

## *Akinari and the ninja exam*

We find ourselves in a world where technology is nascent, made up mainly of ninjas. Our story takes place in Japan... somewhere not far from Okinawa... To explain the context, in this region, war was raging a few years ago.

Our hero, Akinari, just 14 years old, was already facing the reality of life. Nevertheless, his daily life was very simple. He got up, got ready, and went to the ninja school to learn the tricks of the trade. On the program: learning how to throw shurikens, which is a traditional Japanese throwing weapon generally in the shape of a star. Or the throwing of kunais, which is a white weapon used by ninjas. Or the manipulation of ninja techniques and the knowledge of the history of the past wars that his village has known. Such was the typical day of Akinari at the ninja school.

In this world of ninjas, everyone had their own rank, much like in the army. Akinari was old enough to reach a higher ninja rank... But in order to reach this higher rank, he had to pass an exam which consisted of two steps: a written test based on the theory and knowledge acquired during the school year and a practical test aimed at evaluating the combat abilities of his young ninjas. In order to have the best chance to pass the exam, Akinari had been preparing for days. He trained hard after school to perfect his ninja techniques.

After two weeks of intense effort, the day of the exam arrived. As far as the written exam was concerned, Akinari was able to get through it easily enough, at least to get the minimum average. But the most interesting part of our story was the practical exam where the ninja apprentices competed to see who deserved the rank of senior ninja.

The organization of this practical test was simple: it was a tournament between aspiring ninjas. Whoever gave up or left the arena was eliminated. During this tournament, the little ninjas took turns fighting. As for Akinari, he had managed to get through with some difficulty until the semi-finals of the tournament, where the course of our story would change completely.

During his semi-final fight, he was facing his childhood friend Tsuki, where he had difficulty to take over the fight. But in the middle of the fight, a big explosion sounded at the edge of the arena which suddenly ended the tournament.

Suddenly Akinari felt a presence appear behind him, evil and malevolent. Suddenly, the presence captured Akinari, who did not even have time to turn around to see the creature with the evil aura taking him to a place he did not know and had never seen before. Besides, he knew he was in the forest because of the surroundings. Panic-stricken, Akinari tried to escape but was trapped in a prison of magical energy, not knowing what to do. For a moment, he felt lost and alone. He wondered if anyone would come to help him. In his torment, he decided to pull himself together and take charge of his life in order to find a solution. At one point, he remembered the courses on techniques and magic formulas that would allow him to break these barriers. From there, a problem arose...

What would he do after breaking the magic barrier knowing that it was an enemy much stronger than him. Maybe he could use a camouflage technique... Not too easy to flush out.... A decoy to divert his attention... Too experienced for him to fall for it.... During this moment of reflection, Akinari reviewed all these options, taking into account all the unknown and random parameters that could prevent the success of his escape and especially his survival. Suddenly, against all odds, the barrier broke and an object grazed the enemy in front of Akinari. A ninja from Akinari's village appeared at Akinari's side. Akinari recognized the ninja from behind. It was Tsuki who had come to save him. Our hero was still shocked by this arrival but Tsuki had already started to fight the enemy. Totally surprised, Akinari was impressed by the level of the enemy. Tsuki was also in great difficulty. It took only five minutes for our bad guy to finish with the ninja who came to the rescue.

After that, a choice took place in the mind of our Hero... He had to either run away or at least try to prevent the reinforcements, or try to fight in the event that they came to the place of the fight. Time was passing, and he didn't have much time to think and had to make his choice. But in a few seconds his choice was made. He decided to gather all his forces, to surpass himself in order to hope to be able to fight against this evil force.

Akinari possessed a secret power that he used in this fight that allowed him to send a blow of extremely high power but which had destructive repercussions on the body if the power was not controlled. After activating his power, his anger and desire to avenge his childhood friend took over, which activated Akinari's secret power. He managed

to reach out and hit the villain with a punch filled with the power of the power, sending the villain flying into the forest. Our hero had succeeded in knocking down the terrible enemy.

Joy and euphoria took hold of him. But this joy was short-lived because the backlash of power was devastating... His arm was in pieces and the pain was starting to come...

Soon he passed out from the pain. A few days later he woke up in a bed with a kind of bandage around his arm. Next to his bed on a chair was Tsuki who was waiting impatiently for him to wake up and tell him what happened after he fainted. Tsuki told him that thanks to his devastating punch, the reinforcements had captured the still unconscious villain and that everything was back to normal thanks to his action. Without knowing it, Akinari had become the hero of his village.

Within days of his awakening, the important people of the village came to thank him, even the village chief himself. Weeks passed and Akinari found himself strengthened by his fight and the revelation of his power. Life was able to return to normal. Akinari went back to school as he did every day, and continued to train after school to master his power. He took the senior ninja exam again and passed it without difficulty this time. So he got his superior ninja rank in order to strengthen his role as the hero of the village.

# Chapter 1

Enough! It's Enough, I can't stay like this anymore...mama told the difficulties of this new life but I did not expect that! I remembered her words when she told me after my umpteenth expulsion that from there boarding school is my new house. I'm sure of one thing this new year will be long... and the start of it doesn't help me, my train is overflowing, a CEO at my right (he is mad against his secretary since the start of the travel), a family and her baby and the imperturbable couple. "Grace Field House" is my new house she told me, the teachers and the nuns will teach me what a Lady have to know, but there is one things that she does not understand...I have nothing to do with titles, the only thing I really care about is space and... him but he left us. Astronomy is what helped after the loss of only person who care about me, and the only person whom I really cared about. As a matter of fact, he always helped me with my dream, always told me that I am the most beautiful person in this crazy world, always told me that I am his star, his supernova. I think he gave me my passion and my name "Nova", I remembered when I was a child, him and I were on the poolroom with the telescope and we were observing stars together, sometimes we were sleeping in the poolroom. I miss these moments... I miss him. My new "house" like mama described it is a castle from the gothic period. The entrance has a massive black gate with gargoyles to welcome their guests, the gate is linked by two dark giant towers. At the back of the gate we can observe a castle from the same period, with the same colors scheme and a combination between a Disney castle and "Notre-Dame" in France with a forest like in Harry Potter around my new school. During my trip from the house to Grace Field House I discovered that it's a private boarding school for rich kids.

"Miss De La, miss... "I cannot believe that she forced me, I am sure it is just because she needs to find someone else, another idiot who will fall in love and fall on her plan and finally when she had everything, she will leave him... why is the door opening?! It's the driver

"..." He said something but I don't understand

"I'm sorry I don't hear you" I answer him...ah! I know why I can't hear him; my hearing aid is off.

"I was telling that we are arrived and someone is waiting for you"

"Someone is waiting for me? "I ask stupefy. How someone can wait for me when I discovered "Grace Field House" yesterday, does mom knows someone here? I'm sure she has no friends who work in a boarding school. "Thank you for the drive"

"Yes, miss De LaDelestre, the housekeeper is waiting for you, and you're welcome" he answers.

I move towards the boot of the car when the driver stops me and tell me that he takes my stuff and that my job for the moment was to meet the housekeeper. I left him outside and enter the castle. At first, I thought that yes, the entrance is beautiful but it is not expectational, but with a closer ... look, the castle is stunning. The entrance reminds me of the entrance of the "Opéra Garnier" with the massive staircase with statues at the start and the end of it, the stair case goes in two different ways, left and right. There are fake candles all along the stairs, there are columns and arches that attach the floor and the ceiling together. In front of me on the first floor I identify two giant statues and a woman. This woman is maybe thirty years old not older; she is in a suit with striped shirt and black trousers with strap and black stiletto heels; and her dark hair is in a low bun.

"Good morning Miss Nova De LaDelestre , I am Cora the housekeeper. My job here is to help you and to keep order between the children and the personnel." She said with a strict voice like she has no emotions. During this time my baggage were next to me and the driver too. I introduced myself and she explain me how the school works, the time slot for the different meal, the rules, and things that I don't remember. I am impressed about she walks; she has the poise of a queen; the student around us released the road in front of us. Indeed, while she was showing me the dormitory, I noticed how the student was looking at her like she is the only person on the corridor; she inspires respect. Without any link I also noticed the uniform of the student, it was a dark green tiles skirt with a kilt style for the girl and for the boys trousers with the same style, a white shirt, a tile with the same color scheme as the skirt and a black blazer, the final touch was the long black socks( I suppose boys have the same) and the shoes they all wear black moccasins. I have to wear them for a year that will be I think the most difficult thing. I was so much in my dreams that I did not realize when she told me that the door number thirty-four is my bedroom.

## Chapter 2

My new bedroom! My new home! I cannot believe it. The bedroom number thirty-four is now my home. Open the door Nova don't stay here in the corridor, you have the key! If you don't have the courage knock the door! My roommate will open to me; but if she is not here or if she can't hear me because there is a lot of noise! Breathe in and breathe out! Okay let's go! But the noise comes from the dorm! The first thing that I notice is the noise, it comes from "my" bedroom! This is the most unusual thing that I've ever seen. There is in the middle of the room a girl with long ginger hair and pastel clothes, she is painting. Next to her there is a messy desk with paintbrushes, paint bucket. The dormitory is split into two different parts: mine lifeless with white walls, and next a colorful and radiant one like her personality. She does not see me yet, maybe I have to introduce myself now or wait. I think waiting and doing my stuff is the best solution as she seems so focused. My part of the dorm room is on the left side, it's an empty space with just a bed a wardrobe, lifeless like me since his loss... but wait a minute the music is off.

"Excuse me but who are you and what are you doing here?" request my new roommate with a sweet voice. Amazing she will hate me forever; I understand her point of view an unknow person impinges your "territory".

"Hello! I'm Nova your new roommate; I thought that someone would warn you on my arrival." I'm sure my voice shows my state of mind of the moment: terrorized.

She starts smiling "My new roommate! Really! I'm so happy! I finally with the time start thinking that I will finish my studies alone in my bedroom!" She let out a scream that is for me not human.

Despite a weird meeting, she is by my side on my bed and she talks with me. So, she is Anastasia De Luca Cominelli, she is French (by her mother side) and Italian (by her father side), she has a passion for painting and she has been at "Grace Field House" since tenth grade, and she loves it! She tells me that if I need something, she is here and she will introduce me to her friends.

After an hour setting my place, she finally tells me that dinner time is close and we should move to the dining room. At first, I was confused because she was not wearing the uniform but she told me that for the dinner we can be in our own clothes.

Attain the dining room the tremendous amount of student nailed me in place. There were so many students from different origins, none of them looked the same and it's more obvious without the uniform. I was focused on my thought I did not realize that Anastasia introduced me to her friends and more specially the mysterious voice.

"Good Evening student." A deep voice filled the space and attracted the attention of everyone to someone towards a platform where, a group of people were united in a military organization.

"We are gathered for another beautiful year! Behind me you can see the teaching profession, they will help you surpass yourself. For the new students welcome and I hope that you will enjoy yourself and for the elders I hope that you will help younger students in their adjustment period"

The headmaster was a young man maybe thirty years old, everyone's attention was focused on him. The rest of the speech was not really interesting, he introduced his self has Mr Elwood and the teacher introduced themselves too. The dinner was splendid and it was the same for the company and what finish in my stomach.

Following the dinner Anastasia told me that she wouldn't go in the bedroom now and that I could go with them. I told her that I wanted to stay alone for the moment and she accepted it. I stayed in the dining room for a moment and when I took the decision to left the room a shadow came by my side.

"Good evening Miss"

"Miss De LaDelestre sir and good evening; I'm a new student, I'm in twelfth grade" So I talked to the headmaster I had to be polite and show that I was calm.

I do not know why but when I raised my head to his height, he stepped back, like something hit him and a moment of silence ensue.

"De LaDelestre? Like the property developer?" He looked embarrassed by asking me this question but...more importantly my family was well-known even in France...did we have property here and in another country in the European Union?

"Yes, it's my family" I do not know why but I already know what would happen; it's always the same thing

"My condolences for the death of your father, he was so young"

"You will excuse me but I still don't know what I have to answer after those kinds of things." My instinct was good...it's has always been the same since the news of his death, people's behavior is still the same, like a little delicate person. It is irritating with time. What happen if stop listening him? He wouldn't see it he seems too much in his way to show me that if I need help all of the employees of the school are here for me. I was in my dreams until he let out one word: best friend.

## Chapter 3

Best friend! This could not be real... no it's was lie! If Mr Elwood was dad's the best friend... why I don't know who is he? Why he wasn't with us the day of the funeral, why... There was so many questions in my mind...

"My dad's best friend? You have to know something I will not give you favors just because you tell me that you were a friend of my father! How I can be sure of that, who tells me that you don't lie no one, we are alone here so I'm sorry... no I'm not sorry because you are the bad person in this story! Now goodbye and if you want to expelled me fine do it but I will make a complaint against you!" I imagine that I look like crazy, my hands are shaking and I think I am shaking like leaf, my voice is the mirror of me, lost. Why he put me in this situation... yes, I'm alone now but it's not a reason for people to take benefit of me, I'm not a little sensitive person, I'm... why he set his eyes on me and stay in a dead silence.

"Can I talk now?" Even if I say it with sweet voice, I can't trust him "Follow me"

"And why do I have to follow you? Give me proof!" He can hate me if he wants but every horrors story starts like this take "it" for example he follows the clown; and in my case I follow a man who is my headmaster, and "my father's best friend" ... this is the most weird situation that I've evr heard about... why I'm always in that kind of situation...

"Proof, your name is Nova De LaDelestre, you love astronomy, your father's name is Simon... yes but it's on your folder...your...I know!" He takes off his signet ring of his finger and his phone of his suite case.

"Take the ring and wait a minute I unlock my phone" He is focus on his action; the signet ring is the same as dad's one Dartmouth University the Ivy League. How and why a student of one of the Ivy League university is here as the headmaster in Boarding School in the middle of nowhere in France and not in a multinational company has the CEO?

"I know what happened in your mind" he said with a little laugh "How and why a guy like me, an ex-student of an Ivy league is here and not in a big company!" He laughs... why? Is he good?

"Teaching was a passion, and I find here in France my soulmate... Cora!" He talks with so much love like him, when we were on the poolroom or at the country house watching the stars for hours.

"Got it! I was sure she texting me, what is the problem... Oh sorry... hum" This man is strange but in the good way not like a psychopath.

"Ansel! What is the problem? Cora is pregnant? You want vacation at the start of the year? Nova never shows?" this voice on the telephone handset... it's the person who give me life... my "mom". Why does she called my headmaster by his first name and how does she has private phone number... he can't be her new boyfriend because "Ansel" is engaged or maybe she is his mistress...No she loved and she will always love Dad

"Good evening Athena, yes Cora and I are fine thanks for asking and you?" my "mom" and Ansel laugh.

"Yes, I'm fine, fine as a person in grieving process, I live... I miss him..." she seems so sad but I know it's a masque.

"Hello mom! How are you? Do you miss me? I suppose no because I'm here and not at home!" I'm mad at her she sent me here without no regrets and she thinks that I can be nice. "I discovered that Ansel is dad's best friend, fine you always want to know what I do; if it's not my bodyguard it's a friend, I wondered about why this school and not another one! But I understand now, it's far of the house so you can be alone but you still need someone in so it's the perfect place because money is not a problem!" I can't believe that she treats me like a kid, since his death we are always in conflict, no one to raise the white flag.

No, it's not possible I have to leave, think and breathe.

## Chapter 4

One month has passed since the “call” between Ansel and my mom. After this thing I leave the dining-room and take some air outside in the garden; I stayed in the garden. Until the start of school my daily routine was organized and I customized my part of the bedroom, it doesn't seem lifeless anymore but the thrilling contrast between my part that is more with dark colors and Anastasia's part with pastel colors and a lot of posters of videogames, boys band (especially BTS a Korean group) and a lot of drawings some of them are her artwork ( and she is really good) it's funny. When people came in our sanctuary (as she loves to call our bedroom) they are shocked by the difference it's so cliché the dark friend and the joyful one; luckily, we are not blond and brunette that would be the icing on the cake hopefully it's not our case!

Successively to my “night” I discovered the school with Anastasia and her friends, the library is one of my favorite places of the school after the dining room (food is the first obviously). After these kinds of emotions: good vibes, friends, vacations, I rediscovered this emotion: fear, my hearing aid let me down. When I realized it was three days before the back-to-school-time... how in one day before day I can find someone who to fix it, it's impossible... and during the last three days of the holidays I did lip-reading, and I remembered why my hearing aid was a part of me when (I'm with hearing people who can't sign) , because lip-reading asked to much concentration on one person , concentration for me and the person who is talking because she had to articulate more for me.

And finally, school started, everything was ready but I was so scared, a new school, new teachers, and more especially my headmaster! Anastasia and I were waiting for the others near the dining-room because it was time for breakfast.

“Do you see it they put croissant, chocolate croissant, and crepes!” Anastasia is a food lover like me, we were made to live together!

“No really! Where? Do you smell it there is sausage, rice and ... chocolate!” Anastasia abdicate and finally took me to the buffet. At the buffet she was so happy, she had stars in her eyes, she ate everything that she could put in her stomach.

The first day of school was calm our homeroom teacher introduced his self, our schedule and the regulation of the school.

While school days pass my grieving, process did not evolve; I was still here thinking about the fact that his death cannot be true. Nervous breakdown was near.

I was sure the nervous breakdown was not so far; it has been three days and I havened it my bed expect to take a shower or go to the toilet. Anastasia brought me food for lunch my only meal of the day, I cried every day, and when I did not have enough strength I stayed in my bed in silence. I am death in the inside, I am an empty shell. Why did you leave us... me it was too early! Dad you promised me the moon and now I'm six feet under the earth. My telescope watches me since the start of my depression, his telescope.

What happen if I leave everything? Who will notice my absence?

“Nova?” This voice, a deep voice someone call me, dad, I'm coming.

“It's Ansel I'm worried about you, I heard from your friends that you are not with us anymore.”

Oh... Ansel.”

“I know in what you are now. I was in the same state of mind when I discovered the news. I had the luck that Cora was by my side, close relatives are the best help, I know you do not remember me before the accident two months ago, but your father sent me a lot of pictures and news of you and your mom. We were supposed to meet before the thing. I was so happy it had been years without him by my side and the day one we can be together; they take him from me.” The sadness in his voice is obvious, he suffers too

“Your mother is in the same case, she loves your dad, and she loves you. Do you remember before his death; if you think that Adam was the person who reunite Athena and you it's wrong, it was you. You and Athena were like inseparable. You and your parents were inseparable.

## *Epilogue*

It's the end of the years and am better, my depression is better. With the help of Ansel, I feel better, he found me a psychologist, I restarted sports outside of the school dimension. It's graduation day and mom is here. We talk a lot and with the help of the psychologist and Ansel we can talk quietly like before his death and more importantly I accept this death. Even if I'm better returning in England, now is hard so the continuation of my studies is in France.

"NOVA! Wake up we are late" who is yelling at me now it's too early...

"NOVA! Water!" oh

"AHH! But Anastasia what are you doing it is 6am" Why am I here in my bedroom in England and not in France?

Everything was just a dream?

"Nova your dad and your mom are waiting for us in the living-room. Hurry up" Dad, Mom.

I don't know how fast a move but I'm in the living-room and both of them are here. My first instinct is to hug my parents.

"Nova are you fine?"

"Ah mom you can't imagine how fine I'm now with both of you in my arms" Why are tears flowing on my neck.

"Mom, Dad thank you and I love you"

I know what I have to do now, from today I will be more understanding.

## Fighting for my future.

James was an ordinary 14 year old boy, he was not very popular at school, he only had a few friends but they were real friends so he did not mind, he'd rather have two real friend than having hundreds of fake ones. What was special about Liam was his dream and his talent. Since he was 5 years old, his dad would push him to go on stage in karaoke bars because he knew how talented his son was. Once when he was only 6 and he was in a restaurant with his parents, he started singing and the owner told him he could sing as much he wanted even though any other kids weren't allowed to sing after 9PM. When he got a bit older, his father kept telling him that he'll get him in front of Simon Cowell one day and so he did. James put his fears aside and went on The X Factor as his father wished. He wanted to make his parents and sisters proud of him and he knew he could do it.

Today was the day, it was his audition on The X Factor. Many members of his family came to support him, which relaxed him and gave him confidence; his parents and sisters were obviously here but his cousin Ross as well as his aunt, uncle and a few friends from school also came with him. He stepped into the room, he breathed in quite loudly before standing in front the judges and introduced himself. After this, he started singing Fly Me To The Moon. He tensed a little bit once he finished singing, being a bit scared of what the judges would say. He started shaking a little bit, feeling his heart starting to race faster as he was waiting for one of them to speak, the wait was unbearable even if it has been only a minute since he finished singing.

"There is potential with you, James" Simon started, "I'm just missing a bit of emotion »

James felt his heart sink at those last words, he felt the tears started to wet his eyes but he tried to act like the man's words didn't hurt him.

"I think you're really cute and that you got charisma » The other judge said and James' mood suddenly changed as a smile spread across his face.

"I think this kid could do fantastic" the last judge said.

They liked his audition, he told himself, it was obvious that at least Cheryl and Louis did. Now he just needed their yeses. But he spoke a bit too fast because Simon had more to say,

"I think there's 50% missing"

James didn't hesitate and said "Give me another audition and I'll show you I've got these 50%"

And after these, the three judges immediately said yes. He was in the competition.

He was the happiest, he was so close to achieve his dream. He went back in the room where his family and friends were waiting for him and jumped in his mother's arms, his smile so huge that it was almost hurting him.

A few days later, Bootcamp took place. By now James was totally confident and was sure he would get through. He performed his two songs with no problem and was now waiting for the results, was he going to get through? Was he coming home now? There were way too many questions going through his mind. He sat in a room waiting for someone to tell him to come and tell him it was time to go on stage for the results.

Then, after what felt like ages he was finally called.

The moment of the results came in a blur, one minute he was standing there being extremely nervous but with hope, the minute after tears were rolling down his face. This was the end, he thought, Simon decided to send him home. It was the end of the road for him.

He was on the phone with his father to tell him the bad news, the poor young boy was shaking and crying his eyes out when someone came to tell him to come back on stage. He did not understand what was happening, did they want to make him cry even more to make good tv? As he stepped on stage, he quickly wiped his tears and his heart started beating fast but he tried to keep a straight face to not show any emotions. It was obvious that he has cried a lot, his eyes still red and puffy but little did he care, he only wanted to know what they wanted from him.

"Listen James, I don't often do this but you have too much potential and talent to let you go," What does that even mean? James asked himself. "You're back in the competition."

All the pressure left his body as happiness filled him. "Thank you so much, I promise you won't regret this!"

He was going to make it.

The next step was the Judges Houses in Barbados, any other teenager would take this as holidays but for James this was serious, his future was in his hands and if he messed this up, he would work in a factory with his father which was clearly not what James wanted.

The few days in the house before the performance felt like years; he could not sleep properly, he was rehearsing till the very last minute.

His performance went quite well, he sang Hero by Enrique Iglesias and he thought Simon might have liked it. The contestants never got a comment after this performance, only a small "Thank you" if he was in the mood for it, they would get the results only the day after.

And if James could not sleep the days before, that night was even worse. He stayed on the couch of the big house all night overthinking about everything. He could not take another no, it had to be a yes. He had to get through the live shows and fulfill his dream, he could not go back to Wolverhampton after all of this.

The day after, James was the first one to know if he made it through or not. He went where Simon was waiting for him and took deep breaths.

"So James, I've made a decision. It's bad news, I'm sorry."

His world fell around him, it was the end of the road for him, it just ended here like that. He was going home.

Going home was the toughest thing for James, he lost all interest in school and his grades were going down. His dad told him that there was still a chance, he could try again in two years, if he worked hard enough he could make it another time. Even if it was difficult, he got on his feet and started going forward.

At home he would lock himself in his room for hours and sing, recording himself with his guitar again and again until there was no energy left in his small body. He was pressuring himself so much that he would break into tears every night when he laid down on his bed. There was no joy left in the boy but only stress, a big amount of stress combined to sadness.

After a few months, he started doing gigs, it was not much but it was great. It made him a bit happier although he still felt empty somehow.

However, he was not really going anywhere and people understood it, other teenagers starting to bully him like the day he went to McDonalds and some random guys shouted "X FACTOR REJECT!" at him in the middle of the restaurant. He was so embarrassed, people kept making fun of him and he just did not know what to do so he just kept doing his gigs waiting for his next audition. He knew he had to work hard to make a name for himself the music industry but until then, he had to stay tough and take all the insults, no matter how much they hurt him.

Unfortunately for James, insults got worse after he discovered that he was bisexual and people around him heard about it. He wanted to get through the competition more than ever now so that people would stop the bullying but he knew that if anyone at the show knew about his sexuality, it would be way harder for him. James knew that this simple little thing about him could cause the whole world to hate him.

June 14th. Two years after his first audition, here he was waiting for his turn to do a new audition.

This year the auditions were quite different, they were not in a room with only the judges, there was an audience. James could not mess this up. Before his audition, a bunch of people interviewed him and it was really hard for him to focus on the questions because all he could think about was his audition. He kept checking the time until it was finally his turn. Then, he got on stage and he did not have to introduce himself as the judges immediately recognized him right away which made him smile.

This was the moment, his moment. James took a deep breath and started singing, following the few dance steps his dad taught him. Only 15 seconds after he started singing, the entire audience stood up and started cheering him, he tried to stay focus on the song but a wave of happiness went through him. As the performance went, the audience kept cheering him and the judges seemed impressed, James knew he did it, he knew it was the beginning of everything. Once he finished the song, everyone applauded him and the judges stood up. James was smiling like never before.

"You've got it. Whatever it is, you've got it. Your voice is very powerful." Cheryl told him.

"Thank you" he felt like he was smiling like an idiot but he could not help it.

"That's really impressive, everyone in this competition should be worried about you." Natalie said and James giggled, he could not believe all of this was real. Louis said something that he didn't really catch and now it was Simon's turn to speak, he started feeling a bit nervous.

"He wasn't ready two years ago so I told him « come back in two years, you're gonna be a different person » and I was right. Now let's vote."

Louis, Cheryl and Natalie said yes with no hesitation and there was only Simon left. He looked at James a few seconds before saying, "Absolutely incredible. One massive fat almighty yes."

"Thank you so much!" He jumped of happiness, he made it. He got through, he was in the competition. All his family and friends were extremely proud of him and he would not lie, he was proud of himself as well.

The next steps of the competition went pretty well, until bootcamp, maybe that thing was cursed for the young boy. He was so close to make it through but Simon already said everyone's names, only one person was left and it could not be him. Unfortunately he was right, it was not him, he did not make it.

Have you ever heard of "the story repeats itself"? That's what was happening to James, he got send home once again at bootcamp but it didn't stop here last time, did it? He was already leaving when someone asked him to go back. "God, what do they have against me?" He sighed and went back to the studio, in a room where all the boys who didn't get through were. A man, someone who works for the show, started calling a few names, five names to be more precise and this time they called him.

He followed the man and went back on stage with the four other guys he never met before. Tears were still visible on his cheeks, he cupped his face with his hands while he waited for something to happen.

« All of you are way too good to let go, (James had an impression of deja vu, that was basically what Simon told him last time) so we have decided to put you five into a group. Welcome back boys. »

A band? He did not even know those guys, they were not friends and they did not know each other at all so how could this work? What if they hated him? What if one of them was homophobic? What if their voices did not sound good together? As questions started going through his mind, he rushed backstage and called his father.

"Dad, they put me into a band"

"That's good son, what's the matter? I can tell you're worried"

"How will this work dad? I don't know them-" he didn't have time to finish his sentence, his dad started speaking again.

"Listen James, you've got two choices here. Either you have 50% of something or 100% of nothing. This may not be what you initially wanted but you still can fulfill your dream that way. Think twice before taking any decision, I trust you."

"I will dad, I promise."

Maybe he should listen to his dad, after all at the moment that was his only way to get a career in music. Maybe being with those boys would not be that bad even if they dressed terribly. He went back to the room where were the boys waiting for him and said "I'm in."

He quickly sent a text to his father "I'm in the band".

He was with the four other boys, William, Edward, Javadd and Nate when he saw a notification on his phone, a text from his father.

"The boy becomes a man."

He smiled widely and put his phone back in his pocket. He was on his road to become the idol of million of people.

## Diary from my teenage years

« Hi, this is my first time writing something down. But my psychologist said it

will be great for my future me so, here I am ! My name is Rebecca and I'm

eighteen. I'm from Vancouver in Canada. That is a city that I love now but not

before. Let me tell you why!

It all began when I was in my Senior Year. I remember that I was so unbothered by everything. I had no pleasure, no joy, no anger, almost no feelings at all. I also had no friends, bad grades, strict parents.

Alone against

the entire world, it became worse every day. That was me and I did anything to change that. I was just existing but not living my teenage years. When I think about it now, I am just disappointed in myself. But one day, everything changed. I will never forget that day! Never!

« Today I'm going to introduce you a new student. Mark ! » This is exactly what my French teacher said I remember ! That was the real first time for a very long time that I felt something. He was tall, attractive , extroverted with a

good voice. He was like an angel coming to earth. I think I was not the only one that had butterflies in my stomach at this moment. All the prettiest girls seemed to want to talk to him. I could never imagined Mark looking at me once.

« Can I sit here? » He said. Imagine how my cheeks turning red. « Yes, of course », I said with a shaky voice. We talked about many subjects between all the classes. I lived for these moments. I was lucky to sit next to him but all the girls were angry. I could feel their disgust looks a mile away. That's how I was known by all the girls : the girl who sits next to Mark, the new transfer student.

Days passed. My reputation was going bad but I did not care about it because I was happy ! And with that I naturally tried to be pretty all days. So, I remember going shopping many times and taking care of myself. I did not do it for Mark. But he makes me realize that people can notice me and that I am existing for someone.

One day something happened. I was sitting next to him and he was silent. It was really strange because he laughs a lot and he's very talkative. Then he looked at me and said « There's a party tonight at my home, do you want to come ? » He was blushing so hard. Me too at the same way. I answered with a shaky voice again « yes, why not ».

That was the first time someone told me to come to their party. And on top of that, it was Mark's party ! I was excited all day long. I finished school early that day. I came back home and, the first thing that I did was : asking my parents. The scariest thing to do.

They're very strict; didn't want me to « play with popular mean girls » and stupid things like this.

Without any surprise, it was a « No. ». Not a gentle « no », but a big angry

« No ! ». At that moment, I burst into tears even if this was not so surprising.

Like I mentioned later, I was unbothered by everything, but since Mark had appeared in my life, I was feeling a lot of emotions. This was just the beginning. I cried all my tears in my room. After many hours, I decided on something that I thought I would regret. Sneaking out. That was the plan : have dinner with my parents, pretend to sleep, find my better outfit, sneak out at night through the window, and finally jump from the second floor. Many thoughts were going through my mind : Would my parents find out ? What if something happened ?

But I did it ! The plan worked perfectly and I even used my dad's car because I already had my driver's license.

Many people were here. I knocked at the door. Mark opened it. «

You're pretty tonight, come make yourself comfortable ! » I just said thank you and walked away because I was so scared. Everyone was looking at me. This was the worst feeling of my life. Everyone was staring and laughing wherever I moved in the house. The thing that is going to happen next, is the worst feeling that I had from all my entire life.

Johnny, a guy from my history class stood up on the table and screamed :

« Guys ! Listen to me ! Here's the ugliest person with the ugliest voice that I've never met : Rebecca ! »

He was totally drunk and everyone laughed at me. I was going to run away but grabbed my wrist. « This is so random but Rebecca, if you can sing something correctly I'm asking you out ! and if you can't, you will be the official ugliest person of the entire school okay ? » Just after he said that he gave me a mic and someone played a lovely song : I like me better by Lauv.

I knew this song. But nothing was coming out of my mouth. Then I felt someone taking my hands. It was Mark. I was so surprised that I stared at him for a moment. He sang the first part of the song and I joined him and we finally sang the song together in front of all the

people. The boys were petrified because they laughed at me for my voice while i can actually sing really well and all the girls were shocked because Mark took my hands. I used to sing when i was five years old but I lost all my skills because I stopped everything on my high school years. That moment was magic. Singing made me feel really good. After the end of the song Mark asked me out. I said yes, obviously !

Reality came back to me when I saw what time it was. I just said goodbye to Mark and went home directly so my parents won't discover anything.

And that is how only one man changed my life. He made me feel emotions, gave me confidence to fight those people who laughed at me and made me find my passion. »

Rebecca closes the book. Reading that makes her feels really nostalgic because she can not imagine her life now if these moments never happened.

She's now a recognized singer from Vancouver and married to Mark. Together they discovered the best of themself. « You did really well Rebecca. » She says to herself while a tear of joy flows down on her cheek.

Suddenly a little girl yells in the house.

« Mum ! Dad is home ! ».

The end.

Yaz and Rayan are teenagers like the other, they go to school, go to the park to have fun with their friends or walk Yaz's dog Roy. Yaz was rebellious, energetic and determined to graduate her school while Rayan was rather wise and shy, he did not attract any attention.

One day when she was watching Roy with Rayan in front of a market during (her father was shopping, a thud coming from an alley a few yards from the store attracted the poor pet, he pulled so hard on his leash, his collar came off. Yaz tried to catch up with her dog, when they got into the alley, they had an intense light in front of them as if a miniature sun was blossoming in front when suddenly these lights exploded, streaks of energy spread throughout alley. Yaz and Rayan did not understand that the what has happened, she thought she was dreaming, she put the leash back on Roy and returned to her father who was waiting near the store and returned home.

After the weekend with these unusual occurrences, they resumed school, it was a sunny Monday, the day started well until Billy a disruptive student who often brutalizes Rayan walked towards them during the break and started annoying Rayan, Yaz tried to push him away but not take advantage when all of a sudden Rayan pushed him back more than 5 meters with a single blow of his arm, Billy had landed in a pile of leaves further, Rayan who was the shy child of the school had become the center of attention of the court, all eyes were stuck on him.

Yaz took him to school and hid in a classroom, they wondered what it was, Yaz asked Rayan to do again what he had done with a table but it didn't work, but when Yaz turned the table it was put to follow her on her all alone, as if she was on a leash, this time there was no longer any doubt that they had powers but where did they come from? After a few minutes they started to make the connection with the strange light they saw in the alley, whereas Yaz worried about the danger they could pose, Rayan was rather happy that he could get revenge everything Billy was doing to him at school. Yaz didn't really agree with using these powers against him, she tried to reason with him but to no avail, Rayan was sure of himself and came back to see Billy but by the time he was unable to push him back, but when Yaz approached Rayan to help him, those powers had returned, it was clear that they had to be together

to use their power. This problem did not make Rayan happy as Yaz did not want to use his powers against Billy. Right now, Yaz didn't expect Rayan to tell him :

"If you refuse to help me, we are no longer friends."

Yaz replied, "We don't make friends do bad things."

Something had changed in Rayan, he tried to force Yaz with his power, she defended herself by pushing him back to the back of the room then he decided to go home but alone when they used to make way home together.

Yaz was very angry about Rayan's immaturity and this utterly selfish request as Rayan began to regret his words, he was ashamed that their friendship had been destroyed for their power, the after day of the break, he went apologize to her but she refused his apologies, for her if they had really been friends, he wouldn't never have forced her, Rayan's actions was unforgivable. He asked her a last chance and he said that he was really sorry and that he would never use his power for his personal pleasure, he convinced her.

A few hours later, in the corridors, both friends walked toward their next classes when Billy walked towards them to continue what he had started the day before when Rayan with a look of revenge saw him go down the stairs, he started to squeeze hand, he was aiming his hand at his legs and suddenly Billy fell down the stairs and reaching the end of the stairs he twisted his ankle.

Yaz was shocked by the scene that she saw, Billy could have died and it would have been Rayan's fault when she looked up Rayan it seems not to have regretted his action, she took his hand and led him outside.

"But what did you do ?"

"I don't have to justify myself, it's not you he was bothering him!"

"You weren't allowed to do that"

"He deserved it" he said with a proud look.

"You used me"

"Sorry but I don't regret what I did"

In a few seconds the weather changed, as if a storm was brewing, the pressure increased, the inseparable duo confronted their power each trying to stop the other.

Yaz felt as an accomplice in Ryan's bad deed, she thought if she hadn't forgiven him this moment would never have happened. After a few seconds of power confrontation an explosion of light burst between the two friends, they both found themselves on the ground, the wind calmed down, a silence reigned in the school yard. Both two shine the

lights emanated from bur the heroes then the two lights came together to form one, after this event our heroes found themselves without power. This light was the source of their power ? The light dissipated in nature as if it had never existed, Yaz and Rayan got up left each one on their side, returning home, Yaz swore never to speak to Rayan again, she realized that he is maybe a good friend, but he was not exactly a good person. Rayan on his side grew more mature and realized his mistake, that he had lost a friend who was just trying to protect him.

THE END

## *The Girl of the Basket*

This is the story of a little girl who becomes a woman. This is not my story, even though I could be a part of this story, or I could be the protagonist, but it would not be as interesting as it really is. This is the story of a woman whose story needs to be heard and told, because this woman impacted a lot of people's lives and changed many biased opinions on the caste system. This is the story of the great Sarah Macconagan, the one who gives a new face to humanity.

Sarah was like all the little girls of her age, obedient, well-behaved, not asking any questions about what grown people told her to do. She was ten at the time and was the cutest little girl this world would ever see with her hair colored similar to the sun rays. Her skin was so pure and well-defined that we would consider her as a porcelain doll. Her eyes, as green as the trees during spring, reflected innocence and purity. Like the young girls of her age, she was on the habit of dressing herself in long dresses, underlined at the waist by a sweet ribbon defined in a knot.

Sarah lived in a beautiful, big and well-adorned castle, located in a small city named Aragon, and qualified as being perfectly organized, namely, every object had its defined place. The little girl was one of these girls of the world who knew what it was to have breakfast.

Aragon was the type of city located in the upper side of a hill, surrounded by a forest not well-known by the inhabitants of the wealthy city of Aragon. People of this city had no interest on what was happening outside of the frontier of the city.

Sarah belonged to a family where the actions were supervised by her mother, the Queen of Aragon, Lady Elisabeth Macconagan. However, all the actions of Sarah were guided by her mother, she was the one who took decisions, who recommended what to say at which time to say it, who dressed her little baby as the fragile doll she was. Nevertheless, despite the arrogance, the seriousness and the strictness of her mother, who did not even let her breathe without her agreement, Sarah always obeyed nicely to her mother, thinking her mother as the grown person she was, which consequently means that she knew what was the best to do and her actions did not have to be questioned. The girl had no idea of what was hiding in the big forest and, as no one was interested, she was not either.

But there were rules about this forest : no one was allowed to venture himself on it, and Aragon was a place where nobody dared to transgress the rules.

One day, under the influence of a royal case, Lady Macconagan decided urgently to visit Sarah's dear uncle, located four miles away from Aragon. As she was in a rush, she did not think and brought Sarah with her. Because of the emergency of the situation, she did not have time to make the long road which gets around the forest. As a consequence, she got through with her stagecoach.

Sarah had always dreamt of that forest, such mysteries had been built around it and she deeply wished to discover it. Furthermore, this was the very first time Sarah was allowed to leave the city and cross the frontier.

This day, the little girl behaved like her mother wanted her to behave, calm and well-behaved on the outside. Notwithstanding, in the inside, the little girl was very excited to unmask what beautiful world was hiding outside the boundaries of Aragon. She had the capacity for wondering about a squirrel in a new tree. The little girl had hopes to discover majestic trees, crystal clear waterfalls... She had dreamt of the delicate noise of the water, of the Wind's murmur into the trees, of the birds' symphony near to the flowers, and her dreams could be perceived by the spark which had taken place in her eyes. Unfortunately, that shiny spark on her eyes died as fast as the rich people threw left-overs away. Indeed, the wild forest was not actually what she thought it would be.

When she discovered what rich people had hidden far away from their luxury life she turned pale, nauseous and entirely shocked by her genitrix, who seemed not to have any reactions to what was parading in front of her innocent eyes.

Indeed, the forest she thought bright and shiny was actually dark and dreary. There were no birds singing, but ravens who were croaking, no majestic trees but only dead trunks with grieved leaves. The ground was muddy with dead insects inside or insects that were trying to survive through the mud which was absorbing them.

Among all that, she saw distantly what seemed to be a very small village, built from dead wood gathered by mud to form what looked like a roof. Walls were built from straw and twigs found on the ground. And within all that she saw people. Life. In a dead space. People were covered with mud, they were grubby and skinny, as though only their fragile bones could maintain them on their feet. She perceived men, women, parents...children. Sarah sat back in the stagecoach and, for the first time, a tear found shelter in the corner of her eyes, breaking the perfection of her face, erasing the innocence from her eyes, stealing the purity of her soul. The queen looked down at her with a despising look, but for the first time, Sarah did not care about her. When The People of the Forest saw the white and gold diligence among the dark and disgusting trees, they started to throw some mud on it, making some dirty marks on it.

« Oh dear, these people embody perfectly the kind of savagery that my eyes cannot bear, please close those curtains », her Dear Majesty said, in a disgusted tone. Sarah did not say a word more during all the journey.

Back home, she went to her room and tears started to rain one by one from her mournful eyes. Once it started, it took time to stop and she did not know how to stop it. She did not like that feeling. She felt hurt, bad, remorseful. How could she be that blind all this time ? How could people live in these conditions ? How could her mother have lied to her all this time ? This sadness was suddenly replaced by anger, a feeling she had ignored all her existence. Her breath was going faster, her heart was beating more savagely. Her pale skin became, in a moment, as red as the ribbon of her beautiful dress. She was angry. Angry toward all the people who lived in a wealthy way next to these people who did have nothing to eat. Angry toward the Queen, who has lied to her all this time. Angry to herself to have been that blind, to have been that obedient. But suddenly, in all that space of anger, came an idea : when the night would come, she would venture herself to the forest, bring help to these people, and try to enhance their lives as much as she could.

Thus, she stood up, went on her wardrobe, took one of these haute couture dresses, cut it to make it worn, grabbed her hood and went to the heavy kitchen where all the meals were prepared. She took some of them and gathered them in a basket and then got out by the window. Outside, once in the wood she deliberately put some mud on her to be unperceived by the people from there. When she set foot in the village, she walked through the population. Weirdly the village was quite alive, whereas the night had already fallen. Kids were playing around the fire, parents were boiling some insects to eat while others were playing music with their mouths or their fingers.

Sarah was firstly scared : the forest was at first sight dreadful, scary and insecure. But then she was marveled and fascinated by the children who were happy while dancing around the fire whereas they had nothing. They all seemed to be happy together. That made her smile. Then she realised why she was there and started to activate her plan. The girl entered the different houses and placed a meal in each house. And then returned her home.

It became a habit that every night the little girl got down in the forest to drop off some food baskets which turned into bigger ones each night. Then she started to add some of her toys for some, some musical instruments for others.

The People of the Forest did not understand where these baskets came from but there were joyful to discover them every night. These baskets showed them light, gave them something to hope for, something to believe in.

One night, while miss Macconagan was doing her tour, she was laying a basket at the usual place but at this moment someone entered in the house :

« Who are you ? » the boy was started to scream.

« Shh ! Shh !! » said Sarah with a panicked voice, and then, threw herself on him, with the aim of avoiding him to talk, putting her hand on his mouth. The boy started to struggle but, after a moment, calmed down and she freed him.

« Okay, I'm going to introduce myself but, please shut up » she asked gently. The girl waited a moment and continued.

« I'm Sarah Macconagan ».

« Are you the Person Of the Basket ? » the boy asked.

She whispered, « Yes, I am ».

« Seriously ! So you came from »

« SHH !! » insisted the lady.

« Yes, I came from the upper mountain, as you call it here » she confessed desperately.

The boy looked down at her.

« I know what you are thinking of me but I promise I'm trying to help »

« I believe you » answered the boy.

« Seriously ? » asked Sarah with astonishment.

« Yeah, a person of the mountain would not even go down in the forest and even less cover oneself with mud » said the Person of the Forest with a little teasing laugh, as he was considering her as stupid. But Sarah felt relieved.

« I am Anthony » he gave out his hand in a sign of introduction.

« Nice to meet you Anthony » she replied, happy to have found a potential friend.

« I think you should reveal your identity, that would show to people that people of the upper mountain are not all the same ».

« NO ! » she replied directly, « Sorry but I know you people, despising us and I don't want them to know who I am because they will reject me, I don't do this for them to know who I am, just to improve a little bit their daily lives, your daily life. »

« Perhaps you are not forced to reveal them who you are. » The boy expressed in a sly voice.

Indeed, the boy had an idea, he would introduce her to his world for people to meet an Upper Mountain Person but without telling them her real identity. Thus, they could become aware of the fact that people are not as they think they are and that would bring an end to many biases. Sarah agreed and she went in immersion to Anthony's world.

This immersion may be the best experience of her life. She met incredible kind-hearted people, she attended to their night parties with music and dancing. She had never danced like that, she had never been so joyful, she had never been so lively. All the village appreciated her, everyone was waiting for her visit every night, without knowing who she really was.

However, one night, as she was coming back home dancing and full of music on her head, she discovered, unexpectedly, her mother at the entrance of her room. She opened her eyes wide while observing her dirty daughter, ugly and covered with mud. Then from a disgusted face she went to an angry face.

« Could you explain to me what this means lady ? If I dare use that word again. Look at you. You are disgusting. A shame. I cannot even look at you. I know what you are doing. Didn't you think I would notice ? You are making a shame of our lineage, of our name, of me. How can you even get back there with no shame ! I can even say how disgusted I am. I do not even recognize my daughter...if I still have one. »

The queen brought her in a tower with a single window so small that a cat could be trapped by the bars, turned her back and locked the door.

« If you cannot take care of yourself and make the right decisions, I will for you ! You will not be a source of shame for me anymore. You will be trapped in this tower forever. »

Sarah was devastated, but not because of her mother. What devastated her was the fact that she would not see Anthony and the others anymore.

Days passed and Sarah was still locked in the room... lonely, and she noticed for the first time how empty and dead was the room in spite of the painted frames on the wall.

A week passed, then two. One night, in the middle of the second week, she heard a noise from the small window.

« Anthony ? » she asked when she went to see what it was. « What are you doing here ? Leave ! It's too dangerous for you to stay, they will lock you as she did with me, or even worse, please leave. »

« That's what they did to you so, they locked you in. »

« Yes, I am locked in forever because I have made the biggest mistake anyone from the upper mountain has ever made, I broke the rules ! I'm condemned ! » she replied desperately.

« Not for long I promise » the boy answered and then left.

Anthony returned in the forest and confessed to his village who was Sarah and told them the whole story. The inhabitants were first shocked and started to disdain her. But Anthony reminded them how kind she was to them, how happy she made them, how she crossed the boundaries of class to help them, how she transgressed the fundamental rules to be with them. She never looked down at them, she never despised them or belittled them, she always believed in them. These words reminded them the amazing person the lady was.

Thus some of them took some ropes, some wood weapons and went on their way to free the lady. When they arrived discreetly at the tower, they made a hole in the wall and helped the lady escape, but then she stopped.

« I'm not going with you » she said firmly, « All of this has to stop » she went on, determined.

And then she went on the middle of the street and screamed « Come out ! Come out ! If you are not afraid, come out. » Lights turned on. People started to get outside with misunderstanding looks.

« People of the Upper Mountain, please let me introduce you to People of the Wild Forest, see how happy they are, see how lively they are although they have nothing . They lived in peace with just a piece of bread to share, but they are generous, altruistic, always happy to help. Although they have nothing. But look at you, look at us, we are people who do not need anything and yet, our values are founded on appearances, our values are as weak as our mentality. Look at all these privileges we have, look how wealthily we are living whereas people just next to us starve to death. People of Aragon do not even know the existence of these people. This is an injustice, the people of the wild Forest have children who need to go to school, they have families who need to be fed, they have a voice that needs to be heard. That is why, me, Sarah Macconagan, Heir of Aragon, put an end to this unfair caste system, put an end to years of ignorance, put an end to inhumanity. I claim the end of the People of the Upper Mountain and the end of The People of the Wild Forest. Now, we are all from a same group, humanity. This is the time to overcome our biased opinions, to let behind our biased society, to leave place to novelty, to solidarity, to humanity. »

That was the way Sarah Macconagan put an end to years of privileges and ignorance. By transgressing the boundaries, she gave birth to a new world, to a new Aragon. A world without privileges, where people come from one universe and are united. Through her quest of equality, Sarah found herself and became the leader and the creator of a new society.

## IMANY AND FREE WILL

My name is Imany and I am a 27 year old woman violinist, but the experience I am going to tell you about is from my childhood until my passage to adulthood, which I consider to have reached at the age of 15. Of course it is not really the age of a conventional adult, but because of what I have lived I consider it so.

I was a little girl who could be described as lucky with her two loving parents all in a context of life that initially seemed to be the dream of any child a big house, a large garden, and the icing on the cake the possibility of fair school at home thanks to the financial means of my father in coherence with the revenues of it -this my mother Inaya who was a former teacher ensured my education, it's not a random decision she knew she had the skills to provide my education but she was also a victim of emotional instability that she had trouble recognizing but in the eyes of the law she was considered to be able to provide my education in a way that is more than correct, I fully understand this choice but the execution of this thought was not to work in my favour nor in his, but I would not explain it to you quickly enough, before I would like to return to my father Atem, unlike my mother, he was an extremely calm man who, whatever the situation we were in, knew to have the right words to reassure us and all this obviously in total honesty, but as you can imagine, not everything was completely white or black, because of his work, which could rather be described as a passion, that is, a pianist, He didn't have a lot of time to spend with my mother and me to give you an idea, he could sometimes leave the family home for more than 6 months to play his concerto around the world, At that time people lived in South Africa and the piano was not a popular instrument in this culture, which is why my father was often on the move to exercise his "reason to live".

It's time to go back to my person since I was born when I was 13 but I lived in a linear pattern of life where the weeks and days were almost identical, but that didn't bother me any more than that, despite not going to school, I had to keep to schedule because my mother was very strict about respecting my education and instruction, which I totally understand but it was very complicated to understand at this age, fortunately my life was not limited to that, but also to social contacts. My mother often took me to the movies, to the beach or to the park, but these activities quickly made me tired, I didn't really like talking with anyone other than my father and my mother, probably because of my habit of staying home most of the time with as alone contact these two figures, I found these relationships with other people only but my parents ephemeral so useless . I would never have imagined that this thought would lead me to lock myself in a passion that in the greatest of chance is the same as that of my father. The music and especially an instrument in particular the cello, I got a taste for it thanks to the influence of my father, seeing him being happy by practicing this art I immediately associated the music with an outlet, a passion, an idea that my father shared .

My mother, who was anti-music, I let you guess why I was forbidden to listen to any kind of music for fear that I would become like my father obsessed with this "fish" as she liked to call it. This situation where my father traveled all the time and my mere educating me at home continued until the age of but 13 my father no longer had the same financial income as before so I discovered the world of school unfortunately my father indirectly approached him of us to the great pleasure of my mother who resumed her position of teacher but my

father did not bear the frustration of not being able to play the piano in front of an audience as he used to do. Going to school was a shock to me and I did not endure contact with other children especially during the period of college where harassment was predominant towards me. This situation was unusual for me and it put me in a state of extreme stress and sadness, which even caused me a strong depression, in retrospect I realized that this situation was not so terrible but at the time, because of the overprotection of my parents, every little detail whether it was a classmate or even a teacher could put me in a state of intense stress, strangely despite this evil-Being I had very good grades in all subjects but none really attracted me, so after those hours of hell my only outlet was music; but as I said above, my mother hate it so sometimes I had to not go to class with my father's agreement (I know this is strange but it must be known that my father was very open-minded is accepted that I sometimes miss classes to be able to play music), all this in the utmost discretion so that he would let me play with him in a small cabin he had built not far from our house, of course this situation is repeated often and my mother understood it quite quickly and she who had a part in my education could not bear this situation which created a huge family conflict that ended with a separation of both parents. This is not the only cause of this situation but I prefer not to go into details. After many court proceedings the judge decided that my mother was going to be my new sole legal representative, this choice that did not belong to me was the point of no return that led me to what I am today, At first I thought I was going to live with her like I used to when I saw my dad from time to time but none of this like I told you before my mom had emotional problems that before were not really visible but after the separation from my dad everything changed, it became my worst nightmare I couldn't do anything without his permission and especially two things go out of court time and play the violin that I (never could use) because of this fact little of me after a very ambiguous family situation change I made the best decision of my life run away of my house Certainly these irresponsible attitude but it is this act that allowed me to free myself as a person, in my bag I had a fairly substantial amount of money that I obviously did not steal from anyone this one was just the fruit of my economy, not much clothes, considering the size of my bag and finally my cello given to me by my father, the very night I had this idea in my head I ran away without knowing where I was really going that night-there was the first time that I felt this feeling of freedom I felt that the world belonged to me and this even if for more than 4 days I had no comfort I slept in the street but in a way it pleased me because this situation was the As a result of a decision I made and not from my mother during that period I saw homeless people playing music to earn a little money I started doing the same at the time not for money but to express what I felt through music, 4 days after I ran away while playing the violin on a street corner alone in a neighborhood not far from home I saw my mother with several policemen approaching me I didn't even try to run away because I knew it would be useless so I went home me after several interrogations by the police and my mother to explain the reason of my flight. After going through this ordeal, I could see that she had completely changed her behaviour. Of course she was angry with me for what I had done but I felt like I was discovering another person, she was not as strict and tense as before she even let me play the cello, and make the decisions I wanted so much that I assumed but this one and I continue to have good grades at school . (I spared you a lot of size that I find useless to go into as concrete as possible) . My father didn't say anything when I came to his house the following weekend, everything was normal I thought I understood how I felt and didn't want to rush me, Afterwards I was able to join a musical high school after college and one thing led me to stand out in this voice that allows me to live today financially.

This ends my story I know the ending is very synthesized but I think I was able to say what I wanted to say thank you for reading it so far and I hope I have entertained you.

Since when... didn't I feel had a nice day? Was it yesterday? Or no long before? No, I don't think so. I think this week is different from another day. I think It was a week and a half ago, my life was boring, all days were the same, the same sun, the same path, the same school with the same strangers at always the same hours at the same seat. I was not really social; they are used to call me by all kind of names because I am not like them. I am social at all; my only social interactions were on my computer with some NPC (non-player characters). I live alone in a little studio because my father is often in travel due to his work and my mother died three or four years ago. But it does not matter for me

Give me the name you want it is not important. I am mister everybody... I will always remember this day; it was the first time someone comes to tell me something different than the persistent flaming. I did not know her name, she was strictly opposed to me. But no one were flaming her, however she was talking to me about "That Day Changed My Life", the last update of this underrated mmorpg (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) in preview. Normally no normie can know it because it was released recently and it's not a famous game. The fact is... it's already a beta! Just the first hundred registered players of the license were able to get this opportunity. I was thinking about it, many times, too many times. Did she like me? Impossible! Since when girls play games? Since when gamers are accepted by everybody as a normie? The next few days she came again and again but I would not realize that she could be someone on the one hand different and on the other hand similar. To relax from this hard half week the week-end I decided to start this game for the first time.

At my first connection I saw this world like my home, a place where no one would judge me, a world of many possibilities, the world where I can be myself. But...someone was waiting me in the hub. There was someone who said that she was the girl I met a few days ago. To verify it I asked for some questions that only she can answer. But, yes, it was her, again. But why did she stalk me that much? My peaceful world has been invaded by a foreign body. I reacted like a person who just found out they have covid-19 like the sun going down my world died off; I didn't know if I could survive at it! A COMMON PERSON CAME INTO MY OTHER LIFE! I was safe nowhere! she could share fake information about me, makes people come and destroy my mental health. I was like a paranoid, overthinking about how my life could be destroyed by one and only one student. In real life I'm used to be flame, it's not "super effective". In game it's not the same, her "hello" was very effective on me. She destroyed my secret garden like Bowser at the final level in new super Mario bros on Wii or more like Mario galaxy.

After all these reflections I noticed that she invited me in a group and in her friend list. I wanted to know more about her intentions but by keeping the control of this psychologic game that I started with her. I thought I couldn't lose like Barça in FIFA 18. First, she started by asking me to call her, and we started to play. I was extremely surprised I didn't find bad intentions; she wasn't a casual player; it's shocked me but she taught me some tips in the game. The fact that she is an e-girl was the more unexpectable. Shy and uncommunicative as I am, I didn't ask her why was she hanging out with a guy like me. Before leaving the game, she told me to come play again with her at 10 O'clock the next morning. This night I didn't slept, I didn't understand what happened, did I really speak with someone else for more than 3 seconds, the time to say: "stop and leave me please!?" I felt something different, could I tell her my friend? Was it too pretentious for me? Many questions like these invaded my mind, I couldn't sleep. Overthinking again and again. At 10 O'clock I was exhausted. If I was Senku I would say that I'm sure that I'm exhausted 10 billion percent. I was at a point where I no longer needed science to round off the day of my death. Just by earing me she knew that I had not slept. My brain was dodging all possible reflections in slow motion like in the Matrix. But at one moment my brain gets up, she asked me to be her friend, I didn't understand why and why I said no. More surprisingly she was not sad at all I saw a hint of a smile. Maybe I didn't see it well due to how I was tired. I wasn't ready for what was going to happen. We started to create a guild. I thought this was a private guild but many people asked to join us. But at this moment I preferred to mute my microphone. When they all needed to go, I reactivated it and she asked me why did I don't talk with the others players. We both knew the answers, she was stalking me but I

answer like she didn't know. A sort of counterfoil answer like: there was some noise at my home. So she hung up and I went to sleep.

I'm used to playing a lot during the week but this time I was a lot of assessments and homework. It was a hard week but Tuesday she came back to me to know why did I did not play with her the previous day and she grabbed me like a Blitzcrank in League of Legend into a group of people out of our high school. At first people looked at us strangely like what's their relation? but in the group where she took me I recognize that everybody were in our guild. Obviously, I didn't talk but I think she talked them about me because they all said "so it's him" like to spoof her. And I started realizing the meaning all these reactions from everyone. I was the chosen one because I had no friends, she is the Ayano Aishi of our world! At this moment I ran home as fast as Usain bolt, no... more like Flash! I heard "gotta go fast" from sonic while I was running.

This night was hard, as hard as know that you are in a dream while dreaming. All sounds of my home the wind outside, the rain, and the door and flooring's creaking were amplified. I was terrified. Was this week a nightmare? Obviously, I had gone too far away in my imagination so far that when I was sleeping, I got up and I scream that It was not my time to became an animatronic like Freddy, Bonnie, Chica. My unsociability made me sick for all of the next day and allowed me to think about what had happened. I wanted to return to the past like she is the Xana of my world. At my return at school, I ran to her to better understand the situation. But she dodged me like Luffy after his two years of training with Rayleigh. Since this day we have not talked, she has not been online. The last day, Friday, after this hard week during which I realized that I have, not only an only friend, not a best friend. Yes, I realized that I was in love with her. It seemed like my first time on Doodle Jump when I set a new record in my country. I skip the step of player like I skip the "have a first friend" achievement of my life. So, Friday I was looking at her, and I finally found the only one that makes me different, who makes me better. For the first time I was talking first. If I could blush, I would surely blush. My voice was shaking. I was stuttering. But... I asked her personally, face to face and later in-game. She said to let her think about it.

We're back to today, Monday, she answered me. Since when... I didn't feel like a nice day? Was it yesterday? or no longer before? Since today, since she's my girlfriend, since I know that someone thinks about me, loves me, if I died someone would greatly remember me. That Day Is Changing My Life. Just right now I'm thinking that I am changing. My world has become becoming colored and joyful. I'm starting to open my mind, talking with people and taking my place as someone in this world. Since this morning people have flamed me less. Now my new life has started, obviously I will not stop games, anime etc. but, I'm someone new and I will be better for me and for her.

## EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

What lies beyond the senses ? What secrets have been hidden from you due to your physical limitations ?

James is a teenager that always thought that novels that portrays people getting sucked out in a novel or a video game were funny .

But as the saying goes : it's all funny and games until it happens to yourself .

### Chapter I PART I

I am James , I am seventeen and my life is kind of crazy . I have always been known as the town's odd nerdy boy , which I must admit I enjoy .

I certainly appreciate the peace of mind that this reputation has given me . My family and I moved out to Wales ( Salvia ) from Australia ( Melbourne ) five years ago . I didn't make a big deal about it because I was and still am a nice, obedient child. Accepting this new chapter of my life, and thus discovering a new climate, people, and community, was in my best interests.

However, it has not always been easy; making school friends is a challenging task for me.

Indeed, I find myself isolating and withdrawing from others due to my inability to have a dull conversation with other people my age. Furthermore, people are constantly giving me strange looks, which makes me feel self-conscious.

### Part II

january 10<sup>th</sup> 2021

Monday has arrived , I awoke at five o'clock in the morning. I was getting ready for school and proceeded with my morning routine, which includes showering, brushing my teeth, and, if I'm lucky, eating breakfast.

I rushed to my room and grabbed my backpack after finishing in the bathroom.

I thought it best to inform my mother that I was leaving .

« Mum , I am out » I yelled from the bottom of my lungs

« Alright , I'll see you later » she replied .

I'm running to the bus stop right now, hoping I didn't miss it. It arrived one minute later, which was a relief.

I got in after the bus driver opened the door and carried on with my day.

Mr O'connor , in third period math class, casually revealed that we would be receiving a new student from Russia, whose name was Isadora Kuznetsav.

She walked in and proceeded to introduce herself . Her beauty was so outstanding that I could not keep my gaze away from her .

### Part III

« Good day, everybody. I'm Isadora, and I'm from Russia. I'll be your classmate this year. I hope you look after me well. Thank you so much. » she stated, smiling.

When she was done, everybody began to applaud, including myself.

Anyway, she was left to choose a seat, but how unfortunate that she was only given one choice, which was the last desk next to me.

« Hello, my name is Isa, and it's great to meet you. » she said smiling and waving at me

« Yeah, hi my name is James, the pleasure is shared » I said nervously.

In all honesty, I just said that to be respectful and prevent awkwardness, but you know, things don't always go your way.

« Anyway, are you free later tonight to hang out with me? » She said excitedly as we were packing.

« okay » I said nodding slowly.

The conversation ended that way, though I must admit it was the first time that a girl spoke to me first.

### Part IV

Isadora was waiting for me at eight o'clock, I rushed up to her and she told me that we were going to her place.

As a result, she called her personal driver. We had an uncomfortable trip, but we made it to her place.

She turned to face me as soon as she walked in and said: « There will be just the two of us because no one else is around, but don't worry, I won't eat you up ». She said walking towards me;

« Well if that isn't the best way to scare me, I don't know what is ». I said, looking at her with a blank expression on my face.

Three loud noises were heard all of a sudden.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM ...

Isadora approached me in an unusual manner, so in order not to offend her and lighten the mood, I began to chuckle.

« Ha, ha What exactly are you doing right now? Are you attempting to frighten me? because it is working ». I smiled at her. But I was dying to run away from her.

### PART V

« Don't be afraid; simply give your hand to me and all will be perfectly fine ». She smiled brightly, like she has been doing this whole time.

I would have done it without hesitation if it hadn't been for her reddened eyes.

However, I was not attempting to kill myself by doing so.

«look , Isadora I am really sorry but my mother ... she demands me.I'm leaving now, but I'll see you at school tomorrow ».

« What are you talking about? I'm not finished with you yet; in fact, I haven't even started ». She said smirking.

« what poppycock ». I said raising my eyebrows to see her reaction .

She simply stared at me and proceeded to recite something in Russian, which did not amuse me in the slightest .

« Are you serious, Isadora? I've only just met you today ». I said looking at her still fearfull.

I was not determined to fight against her , at least not anymore . Therefore, as the big coward that i am , i gave up and surrendered.

## PART VI

« I thought that i was finally making a friend but it's alright. Those few hours we spent together were the most memorable hours of my life. Even though you're attempting to kill me, I hope you had as much fun as I did today , and , have no regrets ».

Her eyes were flickering, and she pulled a knife from nowhere in the blink of an eye.

It only took three seconds for me to realise I was doomed.

I realized there was no way out at that precise moment .

She raised the knife and then ... nothing happened at all.

I began to believe that I was mental and that I needed to be diagnosed, and kept wondering if everything was okay.

She concluded, much to my surprise, that it past time for her to explain everything to me.

## PART VII

It was about time for her to come clean .

« Now, now, now I am profoundly sorry for putting you in this odd and uncomfortable situation.I must warn you, this is not what you think it is, though I must praise you on your performance ».She stated not fazed at all .

«Wait, what the hell are you talking about ? » I asked feeling so desperate .

She had been messing with my emotions and my life this whole time?was this all just a joke to her ?

She was making a complete fool of herself if she thought I would have left her that easily.

I'm sorry, Isadora, but this isn't enough . I'd like to hear more about what happened today ». I said rushing her to give me answers .

To be honest, my thoughts were all over the place, but since I wasn't trying to start a fight, I kept my cool and waited for her to respond.

After five minutes, she eventually broke the ice and promised to tell me nothing but the truth.

I'm not trying to give anything away, but everything she said shocked me.

## PART VIII

« Well , I guess it's time ». She said smiling not fazed at all.

« Indeed ». I said smiling back at her .

« Okay, first and foremost, you are not in the home of a typical wealthy Russian girl. Indeed, we've been in ARTYC since the moment you walked into this building. It's a place where only special children are allowed to enter, similar to Hogwarts and Asgard, if you get what I mean.

« Come again ? Are you still fooling me ? » I asked with a serious expression .

«Well , don't interrupt me, and let me finish firsts . So... to put it in a nutshell , since your birth, the « Grands » have chosen you to do something that only you could do. We don't know how essential you are or what exactly you have to do, but your fate has already been determined.

It might happen right now or in twelve years, but you must always keep in mind that everything happens for a reason.

« Don't you think you are crossing the lines ? This is completely insane ». I said as I was trying to connect the dots and put everything together in order for it make sense .

«Ok, I suppose threatening you with a knife wasn't quite as nuts as what I just said. am I correct? » She said mockingly .

Maybe she was making a point, but I literally can not believe it.

« Okay, now that I've told you all, I believe it is time for us to part ways and call it a day. Good bye James ». She said while hugging me and waving at me .

She managed to get me out of the house without my knowledge, and my life was forever changed ever since then.

«Hi , I am James, and that was the day that changed my life».

## Race to Freedom

“Hi, I’m Ronin Lead, often referred as Silver Ron. I’m 17 and contend to become the Race Champion of my planet Karn. For those who didn’t know, Karn was a planet conquered by who we call the Decimators. All we know from the past history is they conquered our planet in year 5616, when my parents weren’t even born. The tribute was the following: half the population of the planet was reduced to slavery. And by the way, the other half were left poor – and the population is still even 200 years later, now, making them quite enslaved as well. My parents were luckily from the Free Side of Karn, where a big race will take place soon. Hope I’ll place first on it, or at least, qualify for the System League. They would be certainly proud their son, from a wasteland place, could represent those who were enslaved, and prejudiced by the whole System”.

Those very words are from an holo-article’s recording. Young Ron was interviewed right after placing second in the Remus planet race. He is for sure really talented. But his childhood was... so hard. His parents were underpaid engineers, and did not see their son as a future successful professional race module pilot. Ron had always wanted to become a pilot, since the age of 8, when he saw his inspiration: the now retired Pajama Luther, running his module at a never seen before speed – mach 144 to be accurate. He wondered how he could fly that fast, dodging every asteroid block with grace, outdistancing every other contenders, all the way to the first position, all this wearing those pajamas and drinking a few coffees. By watching him like this, we could imagine his mind:

**“I’ll be right there, in it”**

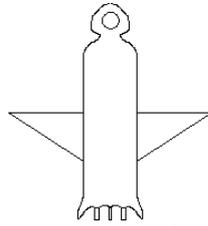
Once, after the TV live System League show, he went outside, looking for at least a good rusty module that would not be not out of order. After finding one, a fine looking one, a full silver retrofitted one, and yet abandoned because their old owner thought it was the end for that ambulant scrap metal. Once Ron was inside the engine, he tried to move it (or at least, make it operational, make it fly). And that was a huge mistake. The authorities radars caught a weird speeding pattern signal that was moving way too fast, like twice the speed limit in the main aircraft highway of Karn. When Ron’s parents learned that from the cops – who didn’t let him continue of course –, they went absolutely furious by the way. Ron never forgot how hard he got slapped, and that impacted his childhood.

Years passed, and he grew up. His school (by the way a rudimentary one, given how deep the war impacted this region), invited him into a pilot training club. We would expect from his parents they would have told him:

**NO**

But they’ve seen for once someone talented in Ron. How would he survive from his huge mistake that could cost his life? From 11 to 16 he passed a ton of exams, and he graduated as a licensed amateur young pilot. The masters remarked him for the huge amount of skills their cadet had, following his education. They had even seen him as big professional pilot. Were they wrong about that?

Like every contender, Ron had rivals. And the most obvious one was Jim, a pilot we didn't know where he came from, whose skills were his unique identity in the eyes of spectators. And this was the only information we had about him. He even had no sponsors, which was particularly strange, because the one Ron had was the leader racing gaming corporation Wingmen (yes, they do simulator racing simulations), that gave him a spacecraft like this one:



Three propelling engines on the back were more than enough to emphasize his thirst of speed. The ship Jim had was actually an unknown model. Was it regular though? The competition's operators checked it out, and it was clearly rule compliant, or, that is what people would answer us if we asked them for their testimonies...

The race on Karn was soon to begin. Silver Ron had all his confidence nourished by these 5 years of intensive formation, and the stronger strength of his parents, who unfortunately couldn't afford the ticket to watch him.

The Announcer shouted loud as usual, the traditional:

**“3, 2, 1, GO!”**

And everyone's racing ships motor heated into fast, furious and strategic madness. The leaderboard was wild, everyone were on the same level, the guy who was placed fifth went twenty-sixth within one second, and all that kind of mad stuff. The two only contenders that were distinguishing from all that mess, were Jim and Ron. They were all the way first, and fought for the first place. Ron's ambitions were well known: the pride of his parents, and introducing his name into history books, since none of the race winners from the League were under the age of 20, and also giving that money to an NGO that helped war victims –because solidarity was a well-known value from the Karnians, a proud people that was fighting against their discrimination and the fact they were slaves and lived in a wasteland. Jim's ambitions were a complete mystery. What would he win this race for?

—

From the Decimators headquarters, a new war against the System was in the plot. In fact, they sent General Jim, their most talented pilot and warlord, to compete on the League. They trapped the race on Remus and corrupted its organizers. They prepared a fleet of fifty cruisers to threaten the System and reduce them into dust and slavery. This time, it's not the HALF, it's the WHOLE System. The millions of people who went to spectate the race ignored that they placed a huge bomb, ready to blow up and to add another crime to the Decimators war crimes list.

—

Lap 50, Silver Ron and his ship made it to the top. They reached finish line first, a few seconds before Jim.

Jim was infuriated at this very moment.

### **And the bomb blew up!**

Killing all these poor innocents who came to see a show (296316 people deceased precisely).

And no one suspected anything from Jim yet... and he was the brain, the leader of this crime.

Ron have escaped the explosion just in time. If it was of an inch shorter from the explosion's radius, we all would know what would have happened to this poor innocent child.

Jim, from his side, used a phase shift engine that was included on his small unarmed fighter. So he

survived the explosion with ease, by phasing through another dimension.

Ron's family lived near the track's lap checkpoint, less than one mile away. They were now gone. And in addition to the fact that he would turn 18 a week after, he could not imagine how it would feel to be an orphan for this short period.

The fifty war cruisers of the Decimators went up on the System from hyperspace warping. A war was declared again against a Republic that had not been through a war since 5616. They went so fast that people from other planets were also clueless, and was so the government. People fled by themselves, and that was Ron's case.

Ron had kist a signal from his ship's sensors. It was a fully armed up military starbase. He asked them permission to land and supply, and explained the situation of his whole nation to them. An old man, and not a random one, the All-General of the Dystopia Starbase, gave Ron a spacecraft:

"But I'm not supposed to fly as a fighter, and I can't go backwards, because I lost everything!", said Ron

"You told me you were turning turn 18 tomorrow, and I'll give you exceptionally the grade of Lieutenant, to supervise an attack in order to help the System Republic. It's time to avenge your parents' death", answered the All-General.

"But I'm not seeking vengeance, I want to find who I am."

"Life is cruel and is meant to be, you know. And if you were about to become an idol for Kernians, why not become a hero for us all? I know it won't give you your parents back, nor your peaceful childhood, but the real rush, the real madness of speed you always wanted, it all lies into your new fighter, the best ever I made myself, the fastest, the strongest, that will take out the whole fleet. You will start tomorrow, and **that day will change your life, that day will change everyone's life**, and as a racer, the **RACE OF FREEDOM** will begin for you. And if you're in, we will be in too."

This small craft held a small artifact, that could produce infinite energy, and a ton of the strongest weapons ever made that could decimate that fifty fleet of those dumb Decimators the time for a race, with its speed of 180 mach, coupled with hyperspace warps. Those very words made Ron speechless. They were, like, from the future. He thought first that telling his whole story and situation to this man was his worst mistake, but, that's the last sentence he said before going to his new commandment post:

**"Yes, and for my Parents. Let's save my people from them, for my Parents, and let's rush, for my Parents"**

**The ~~END~~ BEGINNING\***



# THE DAY IT RAINED



# Chapter 1: the sun was going down

Everything started after the first night of holidays – I had invited Amy to come to my place to let the stress of the school-year finally go.

“*The Notebook!*” I said full of enthusiasm.

“What? Again?” Amy responded, desperately. “Why are you doing this to me, Lilly? We know she’ll end up dead, after forgetting every single memory she had with him. Plus, that’s a silly movie for teenage girls.”

“Exactly, and that’s the point, Darling. We know what is going to happen, so we can anticipate to be ready when she’ll die.”

After a few minutes of dead silence – a moment Amy needed to sigh with despair because of the control freak I am - I suggested that we could start eating instead of watching this movie for the hundredth time.

“Well, let’s have some ice-cream... Bagsy for the chocolate Haagen-Dazs I saw earlier in your fridge!”

“Oh! suddenly you smile again, thank you *Mattus*<sup>1</sup> for giving my dear friend such a...” before I could finish my sentence, I received a pillow right in my face. “Okay, I’ll grab some vanilla ice-cream for myself, then.”

As we were eating and laughing, I started asking questions about next year. Were we going to lose sight of each other, if more than eighty miles were breaking us apart? Was our friendship going to end by “Once upon a time I had a friend named Amy, but it’s been a while since I have not heard from her, I hope everything’s fine for her”?

“Elisabeth Mary Watson, listen to me very carefully because I am not gonna say it again.” She started, very seriously. “Distance will not be a problem for us, and I will never forget you for the very simple reason that we are not going to lose each other. I demand you to believe in this, okay?”

With tears in my eyes, I answered: “I promise I will never stop having faith in us. Thank you, Amy.”

“Good. Now, let’s talk about our deal; we had to keep the degrees we applied for secret, until...”

“...until our last summer before entering University. Yes, I know – that was my idea, remember?” I said, impatiently. “what are yours?”

“Well, you know I’ve always wanted to be a science-engineer, and Brown is very much known for its scientific department. So...it seemed just obvious that I would apply for sciences – I also opted for a degree in economics, though. What about you?”

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<sup>1</sup> \* Mattus : Family name of the brothers who funded Haagen-Dazs

“English literature as a major Degree – you should’ve expected that, I know – in addition to history and Economics. Yale is quite excellent for everything, you know.” “Why do you look so surprised? you know me, my choices were not unpredictable, were they?” I asked, in face of her facial expression.

“Yeah, one year ago I wouldn’t have been shocked at all, but Lilly...you are talking about working with big brands like Chanel and Burberry all the time, I thought you would take economic sciences as major”

“Honestly, I’ve been dealing with this choice for a long time... but the plan was that I would study deep literature for three years, go to the phd diploma and then find my soulmate at 27 to have at least one kid by 32. And the fact is that, if I do choose that luxury sector, I will have to study for only five years – so, I’ll be on the job market at 23 and will start looking for Love sooner. It changes everything, and I am definitely not ready for this” As Amy was still eating her ice-cream, I continued: “Besides, Emma Watson studied English literature and look at her now! Argh I wanna be her so much!”

“Yeah, sure” started my friend with her mouth full of chocolate. “But you are you, do not forget this”

“I know! I just can’t let everything I planned be forgotten because I discovered a pseudo interest for luxury brands. My parents are counting on me - they have worked too hard, and as a fellow I cannot fail it. What if I don’t like working for Chanel and Louis Vuitton? Books and literature are safe, this is security. And as I said, I am...”

“...not ready because you didn’t expect you could possibly change your mind – I know.” Some seconds of silence later, she continued: “The USA is not ready for two British women like us, I am telling you. Let’s watch that movie” she suggested, with a friendly laugh.

“Well, well... you said it was a silly story for teenage girls, didn’t you?” I replied, with a hint of irony.

“But we are teenage girls, Lilly. At least for some weeks more” – the smile she had when she said that was too much for me.

“You...I...you are going to kill me some day, are you aware of that?” I asked – with a bit of sarcasm – by putting the movie on.

“I know, but that’s why you love me.” she answered, with her eternal wink. “Hey, by the way what about William? Are you still...”

“Shh! It’s starting”

We spent the rest of the night watching *Titanic* again – after *The Notebook*, before we fell asleep. That was one of the best nights of my life; that was before it started raining. When the sun rose at the break of day, a good summer was expected; neither of us heard the storm coming.

## Chapter 2: when the rain came

I woke up the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2018 at 6 am, and started cooking breakfast for Amy and me. We could have the house for ourselves, since my parents had decided to go for a week on holidays – just the two of them. It had been so long since they had not been together, as lovers. Besides, I saw in their trip an opportunity to finally be alone. It could have been the time for me to take the habits I will soon have, as an adult – it should have been like that. But an hour after I have woken up that very day, I heard my phone ringing; I was not able to respond, because I was under the shower – Amy said she was taking it. A few seconds later, I yelled: “Who was it?”, but no answer. I thought that wasn’t important. When I entered the living room a few minutes later, I saw Amy crying; she was awaiting me.

“Oh my God Darling, what’s happening? Who was it?” I asked, worrying about my friend.

“Lilly, your mother called...and...” I did not understand why she was in that state, what was going on? “your father passed away”

That was the beginning of the end for me. Suddenly, I stopped moving, I stopped breathing and I went next to her, on the sofa.

“What did you just say?” I asked her, to be sure I understood well.

“Your mom told me she is at the hospital, and...”

“Is my dad dead?” My head started burning. In a few seconds, every piece of memory I had with him came back into my mind. I only wanted one thing: be alone and cry. But I had to be strong, I could not let it go now – not yet, my mom needed me. Thus, I decided to turn my feelings off for a moment and wait for my mother at home. I asked Amy to stay with me, so I would not have to undergo a fight against loneliness; If I stayed alone that day, everything would have been different.

When mummy came back, the first thing I noticed was into her eyes: there was no more light inside them. She had cried a lot. Then, I saw her clothes; she was wearing the nude dress that Daddy gave her for her 47<sup>th</sup> birthday – the dress she always puts on, when they go to the restaurant. I understood that they planned to spend a very good day, together. But the dress was completely wet because of the rain, and her chocolate-browned hair was up in a bun – which means she was completely ready to go out with him, when he left.

I stood up, and went to embrace her. When I took her in my arms, she could not bear it anymore and I felt every piece of pain going out of her self – I knew I had to stay strong to stand by her side. As a matter of fact, I lost my father in the morning of that day; but my mother had to go through the death of the love of her life.

Mum said to Amy she could stay if her parents agreed, and I still didn’t want to be alone so, she spent a few nights with me. She tried to say the right words, but there was nothing to stop the inner pain. Silence started to become deafening, our house was completely dead until the funeral. I don’t remember if that happened a week after daddy had gone or before, but pretending no to be in pain in front of others was one of the easiest things I had to go through in my whole life. Facing other is a way less difficult than facing ourselves, right? That was not the trial of this day. The fight I had with my mother was.

When my 28-year-old brother came for our father’s burial, he seemed detached from his old self – of course I thought he was, I hadn’t seen him for five entire years, even if he lived an hour away. I still don’t know if he appeared to be changed because he had mentally grown up, or if I felt like he was a stranger because I had no chance to know him properly when we

were young. Anyways, the night of my father's symbolic departure, my mother came to me, she wanted to talk.

"Sweetie, can we have a little conversation?" she asked, calmly.

"Sure, what's wrong?"

"Are you okay, Darling?" she started. In face of the absence of any response from me, she added: "It could seem a very weird question, but I haven't seen you cry since your father..."

"It's because I haven't." I answered, with a hint of anger in my voice.

"you haven't cried? At all? Isn't your heart affected by what happened to your father? Aren't you a bit..."? I stopped listening when she started to take her voice full of blames, but it felt like I had to respond when she had finished.

So, after a few seconds, I said with lots of irritation: "Are you done, telling me not to be strong? Someone has to be, and honestly mother no one could count on you for this"

"Do you really believe that you are acting with strength? Running away from what you really feel has always been your biggest problem, Elisabeth. Stop trying to behave like an adult, you're not. You are still a child, incapable of dealing with yourself" these words were like a dagger to me; instantaneously, every cell of pain my mind had endured since my father's death was transformed into rage.

"Oh, because you are so great an example of adulthood and self-acceptance! Have you ever wondered why I always run away from what hurts me? It's because you never let me be wrong on something. I just have to be perfect all the time, since you don't want to be ashamed, if I try something without succeeding in it. At least daddy loved me for who I was, not for the person I appeared to be." I remember the temper getting out of me through every of these words I said with tears of pure anger. I expressed them looking eyeball to eyeball to my mother; I was not realising the pain I was adding to her state at that time.

After a moment of a dreadful silence, she uttered those very words: "you should go to Cambridge with your brother. I don't have enough strength to deal with you currently, and I don't want to anymore."

"I would be glad to. Thank you for this motherly talk; it helped a lot, mummy" I responded sarcastically.

James agreed to bring me with him, and I really thought that a bit of fresh air, far from the memories I had with dad in London, could make me feel better. I sent a hand-written letter to Amy to explain that I needed to go away for a while to stop thinking about all of this. Besides, I thought it could be the moment to finally meet my brother; I had always wanted to discover who he really was, in order to have a proper relationship with him – one that siblings are supposed to share.

The first night I spent at his apartment, I had to sleep on the couch – but I could not, because I was feeling too guilty about what I said to mummy earlier. She was the only parent I had, and I pushed her away because she was trying to help me. Thus, I went in the kitchen to heat some milk. Maybe it could help, I thought. However, instead of finding a pan, I discovered some pictures in a drawer next to the gas cooker. That was a dozen of pictures of me, when I was young.

Firstly, I saw my younger self at the beach, on daddy's shoulders. James was just next to him, holding his hand; mom should certainly have taken it. Then, five or six pictures of James

and I – on the bed, playing games, and there was even one of them in which I seem to yell at him because he has the remote control. I sat on the floor to admire those pieces of art one by one, for what I assume to be more than an hour. I lost the notion of time, and when I realised where I was, James was standing right behind me.

“You know it’s 2 am, right?” he asked, with a hint of irony.

“Absolutely not.” It is only when I answered that I perceived my feelings – by the sound of my voice: it was husky, full of nostalgia. He sat on the floor next to me.

“What are you doing in the kitchen at 2 in the morning?”

“Basically, I wanted to heat some milk but I couldn’t find any pan, and when I opened the…” I could not even finish my sentence before I started crying. Seeing those picture of us with daddy was too much, I could not fight against it anymore. Some minutes later, I found myself in his arms; when I wanted to stand back up, he held me with him – I never knew if he did that to reassure me or for himself but it felt good, in fact. “Do you love me, James?” I asked, after a few minutes.

“Of course I love you, my little cream-puff…” – he used to call me that way when I was five. It felt so long ago that I had even forgotten that nickname. “...more than anyone could know. I know you think you are not doing enough, and I guess you’re right. You have always wanted to satisfy everyone but you; well, you can’t. I know you more than you think. Stop trying to be perfect – no one is, for the simple reason that we are all humans and *errare humanum est*, remember? I love you the way you are, and I am proud of the woman you are becoming, but you have to stop planning everything you do, that’s not what life is about. Sometimes, you have to deal with unpredictable trials, and in those moments, you understand that if you want to say something, stop wondering or waiting for the perfect time and just do it.”

That little speech made me cry even more, and I hold him tighter than before. He was saying out loud what everyone was trying to explain to me for so long...

## Chapter 3: the sky is getting cloudy

After some weeks in Cambridge – during which I could understand who James really was, I decided to go for a walk, alone. I really appreciated everything we did, like going to the movies and eating ice cream in front of the Marvel classics, but it felt like I needed some time for myself. I guess I was on the way to acceptance about dad, but there was still something wrong inside me – and I had to find what it was, so I decided to go to River Cam, in order to think.

This very day, I was walking and I lost myself into unencryptable thoughts, when I met a familiar face. It was him, following the river all its way.

“Elisabeth?” he recognised me for sure.

“Hey, William! How are you?” I said, trying to pretend I was fine again.

“I’m well, what about you? I heard for your father...I know by experience that telling to someone our condolences may be more irritable than helpful, but I want you to know that I am here for you.” He said, sincerely.

“Thank you...I...hum...wha...what are you doing in Cambridge, by the way? You were supposed to study at Oxford, weren’t you?” I tried to ask, in spite of my cotton legs.

“Yeah, I was but I decided to make my second year here; the colleges here have a better reputation concerning international trade, so I found it wiser to ask for a transfer.”

“As a matter of fact, it is! I’m truly happy for you.” I uttered. I really was, he had worked so hard to reach this.

“Hey, do you have some time to drink some tea? It will not take long, and I...” he started

Before he could end his sentence, I replied: “Sure, let’s go”

Once we reached the coffeeshop and before I could touch the Menu, he asked me again: “Now, tell me the truth. How are you, Elisabeth?”

Hearing him pronouncing my name, looking at me eyeball to eyeball with his brown-brighten eyes could do nothing to me but let my guard down. I could not just pretend with him – he never let me, even if he was not aware of the effect he had on my self.

I lowered my head, and then answered: “Honestly William, how could I be fine? I lost my dad four weeks ago, had a fight with my mother and started realising that everything I planned for the next ten years is based on a lie that I am doing to myself. The only positive thing that happened lately is my relationship with James, and this is what’s keeping me alive.”

That was the first time I ever said those things out loud – I did not even know I was thinking of that before it went out of my mouth.

Some seconds of silence later, the waitress came to take our order. Not being able to answer properly, Will responded for me: “two Romantic Garden, please”

The Romantic Garden was some green tea with peach, pineapple and lemon myrtle – when we met three years ago, the two of us were the only ones in a party full of people who took it – everyone else opted for whether fruit juices or alcoholic drinks. I remember his stepfather

invited Amy, his niece, for his birthday, and she insisted for a week with me so I came to this event with her. If she had not, I would never have met William.

“You remember?” I asked, surprised. How could he remember this? It was so long ago...

“How could I not? This Romantic Garden was the reason why I talked to you at first – I could never forget it.” I did absolutely not know what to answer to this, so I stayed completely quiet, we just stared at each other – without any shame nor embarrassment – until the waitress came back with our teas.

Our eyes were talking for us, it was easier this way. I had no idea what link I had with him, but William always had the gift to know me better than I know myself.

The very day of that party we met, he came to me because I was alone, awaiting Amy who went to the bathroom. “Feeling lonely?” he asked, thinking those words were the first thing he announced to me. “Not at all” I responded at that time. “That’s too bad”, he replied; “we could have shared our loneliness together. With some tea; apparently you and I are both crazy enough to drink some hot tea in a sunny day like this”

“Why are you doing this to me, William?” I finally asked, in that coffeeshop after the waitress.

“I enjoy spending time with you, you are perfectly aware of that, Lilly.” Lilly. He called me Lilly. “What’s wrong with me, if I want to share some loneliness with you?”

“I...this is not my point. Why do you want to be there for me?”

“How could you...” he stopped in the middle of his sentence, when he felt that I had not enough strength - nor enough joy - in me to play this game with him. “You were here for me when I pushed every one away, after my mother died. You stood by me through the toughest trial I ever underwent. You knew the exact words I needed to hear. You helped me by not doing anything more than just... be here. I need to know, Lilly; why? We weren’t friends, and you always believed in me. Why?”

This was the second time in my life that I had a panic attack. I started to exhale louder and louder, without letting any oxygen entering my system. I had never been able to keep my self-control with him around, and he knew it.

“I am sorry...I need to get out of here” I said, despite the trouble I had to breath.

I succeeded to leave that coffeeshop, but fortunately or not, William was right behind me. He could catch me and he caught my arm, in the little road near the place we were two minutes before.

“Lilly?” he asked, his entire body at a few centimeters of mine.

Once I could finally regain control of myself, I explained – because *sometimes, you just have to say it* “I suppose you remember the party we met? You always thought that your expression about loneliness was your first step to me, right? Well, it wasn’t.” He didn’t seem to get my point. “The second I saw you, your eye told me how broken you were – when I first looked deep down into them, I saw something I could not explain, and this is the moment I fell head over heels for you. This is why I have never lost faith in you, and this is why I will always believe in you.” I finally said it, it came out of nowhere and in a few seconds, my inner self was feeling completely free. “For the last three years, I haven’t spent a day without thinking of you, William. I am in love with you, that’s why I’ll always be there for you.”

After I broke free of this I left, to go back to James’. I explained to my brother that I felt better – without mentioning the reason of my relief. He decided to watch the last Avengers with me before I go, and the day after I took the train to go back to London.

## Chapter 4: When the sun reappears

I ended up in the train that had brought me here, a few weeks ago. After laying back on my seat, I put on some music – my playlist started with *Young and Beautiful*, by Lana del Rey so I let it play when my memories were embracing myself. The last conversation I had with daddy, the first fight I had with mom in a while, the hug I shared with James and all the nights I spent with Amy...every laughter, every tear, every pain, every joy. I was overwhelmed by everything we need to feel alive: I needed my emotions to breathe again, to face my grief. Of course, the picture staying in my head all the way through home was his face. A month ago, I would have never thought that I was capable to reveal that I loved him – I was not even sure myself, until he looked at me in that coffeeshop the day before...

Still surrounded by my memories, a stranger had to announce me that we had arrived – that was King's Cross, I just had to walk a few more minutes to come home and hug mummy.

When I pushed the door of my living room, I remember my surprise, since Amy and mummy were here, ready for me to come. I had not told anyone that I was coming back, so how could they expect me home? Then, I realised that someone else was here – William's step-father. I learnt some times later that he had been called by his stepson, who understood I was going back to London. Mister Egerton should thus have called his niece, who told my mum – I thought when I knew who was on the basis of all this.

Mother directly ran into me to squeeze her daughter affectionately and, after we apologised to each other for the words we said, everyone ate some apple pie – Amy had baked it. Then, I asked everybody to go home. I wanted to spend some time with my mom, and we saw tapes of our family when the days were sunnier than ever – I was five years old. Everything is so simple when we are kids...I couldn't understand it until now. Some days later, Amy and I spent some time together – we went to shop, that was our thing.

"Do you want to tell me anything about William, Darling?" she started. I knew she was dying of news about it, so I spilled the beans. I told her everything – how I opened my heart to him, that Friday. How I went before hearing he wasn't feeling the same way for me, how I realised that I was deeply in love with him. "how did you?" she asked.

"Well, I was looking into his eyes, and I couldn't put any word on what I felt – I still can't. And, suddenly I had a quote from *Jane Eyre* coming in my mind from nowhere; *If I loved him less, I might be able to talk about it more*. That was it, Amy; I couldn't put words on what I was feeling, because nothing can describe that much of..."

"...love.", she finished. "I am so proud of you, Elisabeth. You will finally be able to live what Brontë and Austen wrote, when you'll study them in a few days."

"Yeah, about that..." I began. "...I sent a mail to the Dean to know if there was any chance to take Economics as a major Degree, to continue in the luxury sector."

"No way! That's so nice, Lilly!" she yelled with lots of surprise and enthusiasm.

"Amy, people will..."

"...I don't care if they hear me, I am too proud to contain myself. Come here!" she said, hugging me. "But how did you..."

"Let's say that James taught me some stuff about life, and I guess sometimes we have to take a chance... Daddy's death forced me to face the rain; I can't always walk with an umbrella, sometimes I just have to accept to be wet, to move on and reach sunlight again."

Some times after my life regained some sense and stability, I had to go to Yale. A new start was yet to come and I was finally ready to live fully, entirely. The day the plane arrived it rained, and I decided to dance under it. I was soaking wet before entering my room, but I didn't care, because no one could plan weather – and that day, I just had to deal with it.

When I arrived into my chamber, I was ready for everything but that.

“Good evening, Elisabeth.” he said, with a croaky voice.

“William.” I replied, very much surprised. “What are you doing here? How did you know that...”

“Amy told her uncle, who gave me a call. He thought I should have a chance to give you a respond for...” he started. At this precise moment, I had just one thought: I wanted to kill Amy for telling everything to mister Egerton. Why did she have to say that I was going to Yale?

“...for telling me you don't feel the same way?” Again, those words came out of my head without my own consent. I needed a seat, but I couldn't move, so I continued: “William, believe me I have imagined the scene I tell you about my feelings hundreds of times, and in every possible thought I had about this, you told me you loved me back. But let's be realistic, how could it be possible for you to fall for someone like me?” after a deep breath, I started again: “Please, don't inflict me to hear it from your voice, I am not strong enough when you are near me.”

“Elisabeth, you are the most powerful woman I know. This lack of self-confidence has to stop, I...”

“You cannot tell me what to do, nor how to behave, Will. Please answer me, what are you doing here?” I asked again.

“I came to you with an explanation.” In face of my misunderstanding, he developed his point: “In Cambridge two weeks ago, you asked me why I wanted to be here for you and you disappeared without letting me finish. I wished I could do for you just the half of what you did for me, Lilly. You said I looked dead inside, well I was, actually. And I was totally impossible with everyone around me – but you stayed anyways. You were my light, Elisabeth. You'll always be.”

What did he mean? How dared him come out of nowhere, to express those misunderstandable words, to me ? What was he even saying, for the sake of God?

“What do you...” I started asking.

“I love you, Lilly. I love you so much it hurts me, deep down in my soul. Let me be the only one for you, please.”

I did not feel anything in my entire body anymore, when I heard these words. My soul was flying in the air, and I lost the notion of time and space – everything at the same time.

“Come with me, William” I could finally say, after what appeared to be the longest seconds of my life.

I took his hand, and had to fight against the sensation I felt when his skin was touching mine. I brought him near the open roof – where it was still raining, and asked him if he was ready to face every other trial that life had planned for us. “If I give my heart to you today, you could never give it back to me, I am warning you.”

“I will always be there for you, Lilly; I won't let you go, I promise.”

And he never did. He has been my lover - and my husband, for the last twenty years and I am writing all of this to look into my memories. I don't want to forget anything I ever lived; I want to feel every everything again – from the first piece of joy to the last drop of pain, to remember every single event that made me become the person I am.