losers' area.

Finally a prisoner!

Angelo retaliated immediately. With a step of
side, he avoided the ball that Darsha had just thrown
on him and grabbed it with one hand. What he could
to get angry!

- Each to his own!" he shouted in the ears of
my friend.

An evil gleam lit up his eyes, and he
straightened his shoulders and stared at my correspondent. He
Aytac and I were the only ones left on the field, I didn't

I didn't think it was worth our while.

- We're not giving up!" I said to my teammate.
who had managed, by some miracle, to avoid
all the attacks against him.

Passing was resumed between our opponents. From
Angelo had the ball in his hand, he sent it in with a
victorious air on Aytac. He had put all his strength into it,
as if he wanted to hurt her. Except that, without

I understand how Aytac avoided the
shock by making a right hook. All our
team applauded him.

- I shouted. You really nailed it! Go on
like this!

Aytac picked up the ball. He gave me a pass,
then two; I aimed at Kristy who didn't have time to
escape.

We were 2 against 4.

we would have defended ourselves well. The
encouragement from our teammates gave me a new lease on life.
the smile. We would fight to the end. He then

a curious thing happened. An energy almost
A palpable feeling flowed between Aytac and me. Suddenly,
I was convinced that I had to let him score.

It was our turn to have the ball, I gave him a
passes. With an air of attentiveness, he cocked his arm, but at the
Instead of aiming directly at his target, he aimed right at
side. And then, bingo, the opposing player moved to
the left, exactly where Aytac had just
launch!

- Hooray!" exclaimed our team.

I watched in amazement as the loser went to the sidelines.

What had happened?

Our competitors growled with rage and the tension
has gone up a notch.

- Everybody on the Martian!" shouted Angelo.
Immediately the master blew his whistle.

- I don't allow this kind of talk in my
He said in a dry tone that he only used to say "class".
rarely.

- But sir...

- This is worth a penalty to your team. Give
the ball to Aytac. Right away!

With his head down, Angelo had no choice but to
to comply. "Well done to him," I said, savouring the
seeing his discomfited face.

The match resumed. Now I felt more comfortable.
relaxed. Whatever the outcome, this game would be
for me unforgettable. Aytac shot at an angle, and from

Again, the ball hit its target. The score was
now tied, with two players in each
camp. Yaehl, a gangly boy who made a
head more than anyone else, exchanged a few
passes with Angelo. The latter had obviously
changed tactics, because instead of sending him to
Aytac, he attacked me. The bullet hit me
with full force. The hand on my shoulder
bruised (I was willing to bet I'd have a huge
blue tomorrow), I reluctantly joined the
prison.

As disappointment stung my eyes, the
game continued. In no time at all, Aytac pointed
Yaehl. The latter did not have time to understand what
that was happening to him: despite his attempt to evade it,
the ball grazed his left buttock.

Touché.

A surge of hope was rekindled in me.
Was it possible for us to win?

CHAPTER NINE

David versus Goliath

The air was sizzling with electricity. On the ground, it was not Aytac and Angelo were the only ones left. At each end, the prisoners were cheering for their player. Angelo was swimming. The swimming costume was soaked in water on the back and underneath.

his armpits, he was no longer handsome or smiling, and not proud at all. He was dripping like a chipolata on a barbecue grill. Strangely enough, Aytac was fresh and ready.

"Maybe Alterians don't sweat,
I said to myself.

What was certain was that his agility made up for it his lack of power. He was quick and calm, unlike Angelo who was ranting as he looked at him. The teacher threw the balloon into the air. With a Angelo shoved my friend, who had to leave the room. fell heavily.

Whistle blows. Aytac must have hurt himself.

I was going to rush out of my zone to him to help, when he stood up. His forehead smooth, he stared at Angelo, who didn't even have the decency to be ashamed. With a twinkle in his eye, he seemed very satisfied of his gesture.

- The ball to Aytac, ordered the master.

Without being able to contradict the arbitration, Angelo faces my correspondent. Knees bent, slightly bent forward, my enemy was ready to ward off the offensive. The picture they all presented the two was striking: Aytac, frail and upright, was coming to Angelo's massive shoulders. It looked like David versus Goliath.

Aytac scrutinised his opponent with intensity.

The assembly bristled with excitement at 2,000 volts. Aytac raised his arm; he fired. Like the times In the case of the previous ones, he skewed his trajectory by aiming sideways.

"It looks like he is anticipating the dodging movement
of his opponent," I thought.

This was strictly impossible.

With a loud bang, the ball hit the chest
d'Angelo.

For a brief moment there was stunned silence.
hovered over the field. Then the shouts of joy
covered the disappointed braying of the losers.

- Long live Aytac!" my team shouted.

Benji and Darsha were doing a dance of joy,
others sang "We won! We won! »,
it was the most total souk and also one of the most
most exhilarating time of my life.

I walked towards Aytac. The turquoise on him
cheeks and a shy smile revealed the
its teeth like small pearls.

- I laughed incredulously.

At the back of the field, alone, Angelo was burning us
his retinas. His fury was so great that I felt

I could almost feel the waves covering my skin.

The bell signalled the end of the morning, breaking
my discomfort, and we headed for the
canteen. Several students were jostling to congratulate
Aytac, all reservations forgotten. The master came close
of us. The moustaches raised in a "time" position
with his large hand on the head of the
of my correspondent.

- That's good, boy. You are amazing.

Angelo, who had passed us to pull over
in the queue, turned around when he heard the
compliment. He gave Aytac a look full of
venom.

*

The lunch break had been ultra mega fun.

Firstly, because putting down the student's
of the school was even more delicious than the
than a plate full of crispy fries.

Secondly, because the players in our team had
We had a good meal at our table and a good laugh. Finally,

Angelo had not bothered us once in
the whole meal, and just that, it hadn't happened since
long.

When we returned to school, while we were
in mathematical riddles, Angelo
suddenly exclaimed:

- Damn! I can't find my ruler!

He had spoken loudly enough for everyone to hear him.
the world hears it, even the master.

- What is going on?

- I can't find my ruler and yet I have
searched everywhere. I don't understand anything, I'm sure I'll be able to
I put it in my box!

Timéon gave a cry of surprise.

- I lost my ruler too!

By reflex, everyone checked their belongings. A
A cascade of "me too" echoed through the room. It
looked like a cannon, that thing we had learned
in music last month. Everyone is singing the
same thing, but in a different way.

Mr Mathéï sat at his desk.

- This is amazing," he said.

You could see that he was thinking about how he
rubbed his chin. In an almost detached tone, he said
then noticed:

- Well, my ruler has disappeared too.

- It's still weird," Ines moaned from her
voice.

I inspected my kit, nothing was missing.
Aytac's was also in its place. The mystery
thickened. Why do all the rules of the classroom get
Would they have vanished, except for our two?

Angelo pointed an accusing finger at us.

- Guess who eats plastic every day?
meal?

At these words, all heads turned towards
Aytac. With his finger pointing like a gun, Angelo
rugi :

- I'm sure this *savage* ate our material
because he had not eaten enough in the canteen!

The murmurs of indignation crackled through the air, "oooohs", "aaaaahs", "gosh! "and I knew it...". It made a buzzing sound, like a nest full of wasps ready to sting.

Aytac did not move, did not react.

For a nanosecond I had a doubt. Is this that the alien had actually taken the rules? And then I remembered that Aytac had not left for a single second during the break. This is not could not be him. In any case, a guy who was so polite as to ask for permission to look at me could not be dishonest!

There was a moment of terrible tension. The face expression, my friend did not protest, did not did not deny the accusation, did not seek to defend himself.

The master seemed to be thinking, paler than the sky of winter. The bell rang and the atmosphere became relaxed all at once. Like a flock of birds freed from their cages, the students rushed to the exit. Their suspicious eyes shifted to Aytac.

Even those who had lunch at our table at midday swerved as they passed by us. A wave of weariness overwhelmed me. Angelo had designated the ideal culprit, and everyone followed as a sheep.

CHAPTER TEN

A lump under the sheets
The journey to the house was made in a
heavy atmosphere. I had to tell Aytac
that things would be cleared up, there was bound to be a
explanation, he remained more closed than an oyster to
As the Christmas meal approaches.
At the table, he declined the plate full to the brim that
Dad suggested.

- I am very grateful to you, but I have to say that I am
I'm not very hungry.

Although he nibbled on a piece so as not to
To be rude, I could see that the heart was not in it.

- Did the day go well?
mother with her piercing gaze.

She had activated her special radar.

- We did a dodgeball. Aytac has hyper
well done.

At the mention of the match, my correspondent had
a brief smile. Then the smile faded away, as one
turned off the light. The afternoon's episode weighed on
my stomach. I too had lost my appetite. I had
pushed the food into a corner of the plate without any
eat a fork.

- You can tell us anything," said Dad. He
there is no problem that does not have a solution, and we
can look for it together.

I remained silent. *I was afraid. Afraid of the reaction of
my comrades tomorrow, and shame on me for having to crush myself once
again in front of that idiot Angelo.* He had been involved in
this flight, I was sure. All I wanted was
forget about it for an evening and change the ideas of
my new friend.

After the meal, I suggested a game of
Pokémon Cruel Combat, the most awesome game of the

land. Usually, when I plug into the console,
I manage to clear my head.
My attempt at a diversion was a complete failure.
At the end of the third duel and his third
defeat, I gave up. Aytac was also bad at playing
video than me in conjugation.
- Don't worry, you'll do better next time.
I felt like I was talking like my father.
- Are you tired? You must be exhausted after a
day like this.

Now I sounded like my mother. Was I in
becoming as responsible as my parents?
At this thought, the hairs on my arms stood on end
of horror.
- Yes, I think I need to rest, a
confirmed Aytac.

His voice was very small, as if from the depths
of a tunnel. With forced enthusiasm, I showed him
the bathroom. He came back all clean and tidy.
in his two-piece pyjamas, even more so in his
elegant as his Harry Potter uniform.

He climbed up the ladder on my bunk bed.
The day before, he had chosen the top bunk. He
He explained to me that he preferred to be on high ground because
that at home he slept on the fourth floor.
- Good night, I breathed as I swaddled myself in
my duvet.

- Good night," he said one floor up.
I wanted to talk to him, to tell him that I
I was also hurt by these abominable accusations.
But we must believe that the dodgeball will be
had exhausted me, as I sank into a deep sleep.
If I could have known what would happen next, no one would have
I would not have closed my eyes so easily.

*

In the middle of the night, I woke up
with a start. I put my ear to the ground to guess what
that had alerted me, but no, not a sound. I had
However, I had the impression that something was wrong.

Suddenly, I understood. When I had fallen asleep,
Aytac made a funny snoring sound halfway through the day.
between the clatter of a rusty bicycle and the roar of a
of a washing machine. And then there was nothing left,
just silence and darkness. My heart began to

I got out of bed.

Carefully, I climbed up to the bunk of the
on it. Phew! I could see a lump under the duvet.
I felt like a fool. Aytac was sleeping peacefully
and I was making films. Note for later :
stop watching crime shows on TV. I have
descended a step when a detail snagged
my gaze. The lump under the sheets was still.

No movement, not even a breath.

I bent down to lift the duvet and
missed falling off the ladder.

The bed was empty.

Instead of Aytac, there was only a pillow!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Eyes to the sky

I examined the deserted room. In one corner, the Aytac's small round suitcase was waiting for its owner and on the stool, his suit was folded, as neatly as if he came out of the dry cleaners. If he had left his things and he was in his pyjamas, he couldn't have been far away.

A little reassured, I went through the house at his research. There was no sign of him upstairs, so I went down to the ground floor. Suddenly, a cold draught brushed my neck and I turned around. The window of the living room was ajar and a sharp wind was blowing through my head. goose bumps. I did not hesitate to take action. I grabbed the first thing that came along (a green polka dot waistcoat roses) and I went out on the terrace.

No one.

My heart started to race. And if he had run away? What if he was found wandering the streets like a zombie? And if, upon learning of his disappearance, the authorities of our two planets came into conflict?

I might be responsible for a war intergalactic! I breathed in a big bowl of ice-cold air and I saw the fire escape.

"What would I do if I were an alien and I was homesick? I would get closer to the heaven, of course! ».

A few seconds later, I was climbing up the wall. Officially, I am not never climbed this ladder (strictly forbidden, my mother was always afraid of heights). In truth, it was a habit of sneaking onto the roof.

In just one minute I reached the top of the building. Like most of the houses in the the roof was flat and covered with plants from all kinds. I stepped over the edge and saw a small silhouette that appeared in a Chinese shadow under the pale light of the moon.

Aytac did not move when I sat down next to him
of him on the bench. We stood there for a while without
talking, looking at the starry sky. A calm
the world.

- As far back as I can remember, he said
finally, I dreamed of coming here to meet people
Earthlings. I thought this trip would be the most exciting adventure I'd ever
had.

I will ever live.
are bent). And now, all I desire,
is to go back home.

A chill ran down my back;
I didn't know if it was the polar cold or the words
Aytac that had that effect on me.

- I'm sorry it didn't work out, I said in
closing the flaps of my waistcoat. This business of rules
This is nonsense.

- It's not just that. Since I arrived, the
The students look at me like a monster.

- Not at all! Some are... impressed,
that's all.

- Oh yes, are you sure? You think I don't have noticed the way they all spread out on my passage?

His voice became as bitter as the coffee in my father, black and without sugar.

- And now, when I had managed to win their trust, they are wary again. It looks like that I scare them.

I didn't know what to say. He continued, his eyes lost in the sky. His tone had softened a little.

- However, I am the one who has something to be proud of. You are "impressed". You are taller and more weird than I imagined.

- Do you think we're weird?

- Yes! You talk loudly, you get agitated and you touch each other all the time.

I was totally stunned. He, the alien, he thought we were *weird*! My eyes fell on his blue hand clutching the armrest.

- Others don't look at you as a monster, I said between two snaps of my fingers teeth. They think you're weird too.

He looked into my dark eyes.

- Yes, I guess being different is enough to seem strange.

We thought about it for a few minutes.

I was shivering from the tips of my hair down to the toes, but he did not seem to suffer cold.

- I think you are "weird - nice - funny", I said in a voice trembling like snowflakes of snow.

He looked at my green waistcoat with pink polka dots.

- You are "weird-gentle-original".

A light flickered in the sky. Aytac has pointed out.

- Look! The shiny spot up there is my star.

I looked up to see the endless sky.

- Wow! I think it's crazy that you're here, with me, when you live so far away. (I lowered my voice).

Say, you're not going back tomorrow, are you? I

I will make things right, I promise.

- How do you want it? The damage is done. Now, everyone thinks I'm a thief and a devourer of insatiable plastic.

- I'm willing to bet that it was Angelo who did the trick. I've been thinking about it and I can't think of any others. explanations. He loves to put others down, I'm good in a position to know!

I thought about the many times Angelo had humiliated at school. Aytac gave me a look unfathomable.

- May I ask you a question?

- Go for it! No need to ask me for the permission, I'm not made of sugar!

- I am puzzled... (He weighed his words). I have well know that you don't blame this boy for discrediting you with your peers. Therefore, why not to tell him of your dissatisfaction?

His distinguished language did not prevent him from being naive. He didn't understand. There was no opposition to Angelo, he was the strongest. Stronger than me, in every way case. I tried to explain:

- I am no match for him. He is the best student in the class, in the school itself! He is super smart, and when he calls me a big loser, he is not entirely wrong. I'm not an arrow, it's rather the opposite. How do you expect me to to defend me?

I had never revealed to anyone how I me. I don't think I've ever even seen myself admitted. Aytac shook his head in disagreement.

- You are wrong. You are very clever, and you have more qualities than this boy will ever have. his life.

- Listen, that's nice, but it's not true...

- I just know it.

His affirmative tone triggered a thought in me unbelievable. Something that had been bothering me since

So I dared to ask him:

- Speaking of Angelo... He's mad at you since the canteen episode, not to mention the ball to the prisoner. I would like you to explain to me why he voluntarily put his head in the water. its spaghetti and how you came to touch the players by aiming to the side. You have superpowers or what?

For the first time I heard Aytac's laughter.

It sounded like a cat purring, but in more acute.

- I don't have "powers" in the sense that you mean.

But I am very sensitive. At home, we call it

"To be empathetic.

- *Empathetic?* What does it mean?

- It means that I am able to feel the emotions of others. Generally, I refer them to their recipient to show that I share their joy or sorrow.

- Like a kind of mirror?

- Yes, that's about it.

- But what happened with Angelo?

- In the canteen, he kept making fun of me. I felt very strongly his desire to humiliate me.

It was almost... painful. I had no choice.

At one point it got intense and I turned it back to him his contempt.

- I get it! Angelo did what he had to do want to do to you! It's great!

- Giant? I don't know... I'm not used to it to experience this feeling. It was not pleasant at all. everything.

- Yeah... But you have to admit that he was really funny with his face dripping all over.

Aytac purred and I laughed with him.

- But what about the game? I insisted. How do you

did you do? It was amazing, it was like you knew
in advance what move the opponent was going to make...

You dodged every bullet and didn't miss a single one
shooting!

- The same. I sensed the direction in which
the ball through the emotion of the player. For Angelo,
it was easy. He was so certain of winning that
I had the impression that I was visualising his satisfaction at the
the moment he touched me.

- Did you see the scene before it happened?

- Not quite. I felt it for only half a second
before, and that was enough.

I took the time to absorb this information.

A cold breeze caressed the silence. My cheeks were
gradually became numb to the point where I had to
I felt myself cracking. A stalactite was hanging under my nose,
my buttocks were frosted and soon my whole body was
would suffer the same fate. I got up from the bench to
jumping on the spot.

- Say, can't we continue this
conversation in the warmth of my room? Because
that in less than two minutes my feet will be
welded together by ice and I won't be able to move!

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Machiavellian plan, phase 1

- We will start with the dictation and I will not tolerate any discussion.

Mr. Weatherman was looking at us with the same eyes dark as a cumulus nimbus on the verge of rain. Just before class, Darsha had surprised the conversation he had had with the director. He the disappearance of the rules and regulations of the suspicions that were directed at Aytac.

- Madame Lemarteau was panicked, as if we were had told her about the end of the world, Darsha said.

She ordered the weatherman "not to do He did not want to make waves to avoid a "diplomatic incident". He was really annoyed.

This explained his cloudy mood.

During the dictation, I tried not to squint on my neighbour's copy. Aytac seemed focused, while I was only thinking about our plan.

We had spent part of the night talking. How to prove my friend's innocence, and by the same time Angelo's guilt? An idea came to me and took shape as I went along. expose it to Aytac. To confuse the rule-stealer, we were going to do like aikido: channel the force of the opponent to turn it against him. Aytac, had also thought of a solution:

- Since it seems that humans experience curiosity about me, I will propose to answer their questions. In this way, they will understand that I am not dangerous. I wasn't convinced that it was enough, but a my mind.

Aytac's desire to speak in public was going to serve my purpose.

By playtime, we were all set. We

went out trying to ignore the hostile looks.

Although the master has been radio silent on the events of the previous day, no one had forgotten what that had happened. Even those who had had lunch with avoided approaching us.

- Did you see?" said Darsha indignantly. We are completely sidelined, it's even worse than yesterday!

- Fortunately, we're going to fix everything, I have mumbled.

Of course, I had put Benji and Darsha in the aware of everything. Firstly, they were my friends, and secondly, they had a part to play in my little comedy.

As expected, Darsha went to stand at the end of the road. the courtyard, next to Mr. Météo who was talking to the Director. Benji stayed in support next to me.

Lots of students were glancing backstage at Aytac. I ordered them to stop.

- Stop!" I shouted. Let go of him! trainers... er shoes, I corrected to the alien's feet. You are heavy, it's not a curious beast all the same!

Obviously, my request had the opposite effect, as it was a which was the goal. It is a law of nature: the more you forbid someone to do something the more likely it is to do so. The pupils approached like a pack of wolves attracted by fresh meat.

In the distance, I saw Darsha in deep conversation with the master. It was to keep him busy while the trap is in place. Aytac climbed onto a bench and faced those around him.

- Since you don't know me, he said

I suggest that everyone ask me what they would like to see. wants. I promise to answer in all sincerity.

The students exchanged glowing looks curiosity. Thus, the alien submitted voluntarily to an interrogation? The opportunity was too tempting to resist. The questions came.

Pam, Pam Pam! It reminded me of cannonballs

drawn from all sides:

- Did you eat our rules in plastic?
- How is teleportation?
- Does it hurt?
- Why are you so small?
- Are you really the same age as us?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- Is it true that you never sleep?
- What happens if you tan? Your skin changes colour?
- Do you always dress like that?
- Do you have a willy?

The voices are interrupted. All the people looked at Timéon who had asked the last question.

- Well what," he mumbled. I just want to know if he pees like us!

Aytac remained unperturbed on his bench. He had put on his smiling mask and raised his hands like "don't shoot, I surrender". Sincerely, he impressed me.

Gradually, calm returned.

- So there you have it," he began in his voice. tiny. I will try to answer each of these questions. your questions. I am innocent of the charges that against me. I did not steal your rules and I do not don't know who the culprit is. Teleportation is like riding on a merry-go-round that goes downhill at full speed. speed. It's not painful, but I had a little heartache. I'm one of the biggest in my class so I can conclude that I'm not an altered person. not small. I'm nearly ten years old on land, I have a sister eleven years old and a brother who has just turned four. I don't know where I get the idea that I never sleep. I have I need to rest at night, and I'm quite tired considering Given the time difference between my planet and yours. The sun has no effect on my skin colour. However, it will become clearer as I get older. I don't usually dress like this. I chose these clothes because I thought they were in the

fashion on Earth. And finally, yes, I have a pipe-shaped extension commonly known as a The "willy", which is very practical as it allows me to pee standing up, just like you.

After this long tirade, Aytac loosened the his tie to calmly stare at the many pairs of eyes that pierced him.

- Wow!" said Kristy. It's just amazing!

Everyone seemed to agree. Stunned, interested, and even amazed. Finally, honesty Aytac had hit the nail on the head. It had taken him a lot courage to expose himself like that. I admired him for this.

At that moment, a smug voice dominated the general hubbub.

- Pfff, what a load of rubbish! I'm sure it's from invent everything to make himself interesting. Look at him...

How can you trust him? He is not not like us, that's all.

With squinted eyes, Angelo was looking at Aytac, worse than if he had been an acne pimple in the middle of his face.

With an expression of disgust as if he hoped that it disappears.

Phase two was about to begin.

Now that Aytac had drawn attention to him, I had to get Angelo mad to make him break fuses. This was my favourite part of the plan.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Machiavellian plan, continued

- He's not *like us*"... You know that's frankly racist, what you just said?

Angelo chuckled.

- What do you want, you idiot? You have a problem? Are you defending your smurf?

At these words, my muscles tingled and my breathing became shorter. I had planned to look angry, but now I was really angry.

- Leave him alone!" I growled.

A cocky smile stretched Angelo's lips.

He relished the situation, like a confident boxer.
force.

It smelled like a fight.

- You know it's silly to risk a beating for this *Martian*?

My shoulders contracted and the mass

The group of students tightened around us. By the time where I was seriously considering swinging my fist in the face of this little weasel (and so much the worse for the consequences), a slight throat clearing has disturbed our exchange.

- Um, um," Aytac said politely, "I wouldn't want This is a very interesting discussion and I don't want to interrupt it, but Angelo, I have to bring a little

correction to your statements. I am not a *Martian* but an *Alterian*. Is your memory failing you?

Or you have trouble understanding the difference. If it is too complicated for you, I can explain it again.

A few people in the audience let out a laugh incredulous. The tension has suddenly subsided.

- Hey Angelo! He's just shown you off, the *Alterian*!" scoffed Benji.

This time it was Angelo who turned up the heat. It has taken on the colour of a steak at the beginning of cooking and without warning, threw himself at Aytac. It looked like a ram that breaks down a door. Except that... VLAN! He has

met with nothing but emptiness. Aytac had anticipated his attack and had merely dodged it. Angelo spread himself out like a puddle on the concrete and a concerto of laughter broke out.

This is well known, which is even funnier than a fight, it is the spectacle of a successful fall.

And for a bowl, it was a bowl!

With clenched teeth, Angelo stood up and dusted off his nice tee shirt with a big brand logo sport.

Phase three could begin. Angelo was ripe for eruption.

I nodded to Darsha

always posted in the distance. She pointed at us by talking to the teacher and the headmistress.

- You'll pay for this!" scolded my sworn enemy.

- I think you would be smarter if

you knew how to control your nerves," replied Aytac. The Violence is not a solution,

This only made Angelo more angry. I have chose this moment to intervene.

- Since we're settling scores, let's admit it that *you're the* one who stole the class rules!

The accusation made Angelo even angrier.

If this continued, it would explode in mid-air like a firework that explodes before it has reached its destination. His nostrils flaring, he initially denied it:

- You're delirious, I didn't do anything! It's the other freak who has eat up our stuff!

- That's not possible, I said. Because

Aytac stayed with us all the time during the recreation. So he has an alibi.

Last phase of the plan. I gave a thumbs up, as to say "I love", except that this was the signal agreed with Aytac.

The Alterian looked into Angelo's eyes.

His gaze became intense and I realised that he was accessing his emotions. The rage that emanating from Angelo spread through the air like a heat wave. Aytac shook under the impact, then he blinked his eyelids to send his anger back to

Angelo. He froze, paralyzed. Without him being able to
the words flowed out of his mouth like an explosion.
a flurry of small stones.

- I pretended to go to the toilet and I was
I snuck into the classroom. I was the one who stole the
rules. I stashed them in the dungeon.

The dungeons were a hiding place in the false
ceiling that primary school children passed on to each other
from generation to generation. It is even said that
that it has existed since the time of our parents.

Angelo stopped talking. His lips tightened.
tight, like a zip, but it is not
was too late. The students, Kristy, Darsha, Aytac, the
and the headmistress, everyone had heard it
and was silent, his mouth forming a perfect "O". Then

Ms Lemarteau's voice broke the silence:

- Please follow me, young man. I
think that it is necessary to have a small discussion
with your parents.

It was a no-brainer.

Angelo bowed his head and followed the lead of
the director. He had the same approach as a
condemned to the guillotine.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Goodbye

Of course, Angelo was not guillotined. I had listed the different ways to punish him. If you excluded cutting off his head, he could have been hang him, nail him to the pillory, roast him in the microwave or throw him into a well. All these punishments are were worth, in my humble opinion.

The school simply excluded him for one week. He also had to write a letter of apology to Aytac, which was perhaps the most important sanction abominable for him. Honestly, he didn't missed. At least, I didn't miss him.

It may not be very nice, but Mum says always that you have to be honest. So I can't pretending that life without my worst enemy is not more joyful.

The rest of the week was a steep slide and we arrived at the weekend without me noticing.

After Aytac's innocence was proven, more no one considered it in the same way. I believe that that the students were angry that they thought he was guilty without looking any further. Aytac was always small, still blue and still Alterian, but no more was the same. The others stopped looking at him from through to talk to him face to face. We worked (a little), we had a lot of fun (a lot). From the maths rally to the football games, Aytac participated in all activities.

It was great.

Tonight it's time for the big departure. We have activated in my room to put the suitcase away, finally

Aytac turned on and I sat on my bed with a funeral face.

Atmosphere.

- I'm feeling blue.

My friend suspended his action:

- Where is a cockroach?

I burst out laughing and my bad mood went up a notch. slightly attenuated. Although Aytac speaks Earthling better

that I would never do it, he's still struggling a bit
with the figurative meaning. I explained to him that I was sad
that he would go away. He pulled himself up on the bed to sit on

His feet were not touching the ground beside me.

- I have a cockroach too, he said.

We stayed like that for a while, without talking,
but it was a complicit silence, warm and comfortable.

- I have an idea! I exclaimed to myself
rushing to my wardrobe.

I rummaged through my junk and eventually found
what I was looking for: a pair of red Converse
that my parents gave me for Christmas. They
were too small, my feet grew faster
than my shadow.

- What do you say we try this? I suggested
holding up the trainers.

In Aytac's eyes, a small flicker of light appeared.
on. He jumped down and took off his shoes
to put on the converse. Then he
formed two neat little loops and tied them together
the laces.

- Mmm, I've been thinking. It's not
still quite that.

I shuffled my pile of old jeans and gave him some.
stretched one.

- Try it.

- Are you sure?

- Go ahead, I say.

He slipped out of his pinched trousers and slid in
in the jeans.

- Styled!" he exclaimed (I had put a point
to help them develop their vocabulary
during his stay).

And it was true. He was super stylish in his
suit, tie, jeans and red trainers.

- So you won't forget me, I whispered
in a slightly hoarse voice.

He had a frank smile.

- I will never forget you.

The familiar tingle tickled my brain

and I felt a comforting warmth pass
between us.

- You're doing your thing again!

- So you know I mean it.

He reached into his suitcase and pulled out one of
his seven Harry Potter ties.

- Here, you can wear it on a special occasion.

Dubiously, I looked at the elegant tie. Not
sure I'll put it on one day, but I'll keep it
preciously.

- You can wear it on your graduation day.
diploma, for example," said Aytac.

- I still have to pass the baccalaureate one day!

My friend pierced me with his blue eyes.

- You must stop doubting your abilities, Elias.

You may not realise it, but making a plan
as you have done requires a brilliant mind.

- But it was to clear your name!

Aytac lifted his arms and put them on my shoulders.

- Not only are you smart, but you have
the intelligence of the heart.

A new emotion tingled inside me. Maybe
that he was right. Maybe I wasn't so
no good, after all. In any case, I was determined
to never let Angelo humiliate me again.

He too was not the superior boy that I
assumed.

- I learned a lot from you," I said.
whispered.

- The reverse is true.

My father knocked on the door, interrupting the
emotional sequence. Fortunately, because I

I felt my eyes tingling funny.

- Boys, it's time!

Then everything went very fast. He rushed to
finish his luggage. Thirty minutes on the airbus and we were
arrived at the teleport. It was time to say goodbye.
Aytac returned his hug to mum without turning blue, squeezed
Dad's hand and gave me a perfect check.

- See you soon, buddy," he said with a laugh.
purring.

I wanted to answer him, but the words were not clear.
stuck somewhere in my throat. I thought about
my apprehension before he arrived. I would never
would have doubted the bond that would unite us. It's like a
if I needed to know it and I didn't know it
not.

Aytac stood in the queue and made me
a little hand wave, worthy of the Queen of England
in the last century. This time I laughed out loud. And then,
he disappeared, swallowed by the gate.

He was gone.

That evening, as I was lying on the
carpet, busy taming a colony of cockroaches,
the computer beeped. I had just
receive a spacial- mail.

I clicked on the message and Aytac's face came up.
displayed, floating on the wall.

- I wanted to say good night.

Behind him, I saw a white space and
bright.

- Is it morning at your place? I asked.

He confirmed and told me about his return:

- My parents are delighted. They think I have
made a lot of progress on the land and they thank you
for your hospitality. They hope you will accept to
come to Alter in your turn.

My heart went into a loop. I knew that
Aytac's stay was part of a programme
but we didn't talk about it. In front of
his invitation, I smiled hesitantly. Go to
Alter was... crazy and exciting at the same time.

- Yes, I would like to, I finally answered.

- And you know, my whole family is looking forward to
to meet you. Especially my sister who loved my
new clothes.

- Stop it! You're always exaggerating!" shouted a voice
musical behind him.

I heard bickering and the screen

was a bit of a wobble. Surely the brother-sister disputes
are a universal thing.

- Let me do it!" resumed the clear voice, and
suddenly, the most beautiful face I have ever seen
has replaced Aytac's.

- Hello, I am Aymée.

Aymée fluttered her eyelids and her long lashes
fluttered on her cheeks. Her violet eyes twinkled
like precious stones and I thought to myself that she
was well named.

- When are you coming to visit us?
requested.

- Soon, I answered.

My heart made another loop in my
chest. I was looking forward to it.

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