

The Grenoble antiquarian

Manuel Julián



MJW
WRITINGS

It's not always easy to leave everything behind and start over.

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With love for Renato Dávalos, his sister Valentina
and Max, who always barks when he sees me.

Synopsis

Adrien Lefebvre had inherited the business from his ancestors: Behemot, an antique store in the cold city of Grenoble.

As a young man he had a doctorate in Art History and was passionate about photography. His main goal was to work as a curator at the Louvre, but his application had already been rejected half a dozen times.

One morning he was visited by a madman who almost destroyed his establishment, and from that moment on Adrien thought about a profound change in his life. So, he puts his old family business up for sale and decides to move to Brooklyn. However, things do not always go as he would have liked them to.

Kissed photos

Grenoble, France, November 2018

I couldn't say what it was due to, perhaps the strong smell of the metal polish, the fabric of the tapestries, the little light that filtered in from the street or the mystery surrounding the objects that had belonged to other people. An antique store led him on tiptoes to the threshold of a mysterious world of strange figures and distant and suggestive environments. Adrien Lefebvre, like the iron shavings to a magnet, he always let himself be attracted to those kinds of objects; they awakened in him a hypnotic interest in touching and smelling them, the smell evoking in him everything else.

They were not old things, they were antiques and each one he discovered, brought with it a new story: Who was its owner? What was the environment of its moment in time? Did the owner have to get rid of it or did he leave it behind due to a war, a let-down in love, an eviction, or a bet?

He got good grades in the National Superior School of Fine Arts, worked several seasons in the Museum of Fine Arts and Antiques of Grenoble and in the Saint-Laurent Archaeological Museum. Later on, he gave some classes in an academy for young people that could not pay the university fees and tried without success to apply for the post of curator for the Louvre, the most visited museum in the world. A true madness! He always had the feeling that he had aimed too high and that was why he had crashed in the attempt, so he continued with the family business: *Behemot*, the old antique store. That week, along with all his correspondence, he had received the sixth communiqué from Paris:

"Dear Mr. Lefebvre ..., blah, blah, blah ..., we are pleased to attend your persistent attempts to procure the post of curator, but we regret to inform you ..., blah, blah ..., that at this time it is not necessary ..., blah, blah ..., we take this opportunity to send you a cordial greeting ..., blah, blah ..."

When he was young, he visited one of these Brocanteur establishments in the 5th District, the oldest district of Paris. Its owner claimed to possess objects recovered from the Titanic, personal effects of its passengers, like in the movie of the late nineties. Of course, it was not true, but his "circus" maintained the climax of the illusion. He had never liked circuses, but he had to admit that he was immediately seduced by the play of lights.

From the ceiling hung some copper heaters for beds, oil lamps or porcelain puppets, old suitcases that had travelled halfway around the world, books on a little table presided over by a lamp with a green tulip and a glass vase engraved with the image of some nymphs. On the shelves there were all kinds of elements that no one would use today, except for decorative souvenirs which had once been considered luxury items. He held in his hands a super 8 camera that still kept an undeveloped Kodak film inside, wondering who its anonymous characters would be. He couldn't help but look through the lens and feel how his imagination produced a kind of leap in time, a regression that would lead him to think about everything that lens would have captured, undaunted moments that survived the passage of time. Perhaps a lonely woman on the beach, with a fine silk scarf tossed in the evening air, or a child playing with his hoop between the fountains of a park where doves fluttered about, or maybe it could be the images of a safari in which the hunter observed a herd of myopic rhinos from a distance... who knows? Most of those things were absurd and unnecessary, at least in a practical sense, but on the surface, art was never something practical, like a bucket and a mop, but rather something beautiful that could make our lives more pleasant and suggestive.

Halfway down Rue Blériot was *Behemot*, a dusty, worn-out antique store with a bronze hippopotamus floating among exotic reeds and papyrus. Adrien had inherited the family business, which had been passed down to him (the third generation) from his grandfather Edmond. In a city like Grenoble, more than two thousand years old, such a business could blend in perfectly with the scenery, a frieze of hundred-year-old houses freshened up by the breeze from the Alpine peaks. On the same street there was an establishment almost as old as his, the Dauphiné glove store, run by Madame Jeannette, a shy widow, about the same age, very refined and feminine and

who had never had children. In fact, she was only married for a couple of years before her husband died in a tragic car accident.

A short distance from the city centre and almost five hundred meters high was *Le Bastille*, a defensive fortress that now only defended itself from tourists and its usual waste and abandoned wrappings.

Lately *Behemot* did not have so many customers, most of whom preferred to buy online. It seemed that if someone didn't have a website or offer their products on social networks they no longer existed. Adrien no longer used a pencil or the accounting books or the old cash register, but he resisted modernism, because despite its advantages he considered it overrated.

At breakfast time, like every morning, Adrien would sit down and look at old photographs. He would keep a hidden box under the counter, a brass box which had a label on it, like an index box, where one could read: "**KISSED PHOTOS**"; photographs that had been kissed by someone at some time for some reason.

The secret of those photographs were the feelings that they roused in him, images about goodbyes and reuniting's, hugs, and disappointments. He felt the same way when Beth, the only woman in his life, went away. The others were like the decorations in his store, old memories, or antiques. Beth was his center of gravity, the reason to get up early, the incentive to find satisfaction in everything he did, even if his customers had fled to the online sales platforms. But now without her, everything was meaningless. One morning, Beth emptied her bank account, packed her bags and got on a bus to Toulouse. The note she placed on the fridge simply said: "Au revoir chérie!", signed with her own lipstick. She left without looking back with, like the delusion of a teenager to meet her fitness teacher,

a muscular and arrogant gym rat with whom she had had, let us say, a "close" relationship for some time.

Adrien tried not to let all that affect him, like every morning when he opened his box of photographs during his little breakfast break. He slipped it for a moment from his hiding place onto the counter and then the doorbell rang.

"A customer? How awkward!" —He thought.

An annoying and curious man with a rough-looking appearance, who didn't know what he wanted and probably didn't even have an approximate idea of what he was looking for in an establishment like *Behemot*, came through the door. The tourist, who was carrying a sports bag with a shoulder strap, started touching everything and making Adrien nervous.

"Can I help you?" "Adrien asked."

"*Ce n'est pas nécessaire, Monsieur.*" (It's not necessary, sir)

It seemed as if he wanted to snoop around by himself without being disturbed. He turned around in the narrow aisle and hit a delicate porcelain figure with his Puma bag, which he immediately decapitated. While making sure he was not seen he tried to put the head back into place, but now it didn't fit and then left it in a plausible shape that seemed to hold still which in reality now looked more like The Exorcist child's head. He accidentally stepped on some ten-centimetre lead soldiers, "surely they wouldn't break", he thought. The price had been lowered. He then chose one in a striking uniform.

"Combien ça coute?" (How much does it cost?)

“Forty euros, sir, plus the figure you broke, totals to 525 euros.”

The client, a mentally disturbed man, was furious and punched him in the face, then threw the tin soldier at him. As Adrien crouched under the counter, thousands of shards of bohemian glass, bone china and other valuables were shattered over his breakfast; the customer armed with a golf club, a long driver with a wooden head and rubber grip, hit everything in his path. Finally, he threw the club as far as it would go before, he disappeared.

Adrien emerged to contemplate the disaster. He stared at the effects of that tsunami and was overcome by deep sadness and a bloody nose. He had spent his whole life there, among those objects. He did not travel; he didn't have many aspirations or future expectations. Just *Behemot*, Grandpa's business.

One thing was clear, the old bag of golf clubs should never have been placed by the door. He did not want to touch anything and then left the store ringing the chimes above the door. Jeannette watched him from the storeroom of her establishment. If she had swallowed her shyness, she would have gone out to meet him and hugged him. She wondered what the taste of his kisses would be like, the softness of his hair, the touch of his hands on her skin. Adrien was there, at the door, looking into space. It seemed as if in any moment he would collapse. Jeannette did not have the courage to cross the street and go out to meet him. She was biting her lower lip in anger at her lack of initiative when Adrien finally put his hands in his pockets and started walking away.

Cold Coffee

Adrien pedalled his bike to Léon Blum Avenue, 21. The National Gendarmerie was a modern, highly glazed, four-story building with large green areas and parking. It was not difficult to find a place to hold the bike and after a brief declaration of intent to the policeman on duty, he went up to the second floor.

Commissioner Legrand tried to reconstruct the facts:

"So, he didn't take anything?" Was it just a scare?

Adrien pointed his index finger at his face: "Do you think this is just the consequence of a scare?"

"I understand, I understand ... let's not lose our cool."

"I want to establish the relationship," he continued, "if there was premeditation or it was an isolated and incidental event." Did you know the subject?

"I already told you that I had never seen him in my life, he was a man who just looked like a tourist."

"And why did he attack you?"

"Why don't you ask him when you find him?" "Write this down! Unjustified assault," he told the municipal policeman who was pounding on the computer keys: "Material and physical damage."

"I'll need a medical report." Description of the subject..., could you tell us what he looked like?

After almost two gruelling hours of regressions and questions that always revolved around the same story, Adrien left the Gendarmerie much dizzier than he had arrived. The assailant had no record, he was simply a citizen having a bad day. He had broken into Adrien's shop like an elephant in a china shop, but he had not taken anything or verbally threatened him. He could have pressed charges, but the commissioner already told him that the insurance company would hardly be responsible for the damages because the establishment did not have any security device: alarms, cameras or sensors that could dissuade someone from doing something like that.

Adrien, despite being the victim, could not help but feel guilty. He pedalled again to a cafeteria while the gray cold of midday tweaked his face. Less than a hundred meters from there, the bicycle stopped abruptly and Adrien fell to the ground. After nearly half an hour of unsuccessfully trying to get the chain back into place, his knees were now aching, and his hands were full of gear grease.

Le Table Ronde Café (The Round Table Café), on Saint-André Place number seven, was the second oldest café in France and its owner was a good customer and friend. Adrien literally collapsed into one of its armchairs inside.

It was not what had happened, it was more that he was tired, but despite everything he had pedalled on that heavy, late forties bicycle...his fatigue was not just physical. He was in a deep, suffocating boredom in which the routine of each day was crushing him. He didn't have much to feel better about, he didn't have a wife waiting for him, no children, no parents, not even a lovingly dog wagging its tail; just an old shop, with a lot of dust and few customers. He had already seen almost all the crime intrigue movies, his favourite ones on Netflix, and read "The Third Man" by Graham Greene several times. Today, however, he did not feel strong enough to return to the point of the book.

It was not because of the incident that broke his nose, it was because of everything else, something more intimate. He had been waiting all his life for something, perhaps something that would change the course of his existence, something more than a tin box full of old photographs and the same old movies. His breakfast had been left on the counter, muffins drizzled with chocolate powder by Adélaïde Cookies and now which were full of glass.

"What happened to your nose?" Guiraud, the owner of the cafeteria, asked.

"Someone broke into my shop."

"And did they take anything?"

"Yes, my pride and self-esteem."

"Don't be so melodramatic, Adrien." The insurance will take care of everything.

"Not everything. It is possible that I will never recover some things, I still have the guarantee of each object, but it is not about that."

"So, what is it about?" Guiraud asked as he prepared the coffee the way his friend liked it.

"It's about me being tired." It is not a physical thing. I am emotionally drained.

Guiraud brought two glasses and a bottle of Frapin that he kept for special occasions, and then sat next to him. The cognac retained that fine aroma of floral notes and an intense flavour of roasted vanilla. The alcohol tingled Adrien's aching nose until it stung, but the second swallow passed more quickly.

"Why don't you take a vacation?" You could go to an exotic place with white sand and girls in bikinis, Guiraud suggested with some vehemence.

"Bikinis?" I think this would not be cured with bikinis. I'm sick of everything, I don't know if you truly understand me. Adrien answered pointing to his bicycle. "I'm at a point where I don't know what I'm going to do with my life ...

"I hope you won't do anything stupid." ...What we do with our life is live it. Guiraud refilled his glass as the coffee cooled on the bar. Why don't you buy a new bike and leave this old one in the museum?

Adrien looked at him sadly. "Don't you sometimes feel like you've wasted enough time and that life has passed you by without you even realizing it?

Guiraud did not know what to say to him: "Welcome to the club!" *mon ami* (my friend). Well, I have always been, here... I would not know how to do anything else.

Adrien got up when the bottle was almost empty and someone wobbly addressed Guiraud: "Tell me what do I owe you?"

Guiraud stood up, knocking his chair to the ground at the impetus of his gesture. "You don't owe me anything, old friend." Today it is on the house. *Au revoir!* (Bye!)

That night, before going to bed, Adrien returned to his favourite reading: the novels by Graham Greene. He made a real effort to open the book, but the pages of a good book were like a feather blanket in winter. The intrigue, mystery, and unexpected twists and turns would make him forget the pain in his nose for a while. The doctor had had to reposition his nasal septum and his face was still so swollen that he needed to lift the book in order to see the full text.

That night he felt very uncomfortable and restless. That crazy tourist had broken so many things, things that he practically could care less about. He had not yet made an inventory of the damage or reported the incident to the insurance company; in a way he did not feel up to it. Around three in the morning he was sitting, facing the street again, sipping a steaming cup of heavily sweetened chamomile tea. The temperature of the Alpine villages had dropped below five degrees and the cold November breath fogged the glass of the windows. Adrien was fed up with his life, with his loneliness. That sleepless night, walking up and back on the carpet, returning to his reading and cups of tea was nonetheless very fruitful.

The next day he put the store up for sale. It took him four months to get rid of every last piece of his business, but with the money he had raised he was able to pay off all his debts, buy a camera, two suitcases and a ticket to Brooklyn.

In time, *Behemot* would become a branch of the *Banque Populaire des Alpes*, and the memory of being an antiquarian would soon fade from memory.

Madame Jeannette warned him over and over again that he was wrong, that it was a meaningless adventure ... the truth is that she was not being honest with Adrien; she was simply wondering what her life would be like from now on, how she could live without seeing him every morning, without having him around. Despite this, she had bought most of the furniture and many old objects from him. Inadvertently she had redecorated her glove shop with all sorts of memories about him, each one of them a part of Adrien and then she would suffer in silence. She persisted several times with Guiraud's help, but Adrien was determined to emigrate to the United States.

"I just advised him to take a vacation," stated Guiraud.

"You and your advice, do you think you are Jorge Bucay to go around saying the first thing that comes to mind?" Jeannette scolded him as tears welled up on her flushed cheeks due to the cold.

Guiraud and Jeannette said goodbye to him at the door of a taxi. She stayed on the street while the Uber moved away from the neighbourhood, from her city, from her life. If she had been brave enough, she would have accompanied him to the airport in Isère, forty-five kilometres away, although once there, the farewell would have been much worse, among other things because Adrien was not aware of how her neighbour felt about him. He did not even suspect it. He was so engrossed in his life change, so focused on pitying himself that he was unaware of everything he was leaving behind.

3

A sugar factory

When Adrien saw the Statue of Liberty up close, the feeling came to his mind that for the first time he was accomplishing something important in his life, even though he would have had to invest every penny to do so. It was not easy to gather the necessary courage to leave everything behind and start over, it was not easy, but it was necessary. Perhaps that suffocating sensation of stagnation would carry all his life like a heavy counterweight, but he had to try. It was such a radical change that he himself was quite scared by the consequences of the decision he had made. It was at that moment like covering the sun with a finger, although now it was best not to pay too much attention to it and look ahead.

With a difference of six hours ahead of his usual time and after a half-day plane crossing over the immensity of the Atlantic Ocean, Adrien felt slightly woozy.

The sturdy Airbus 321 was landing at JFK, America's busiest airport and everyone seemed to know where they were going. The eight international flight terminals were in full swing and the huge hall looked like a donut on top of an anthill. Unsurprisingly, no one spoke French, so Adrien had to improvise. With the help of a small pocket dictionary titled "French for Dummies" and some indicator lights, he was finally able to access the parking area. Adrien didn't understand why the dummies, used in vehicle crash tests, were considered so

stupid, in any case he thought they were brave. For some reason, if he compared himself to them now, he would consider himself just as foolhardy.

On his first day in bustling New York City, his luggage had been lost, his savings stolen while getting out of a taxi and shown the harshness of suburban hospitality. He was able to protect his camera intact and with what little he had left in his pockets, he posted a twenty-day deposit in a rickety, red brick building near the Upper Bay. It would take several weeks to receive a new credit card and much longer for the embassy to provide him with a duplicate of his passport.

He only took photographs, not getting enough rest and hardly eating, photographs that only reflected different emotions, joy, sadness, passion, disorientation or loss. Each one of these images returned his inner gaze reflected in the mirror of a pool of dirty water. The developing equipment and the trays he used, were placed in the bathroom, which now also had a red light similar to the lamps in the alleys of Chinatown.

When he could not continue paying the rent, he looked for a new place to stay. In France he had had his own business, a comfortable home, a life of pleasant breakfasts, books and old movies from his sofa. He had nothing here; picking the lock would be the point of no return and he knew it, but he did it anyway.

In the old Williamsburg neighbourhood, very close to the banks of the East River, there was an abandoned factory surrounded by rusted railings, wild grass and graffiti walls. The rainwater had formed small pools of dirt and mud inside it. The old Domino Sugar refinery doors had been closed for more than fifteen years and although the city council already had a very controversial urban plan for its most conservative area, for now everything rested on the mercy of inclement weather. Adrien found a dry corner near the old offices. It had an adjacent fireplace, a sink that still worked, and a cardboard-lined mattress. Everything would be provisional until he could sell some of his photographs. As his friend Guiraud would have said "A desperate situation, demanded desperate solutions." He missed his brandy for special occasions, his ability to listen; he missed many things that now seemed as far away as all of his expectations.

The air howled between the old iron pipes and the windows that had no glass but had been covered with plastic sheets. A dim electric light filtered in from the street casting a ghostly beam of sinuous shadows when he heard a sudden click of footsteps. Adrien held his breath and stared at the door. The knob turned slowly clockwise as he remained silent, wrapped in a blanket. Seconds later, an African-American boy, about ten years old, walked in and stood there looking at him:

"Who are you?" The boy asked in perfect New York English.

"What do you mean, who am I?" Shouldn't I ask that question? Adrien replied in his customary French language.

"I'm Cuyami, although everyone calls me Yami, and I'm hungry," the boy said as he looked for something of interest to him. The latter was said in correct French.

"What? You speak my language?" Adrien asked

"Yes! My foster parents were French, but I couldn't stand them."

"Do you have something to eat?" Yami insisted again

"You haven't told me what you're doing here in this abandoned factory."

"We live here." The boy answered very sure of himself.

"We? What do you mean by we?"

Behind the child appeared a smiling beagle with brown spots and that did not stop wagging its tail.

"This is Cooper, my best friend." Well, we are going ...

"Wait, wait!" Adrien replied quickly. "What did you tell me your name was?"

"My name is Cuyami, or if you prefer: Yami."

"Okay, Yami." Would you like some chocolate-filled cookies?

The fire in the fireplace, the cookies, and the companionship made the boy and his dog feel more relaxed. Yami. He was a rascal who lived on what he found or what he could steal in the markets. His mother had abandoned him when he was only a few weeks old at the door of Saint Michael's, the church on Sunset Park. His father, however, never knew about him and continued with his life. The boy

went from one place to another like a heavy suitcase, until he was come across by the Rousseau's, a wealthy French family that owned several restaurants. The man was a wimp, and the woman was a frivolous lady with expensive whims. Yami was one of those whims, like a new car or a designer phone, until she abandoned him. He did not feel loved, this was not his family, so now he lived with his faithful dog Cooper, in a dilapidated factory until the city council decided to demolish it.

During the day, Yami and his four-legged buddy roamed the city. They had their strategic places to take things without being discovered, then in the evening they returned to have dinner with Adrien at the old sugar factory. With what the three had gathered together, they prepared a feast using the fireplace.

Adrien spent a good part of the day taking photographs, which he later sold on the street. It wasn't much, but with that money he could buy some supplies and buy himself an eighty-cent hotdog and something for the boy and his dog, Cooper.

He did not quite agree with the life the boy had decided to live, but it was evident that he was not the best suited to give him advice... his bad example gave him away. It had been a long time since he enjoyed a peaceful harmony, the kind that occurs when what you do, what you say and what you think go in the same direction.

Each day that passed he felt further away from his dreams. He had lost weight and a mixture of longing began to draw in his eyes. He walked that afternoon down Plymouth Street, the limestone of the Brooklyn Bridge silhouetted against an almost blue sky of dull stars.

As he looked at the sky polluted by the lights of the city, he thought that he had changed the boredom of Grenoble for the misery of Brooklyn. He had the feeling of having made a complete mistake, everything around him strove to confirm that idea. For an instant he remembered Madame Jeannette's insistence and the absurdity of this trip.

Today he felt especially weak and dejected, almost as much as the time he had nearly frozen to death on Lake Monteynard trying to escape his own suffocating

monotony. However, now there was someone waiting for him at home, a boy and his dog. Yami's company was the only good thing that had happened to him since his arrival in the United States.

That afternoon, before returning to his shelter, he bumped into distracted passers-by and the folder in which he carried his photographs fell dramatically to the ground. Instantly all his work began to flutter aimlessly around every corner of Plymouth Street. One of those snapshots stopped at the feet of a gray-haired man in a cashmere sweater and a thick, tan plaid blazer. He picked it up and stared at it, moving the photograph closer and closer in silence.

It was a long time before Adrien finished gathering everything up again. The man with the boutique blazer came towards him with the last photograph in his hand: "This photo, is it yours?"

"Yes sir"

"Do you have more pictures like this?"

Adrien simply opened his big folder with elastic bands again, everything in disarray and many photographs had gotten dirty. The mysterious man looked at them one by one with quite some interest:

"I want to buy them all, give me a price."

Adrien could not believe, what was going on... was it a joke? He thought of a price which would allow him to eat something different or face small expenses and looked thoughtfully at his camera.

"I'll sell them to you for a hundred and fifty dollars." The stranger looked at him with a hint of a smile:

"I'll give you three hundred, okay?"

"Sounds perfect to me, *monsieur*."

The stranger searched his pockets, gave him the bills and a card.

"Could you come see me tomorrow at this address?" Here, buy yourself some clothes, and he gave Adrien an extra 50 dollars. "I'll be waiting for you at ten and please, don't be late."

The man left in the same direction where he came from, but everything else had changed. Adrien had some money and a job interview. He looked carefully at the card and read:

Early Daily News
Edward Thompson
Chief Editor

That night he went into a Pakistani bazaar, bought dinner and various toiletries. Then at the gas station he bought some blue pants, a light shirt and a gray V-neck pullover; also, some casual shoes size 42.

It was very difficult for him to fall asleep and he got up at seven. The hygiene ritual, that morning, would be complete. He trimmed his hair, brushed his teeth, shaved and cleaned thoroughly. Afterwards he got dressed in his new clothes, except for his coat, which was the same as always. Cooper needed to keep sniffing him to make sure it was him, even though he smelled funny today, he smelled clean.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" Yami asked him

"What do you mean?"

"When they discover that you are undocumented, they could arrest you and send you back to your country." They can't offer you a job now, not like this. The foreigners can repatriate you with a single snap of their fingers. It is better not to be seen and go unnoticed.

"How do you know all this?" I can't believe I'm having this conversation with a ten year old.

"I'm not a child, I'll be eleven in December."

"Okay, Yami, I appreciate you worrying about me so much, but this is the first opportunity that has come my way since I arrived to improve my situation in this country and I don't want to waste it." Sometimes you have to take a risk, do you understand?

The boy looked sadly at the toe of his worn sneakers and then said, "Can you promise me you'll be back?"

"Come here, buddy." Adrien asked him. And hugging him around his waist: "I promise I won't go anywhere without you."

The boy smiled while Cooper raised his front paws.

Early Daily News

The Early Daily News was more than half an hour's walk in the direction of the Brooklyn Bridge. He would not need any public transport to get to the appointment on time since it was relatively close.

Adrien began his march in the direction of his future, his appearance except for the coat had improved a lot. He could not help looking somewhat French, perhaps it was because of his hair and despite that, the hotdog seller did not recognize him. He still had some money left for a coffee, but he thought it was better to manage it with caution. Despite this, he invested all his fortune in some chocolates for Yami.

The brick, cement and glass building preserved the structure of the original design. In the main entrance, with large windows flanked by Ionic columns almost four meters high, was the reception, a semicircle of wood and gilded mouldings.

"Mr. Edward Thompson?"

The receptionist was finishing drying her nail polish by blowing on them: "He's in a meeting."

"Can I wait here for him?" Adrien asked.

"Do you have an appointment?" Miss Nancy Wood replied, observing the pearly shine of her nails.

"Yes, in five minutes."

"Agreed. Can you tell me your name?"

"Adrien Lefebvre."

Miss Wood dialled an extension on the twelfth floor and waited for the call to be connected, all the while looking bored at the redneck appearance of the visitor. Adrien, in turn, had not missed a detail of the receptionist. Her cleavage was partially illuminated by the light from inside the counter and created a pastry sideboard effect. She knew it and smiled when Adrien gave her that look...he could not help it, he was French.

"Mr. Thompson? You have a visitor. Yes, I tell him to come up."

She hung up the phone and absentmindedly told Adrien: "Twelfth floor, on the left, room nine, you can't miss it."

"Thanks a lot."

Adrien took a few steps away from the counter, but then turned around and said, "See you soon, Moneypenny."

It was silly, of course, but he had always wanted to say it. As he pressed the green button for the elevator, he saw in the reflection of the glass how Miss Moneypenny was smiling and holding a part of her blond hair behind an ear adorned by a gold and beaded earring.

Door nine. Chief Editor. It was true that they were reunited.

Adrien knocked with his knuckles.

"Come in! Please sit down".

It was an office with a mahogany table and bookshelves with magazines, books, and folders in disarray. Natural light flowed through a large window from Astor Place. The air from the street swayed the lush linden trees making their leaves shudder like little paipay.

"These are two fellow writers: John Taylor and Pharell Bradley." They have seen your photographs too.

Our newspaper reaches every corner of Brooklyn, almost three million citizens and a good part of New York, although it is distributed throughout the country. Our motto consists of the three points: Curious, Creative and Constructive.

"Do you think you could fit that description?"

"What do you mean?"

"We would like you to be part of our team."

Adrien stared at the managing editor; his words coming like a fine, refreshing rain after a suffocating summer.

In less than a week, Chief Thompson solved his residence and work permit, the EB3 Visa document, a new bank address, credit card and passport. Via his contacts, he was also able to help him acquire a 120 square-meter apartment with a terrace and garden at a price well below the market appraisal and in one of the most beautiful, and at the same time, old places in the city. Given Adrien's background, Thompson hoped he could feel at home there.

Adrien Lefebvre's photographs appeared on the cover of the Early Daily News and the newspaper had increased its sales. The new photographer accompanied Taylor and Bradley in their interviews and the search for new news. Little by little, the newspaper understood the importance of the work that the French photographer was developing by reinforcing the texts with images that almost spoke for themselves.

The first two weeks flew by and one Saturday morning Adrien decided to take a long walk and have a coffee, one of the good ones. There was music in the cafeteria, the whistle at the beginning of a song titled "Wind of change" reminded him of all the changes that had occurred since his arrival in the United States. That moment, with the cup in his hand and the warmth on his lips, was his moment and it comforted him to acknowledge all the good that could be discovered in small gestures.

Bedford Avenue was packed with people and right in front of the cafe was a Whole Foods Market. In New York supermarkets were not very large and customers would buy using hand baskets instead of carts on wheels. Despite the size, they tended to be very crowded. Adrien was enjoying

his great moment by the window when he saw Yami pass by. The boy asked Cooper to wait for him on the sidewalk, he did not even tie him to the streetlight as he went into the supermarket. Four minutes later he ran out with a twenty-pound bag of frozen potatoes, Cooper immediately accompanied him and behind them ran the security guard who was yelling at them to stop.

Adrien drained his coffee immediately and rushed out into the street trying not to attract too much attention to himself.

Hours later, Adrien was still at the supermarket paying for all the damages and trying to convince the owner not to report the child. The security officer complained that it had not been the first time and that they were tired of the thefts and persecution. They finally reached a "friendly" agreement that cost Adrien his entire month's pay and endless begging, apologies and promises.

That night he headed to the sugar factory. Yami was there, frying his tasty potatoes.

"Hi Yami. How are you? "

The boy ran to meet him and hugged him.

"Yami we have to talk"

Three weeks later, Adrien and Yami had an appointment with the Social Worker at the Kings County Courthouse on Adams Street. The room was well attended by a few neighbours, a good part of the Early Daily News staff, members of the supermarket security company, and Moneypenny herself. Judge Elizabeth Connors presided over the session:

"According to this, the eleven-year-old Cuyami Drayton has already been housed with four foster families, has complaints of petty theft, does not receive a school education or medical assistance and lives on the streets. Where are your parents?"

Mrs. Murray, the social worker, stood up to reply, "We couldn't locate them, your Honor." We lost track of the mother in 2009 at Brookdale Hospital where she was treated for an overdose. She escaped from the ICU as soon as she regained consciousness and we have not been able to find her since. As for the father, there is no evidence that he is still in the country or security regarding his current identity.

"What do you mean by his identity?"

"Well, we've never found out who he was, the mother didn't want to talk about him, only that he had joined the army and was killed in the act of combat in Afghanistan."

Judge Connors meditated in silence for a few endless minutes, then looked at the boy and attendees. "As I see it and in reference to the laws that protect us in New York City, I only find one solution for this case: that the child remain under the guardianship of a private center for minors where he can receive an education and receive the necessary care to re-join society when he becomes of age."

"Your Honor." We want to propose an alternative solution for the well-being of the child.

"Mrs. Murray, come to the stand."

The social worker gathered her documents and walked to the magistrates' reading desk. "Your Honor, with my respects." We have brought the custody and adoption documents requested by my client.

Judge Connors looked at him over her glasses and sternly replied: "Why haven't you provided these new documents before?"

"I beg your pardon? It was my fault." We have taken some time in the process and procedures so that all the management was endorsed by the organizations that I represent.

"Who is the applicant?"

"Yes, here is his documentation and residence information."

"Agreed. Go back to your seat."

"Mr. Lefebvre?"

Adrien rose to answer Judge Connors' questions: "Yes, your Honor?"

"You've been in the United States for a very short time. Why do you want to adopt eleven-year-old Cuyami Drayton?"

"Your Honor. We have known each other for some time. We have become good friends and have shared many things together. We are both alone and we have understood how much we need each other. Right now, I have a well-paid job and a spacious three-bedroom home. I know this could be a good start and I am willing to give Cuyami all the opportunities that he has not had until now for his education, medical assistance and also, the affection of a father."

Adrien paused. He was visibly excited.

"You can sit down, Mr. Lefebvre." All right, have the child stand up to answer a few simple questions.

Little Yami smiled as he fixed his blue violin bow tie. All eyes in the room were on the black boy with hair so curly it fell like springs on his forehead. His jacket was a bit itchy, but he had decided not to disappoint Adrien, not at a time like that.

5

Winds of change

Several weeks later.

It had been snowing all night and the city woke up looking like a big sugar cake.

Yami had decorated his room with characters from *Stranger Things*, his favourite series, and also from *Star Wars*. The boy had almost the same number of toys as of books. Adrien had inculcated in him his love for reading Graham Green and Cooper, even though he had his own doghouse in the garden, had spent the night at the boy's feet.

Yami's adaptation to the Henry Bristow School had been progressive. Until now his independent attitude caused him some difficulties in teamwork, as well as following and obeying simple instructions. The worst thing for him, however, had been being separated from Cooper for much of the day. Adrien reminded him over and over the motto of the school: "*Tell me and I'll forget, teach me and I'll remember, involve me and I'll learn.*" The phrase about the importance of being involved in what we do was said centuries ago by Benjamin Franklin, one of the founders of the United States.

The school was in Park Slope, just twenty minutes by bus from 9th Street, and Yami, who had already made new friends, did not want Adrien to wait for him at the school gate.

Before Christmas, the Early Daily News staff was looking for a good story for the Anonymous Heroes column. Adrien did not exactly consider himself a hero, but in a way, he had achieved many things in a short time: a home, a family, financial security, a job that always awakened his most creative side ...

Chief Thompson agreed with the rest of the team:

"Adrien, this story should be written by you."

Adrien searched inside himself and finally agreed to write it. One thousand two hundred words double spaced.

The story was titled: "Yami and the Sugar Factory", where the true hero of his story was an eleven-year-old boy and his little beagle. The story moved its readers and even the City Council, which decided to turn the old factory into a museum. The success of Adrien's story made the newsroom rethink about many things and from that moment on the column would be the Lefebvre column, so that in addition to the photographs, now his name would also appear on page eighteen with a small photograph that did not do him justice

A long way from there, Madame Jeannette received a letter from the United States. Adrien was fine and had many things to tell her. In addition to the letter, there was a photograph of Adrien with a very smiley African-American boy and a dog. The letter also included a clipping from a Brooklyn newspaper page with his name on it.

Adrien apologized for not having written sooner and then offered her an invitation to visit him at his new apartment in the Brooklyn Heights neighbourhood.

Jeannette had never been outside of Grenoble and she was horrified by the idea of flying, but she remembered that old saying that awaiting or waiting a lifetime can make our hearts sick, so after thinking about it for a whole weekend, she hung up the "CLOSED FOR VACATIONS" sign. It seemed to her that she was

committing a crime, but she did it anyway; she took two anxiolytic pills and got on a plane.

The streets of Brooklyn in the morning are like the streets of any other city in the world, blinds that open, people yawning, homeless people shuffling their tired feet to nowhere, routines and customs that timidly wake up to receive the light of a new sunrise.

Donovan was driving his insulated truck like every morning, but today he was feeling especially tired. His children, George and Jenny, nine and eight years old respectively, had the flu and while his wife took care of little Ron, he had spent most of the night sleepless, seated in a child's Disney-patterned armchair. He was rubbing his eyes when the traffic light unexpectedly changed from green to red as a man crossed the street with his dog.

For the first time in her life, Madame Jeannette had been spontaneous, almost impulsive, accepting Adrien's invitation. The plane landed at one o'clock in the afternoon, but Adrien was not at the airport as promised. After a long wait, Jeannette ended up showing a taxi driver an address on the return address of an envelope, 314 Hicks Street. Almost two hours later she was in front of Adrien's apartment, but even though she had already called several times, there was no one there. For a moment she thought that it had all been a mistake, coming and everything, but then it seemed better to be patient and sat on the steps of the entrance. The street was dotted with green trees and fences that led to the basements of red brick buildings, built over a century ago.

People looked at her as they passed by, being evident from her European appearance and her suitcase which had either been lost or she had made a mistake. Afternoon was falling on the city when a school bus stopped in front of the house and a boy with tanned skin and black curls approached her holding his backpack.

"Hi. You must be the lady with the gloves."

"Hi Yami, I see that nothing escapes your eye. I will keep that in mind in the future, although I still don't know if I can trust you."

"Why do you say that? Is it because you are going to tell me a secret?"

"It's still a bit early for that, don't you think?" First, we should find out where Adrien is. By the way, you speak French very well.

"Thank you. It is very strange that he has not arrived yet. Normally at this time he is always at home. It's cold here. Don't you prefer to come inside?"

"Do you have a key?"

"Sure, I'm grown up!"

Yami wore a key around his neck by a simple shoelace. Jeannette rolled her suitcases into the house and looked at everything carefully.

"I always tell him to buy a phone, but he doesn't listen to me." Now we could call him to see what has happened.

Jeannette and the boy sat on the sofa in the dining room. On the wall was a lithograph of an artwork by Andy Warhol inspired by Elizabeth Taylor, shelves with many books, and an old golf club that Jeannette recognized immediately. It was the one used by the main culprit of all that disaster, the same club with which a madman destroyed a good part of Adrien's antique shop.

There was a lot of silence between them and then Jeannette remembered:

"I have brought you a gift.

"A present for me?" Yami retorted.

"Yes, I have it in one of my suitcases."

Jeannette produced a shoebox-sized package wrapped in gold foil and a red bow. She put it in the child's hands.

"Can I open it?"

"Of course! If not, how are you going to know what is inside?"

Yami unwrapped the package with great care and at the same time impatience. It was something really exciting, a true unexpected gift. When he finally finished opening it, he was stunned:

"The Millennium Falcon!" 5,000 pieces in 3D! It's fantastic!

The boy approached Jeannette, who was holding out her hands, but the boy gave her a simple kiss on the cheek and a hug: "Thank you very much for thinking of me." Can we start it now?

When they had unpacked everything, read the instructions and assembled the first pieces, a noise was heard at the front door.

Instantly a little beagle stormed into the dining room jumping happily.

"I see Cooper likes you." Forgive me for arriving at this time, but a man had been run over by a truck and I had to go urgently to photograph everything for the newspaper.

When Jeannette saw Adrien, she felt that she no longer needed to breathe, she had never been so happy to see someone. She got up and walked toward him, but she tripped over Cooper and a wrinkle in the carpet and landed straight into Adrien's arms... everything else was natural and needed no explanation.

There was no first time with her, there never was, but the Brooklyn wind carried the salty scents of a stormy and secretly sleepy sea; a dream that was going to wake up, that was going to occur now.

Adrien was right, the waiting had made him sick. She now understood him within his inexplicable dimension, but today all the minutes, days and years had melted into that intense embrace.

Cooper wagged his tail happily and barked once. Jeannette had already crossed the Atlantic for the first time in her life, so she was determined not to be afraid, that nothing would separate them again. Then she kissed the Grenoble antiques dealer. Adrien looked at her carefully and returned to the softness of her lips.

Meanwhile a child was building his Millennium Falcon puzzle, people continued with their stuff and a subtle breeze swayed the trees in the streets of Brooklyn.

The End