

Luc Delfosse

HANDS OF THE MONA LISA

Love Stories




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COLLECTION CARACTÈRES MOBILES

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To my friend Donald

Preamble

Dear Reader

I often wrote a few stories straight off,
But these ones cannot be told without preliminaries
Because these ones are full of love
'Is life a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying
nothing?'
Yes, William, you are right; sometimes it is the case, but thanks to
God
It is not always like that. Cupid's darts may interfere nicely,
tenderly...
So ♪ ♥ is there anyone who wants to listen to my stories? ♥ ♪
Maybe a poetess living in a hamlet upon a hill will?
I mean in a little village in a fairy tale by a brook...

The Merry Young Ladies of the TGV

THE MERRY YOUNG LADIES OF THE TGV

I

They were three. The three were beautiful. Of course, they were beautiful... How could it be different? First was the discreet Penelope. She was a pretty young lady with black hair. I love black hair. There it is in black and white: the fact that I love black hair on a woman is an old personal mania like my private life is. But as I just said this is personal, and so here it is, totally irrelevant. Totally? Let's go back then to the first degree, I mean the first story... I don't want you to give me the third degree. I am only working in order to get a PhD in love from Cambridge University. Hey you, writer! Have you any intention to go back to this story as you promised to do three degrees above? Fine, fine, I will. So, in front of Penelope, always moving back and forth in order to be able to speak was the incredible Sarah. Or was she Esther? Her hair was long. Not that long if I remember well. It was thick hair, with some chestnut-red glints. Her eyes were deep, immensely deep and black. They were even blacker than the hair of Penelope.

II

The train was whistling in the rain. I was sitting like a bull, in this train, in which the three young ladies looked so happy. My eyes

were already caressing her lips – Yes, I can hear you dear reader and you ask yourself: where is the third lady? She is also in the train, of course. But who is she? Wait only a few moments and you will learn it. But who is this man who just appeared in my story? Was it me? Which lips was he-was I? Looking at? Yes, dear reader, you are right, it is already time to make a digression, a quick one. But is it necessary to clarify who was this man? Was it me or my double? I will double check and keep you posted. Whatever he was, the man would have loved being able to get his lips hopping on *her* lips... I am sure you guessed already: I kindly refer to Esther Sarah's lips – The man didn't know that he was already in love with her beauty. To look at her was putting hairs on his chest. She was actually recalling to me the exotic model that the painter Chassériau took for his *Esther at the bath*. But her hair was not blond. It was darker. The hairdo also was different. She had no knot in her hair and there was not a single note of music in the air. But I was sure that for me she would wear one knot one day, if I would ask her to do so. I would have bet my last coin on it. Then she would undo it of course. For me she would do that. When I was visiting her every Sunday at the Louvre, Esther was always doing this for me in the painting of Chassériau. Esther Sarah was totally aware that this man who was sitting there looking at her was also listening to what she was saying. She didn't mind that, on his part, he was playing the best he could, if she would have not appreciated the fact that he was listening to her words, he would have understood and would have stopped immediately. But he had the feeling that she was pleased to see him listening to her and eventually she was speaking to him. Her true emotion showed through her pretended indifference. Last but not least one should have had to admit that the way Esther Sarah was speaking was producing some kind of unavoidable stereophony. So the talkative lady couldn't be angry or even surprised. In all cases she was not suspecting that I was already writing her a poem. Was this a simple disposition of mind? – Yes, dear reader? You cannot wait anymore? You want to meet also with the third young lady? I understand your impatience. Is there one man on earth who doesn't want to meet with a young lady?

III

Her name was Melisa; she was definitely the quietest of the three ladies. That's the reason why you didn't hear that much of her so far. Melisa was sitting on an aisle seat, close to the love door escape, just on the right side of Penelope and then, as a

consequence, just a little bit further in from the aisle than Esther. Such geographical positions didn't affect the conversation of the three young ladies. As you know Sarah was moving and turning constantly. The three Graces were not playing chess yet. They didn't want to catch a king of hearts or a prince of apples. Not yet. Melisa was wearing glasses. She was wearing them with elegance and certain discretion. She was not behaving like a star, even though she was as beautiful as the sun, a star responsible for life. Her slightly curled hair was cut in an old fashion way. Melisa seemed to have escaped from the twentieth century fox described in Marcel Proust psychological movies. But only the Esther of Chassériau had fox-coloured hair. The train was running at a high speed. The voice of a king born in the US started whistling in his head: ♪ Train ♪...

IV

The three merry ladies were twenty-five years young. The man who was caressing, only with his eyes – this goes without saying but one can write it – the lips of Esther Sarah, this man was asking himself if, on next November 25th, the three of them would go dancing for Saint Catherine's Day? What kind of a hat each one would wear for the feast? What is more beautiful than a hat? He thought (in a few seconds he would be more specific about the hat's beauty). He would then invite Esther or Sarah to go and dance one or more acrobatic rock 'n' rolls. The more I was looking at her the more I felt like going for a boogie. But this is not the point. I was certain that she would wear a hat that night or rather a cap. Maybe she would wear several hats. I hoped she would. She looked so brainy... Before going dancing we would have a drink at the Octopus Garden, a pub I know, where a magician can pull many legs at the same time and there, after a couple of *Blue Label* I would probably dare to ask her: 'where did you get your hat?' What is more beautiful than a lady's hat, what is cuter than a young lady wearing several hats ♪ every night and day ♪? Had 'the-more-the-merrier-women' already chosen the dresses they would wear to go dancing?

V

Esther Sarah was wonderfully adjusted in a light colour skirt. An adornment of woven threads bordered her skirt. Her young breasts were clearly outlined beneath her lovely bodice that he couldn't totally discern yet. But he wouldn't write a bodice ripper based on

this beautiful note. At this stage just let's say that her firm breasts boosted her indescribable femininity. When, in a slight gesture that only a woman can make, she withdrew her little black cotton vest, she made it possible for her attentive observer to freely admire her bodice. It was also black. ♡♡♪♪ He wanted to paint it red ♡♡♪♪. During a few seconds he only saw her magnificent shoulders and then he could just catch a glimpse of her lithe body as, in an old song, one could ♪ catch a glimpse of Rita ♪. Her superb complexion could also be her sole adornment. With agile feet Esther Sarah was playing in oriental slippers as last finery in these Indian summer times. These summer shoes were the evidence of Esther Sarah's love for life and its colours. The noise she was making was another proof. That was probably the reason why the three colleagues were creating a light daily disturbance. They were not naughty, just talkative. Was it difficult for this man reduced to silence to say no word? No, as an exception this man had chosen ♪ the sound of silence ♪. But let's be back to Penelope. In contrast with her poppy-red bodice she was wearing a black classic skirt. Black and red seemed to be the only two label colours available. Maybe in a not too distant future she would share a *blue label* with me. One could find a taste for order in her personality. Also, her moccasins were black. As for Melisa, she was wearing trousers. Why were her trousers black? It was possibly a fashion trend... Anyway, up or down the black colour suited all three beautifully.

VI

Curiously the blouse of Melisa was white with short sleeves. Curiously she wore beige city sport shoes. The man who was absent-mindedly observing these three life-oriented ladies, especially one of them, lifted up his head again. There was a smile up on his face. His eyes came up once more against the almost still juvenile appeal of Sarah. She captivated him. She held him spellbound with her smile. The spell would never be broken. For a long time already, the seductress was present in the mind and the body of the young woman. To him Esther looked like an actress in the dress rehearsal night. For her he would be able to drop off rock 'n' roll for a while and become her crooner for one night.

VII

Everything seemed to be running well on the railways. Apparently the young ladies were working in the communication industry.

Making a great ballyhoo was probably natural for them. He would have preferred to make a song and dance with Esther. The three seemed to know everything about anything; everything looked serious to them so probably nothing was important. Seated in this train, coming back home after an early morning departure these early birds were still singing, the speed was loosening their tongues. It was a farewell to somnolence. The review was fast and severe. Was it said with discretion? The observer was now trying to hide away to avoid devouring Sarah with his eyes. He wished he could devour her with kisses. He got a burning desire to speak with her. Did he really appreciate her magnificent prattling, these twittering birds flying over babbling brooks? One part of their conversation particularly drew his attention: with the enthusiasm of her youth, Esther Sarah declared:

- This is actually not the same thing to create a logo, an icon or a simple scheme. It all depends on the man. And furthermore, it also depends how much the man is paid for his work, she added for the pretty initiates.

The full implication of what she said was not lost on her friends. Under the insinuation the critic was obvious:

- In our company people are paid next to nothing, added Penelope.
- When they do get paid... added Melisa.

And the three young ladies burst out laughing.

Based on these few exchanged words, it was rather easy to give a context to the type of work the three young graduates were having. Brilliant, they were ready to piece together differently the business world, especially the business of their colleagues? One simple observer would have probably thought this way. They were naughty? No, only talkative, I believe that I mentioned that earlier. Tigresses? No, they were not aggressive. It was a classical dialogue. They were young and one can forgive youth. A positive point was that they used no electronic agendas. Maybe they didn't want to get older too fast. In fact, only the very high speeds seem to stop time.

The excited man I was, was waiting for the right moment before he dared to ask Sarah:

- Do you like perfume? As if he would have aimed at stopping her from gossip.

He was not disappointed. In a nanosecond the woman whose legs I forgot to mention were comparable to those of a *long, tall Sally*, this pretty Sarah immediately understood. She wouldn't waste her beauty with an excess of frivolity. Comparable to the tragic heroine loved by Nero, in that play by Racine, her eyes suddenly appeared soft and tenderly shy. She looked at him and seemed to say "thank you". Was it because of the little cute attention he had just paid to her offering her a little perfume bottle, or because of the steady, ready attention he had paid to her on the train? She kept deep down in her eyes a huge reserve of gentleness that he took and hid immediately in his heart of hearts.

If, in a future, this type of future which already appeals to our imaginations or speaks to our hearts, if in this lovely future that one can invent every morning, the ups and downs and the blowing winds of life would make it possible, then Esther would blossom, he would see her face lighting up and at the end of this movie made in Hollywood, like a beautiful fatal flower drawn by a poet, Sarah would open up and they would kiss before the audience would stand up.

The train arrived late. All passengers were invited to file a claim form for the delay. The man who loved beauty and gentleness made a vow. He asked another favour of destiny: he wanted to meet again with Esther Sarah, as soon as possible. Why not in Windsor? It would be for sure a pure coincidence...

The temporary End (*)

(*) Why should this burgeoning love not grow? Dear reader, turn a few pages, go to the real End and you will see how friendship and love can grow...

The Ear of Monsieur Ingres

The Ear of Monsieur Ingres

- What are you looking at?
- I am not looking at, I am simply admiring...
- May I kindly ask you a question?
- Please...
- What is the object of your admiration?
- This object is two-fold...
- Won't you tell me no more?
- In fact, if you want me to 🎵 go and tell it on the mountains 🎵, it is all about your ears...
- What, "all about my ears?"
- Yours ears are so beautiful and so, how could I say? So abusively sensual...
- Thank you Darling.
- I am rather partial to your ears... I am just wondering which one of the two I prefer... The right one or the left one? No, it is a silly question. In fact, I love them both, the same way, each one differently I guess.
- This is exactly what happens with children...
- Yes, Mademoiselle, except that ears are a real symbol...
- And the children, what are they?
- Children are not symbols except as they appear in commercials.
- If they are not symbols what are they?

- Human beings.
- Are my ears not human?
- Yes, they are, but they are less turbulent than kids...
- How can one be more or less human?
- This is a question of turbulences...
- When one is awake or asleep, is one more or less human?
- Sleepy doesn't mean less human but "merely human".
- Let's come back to the ears...
- To *your* ears !
- What do you think of them?
- They are magnificent; I told you already. My eyes are shouting it...
- My ears are happy to hear that. But please, do not shout !
- In case you wouldn't have realized, eyes usually shout or cry silently.
- Then this is another perception, isn't it?
- Darling, I hope that you are not going to think that you can expect some extra benefit because of your ears?

- No, do not worry. When I gave it all to you, I mean my soul, my body, my life and although our harmonious contract didn't specify it, my ears were also included.
- Thank you, I was afraid. You know what? Ears are naturally made for hearing, ♪ as boots are made for walking ♪, but as far as I am concerned ears mean much more, they inspire my desire, my desire for life, my desire for you...
- Why, are you comparing my ears to a streetcar?
- No, I wouldn't go that far. I don't know why they attract me that way; it is simply like that...
- I know you to be able to philosophize during hours and hours about ears. You are even going to tell me that *ears* are a concept.
- Not a concept, just a symbol...
- Ok, I listen to you...
- This is the minimum of a requirement when one refers to ears...
- In fact, one finds *ears* in every single civilization...
- Logical! Civilizations are composed of individuals equipped with ears...
- Easy to say, but I accept the argument. What I meant was that the simple fact to bring up the word *ear* could raise immediately in a conversation Jerome Bosch, the deafness of Beethoven or the one of Quasimodo, the perfect pitch of

- Glenn Gould as early as when he was three 'ears' old or so, the cut-off ear of Van Gogh...
- Ears, earphones, ear rings...
 - In fact, I have a dream, I dream of a love theatre play that I would write..., and in which your ears would play the same key part as the nose of Cyrano does in the masterpiece of Edmond Rostand.
 - Ok, I listen to you...
 - « Dear Mademoiselle, in your position, if I had such beautiful ears as you have, I would right away listen to my ear's lover... Do you love so much the little birds that you care to offer them such a lovely place where they can sing ? But I will stop here, I refuse plagiarism. Darling, would you carefully listen to me?
 - Are you singing darling ?
 - No, I am humming harder to myself...
 - Are you feeling blue?
 - No, I just feel like being on ♪ ♥ ♪ blueberry hill... ♪ ♥ ♪
 - Would you find your thrill there?
 - I've been there already and I found more than my thrill... I found you...
 - By the way, I feel a little bit hungry...
 - As far as I am concerned I feel hungry too but only for your ears...
 - Maybe but you will not eat them...
 - Oh no my dear ear, don't play the deaf ear to me... Ears, ears... My kingdom for your ears...
 - You don't want to be my king anymore?
 - If you don't want to give me your ears now then I have no other option than to go and visit an exhibition...
 - Really, go ahead! Which one?
 - I don't want you with suspicious minds Darling.
 - Thank you.
 - I should tell you off...
 - No, I don't want you to deafen me!
 - So, tell me, which exhibition are you going to?
 - It is called: "Hello good ear!"
 - ♪ I heard it through the grapevine ♪... Don't forget to visit the pavilion of the ear...
 - Agreed I will not forget.
 - Do not forget your earphone if you drive...
 - OK, I hear you.

- When you will be back home I will be in bed. Tell me sweet words of love in the ear... I will leave a little piece of one of my ears over the pillow.
- Tonight, I love the voice of my maîtresse...

A few hours later...

- Darling, are you asleep?
- No, I was waiting for you. I was turning around and around in my bed and now two of my vertebrae are painful.
- By the way, I arrived too late, the exhibition was closed.
- Was it? And so... Why do you come back so late?
- I went and visited another exhibition.
- Which one?
- Ingres. You know what?
- No, I am sleeping.
- You just told me that you were not sleeping.
- Let's say that I am sleeping on one of my ears only.
- True, I saw that when I entered the bedroom, but I just remember now..., you promised me to let one of your ears appear, the one you are not sleeping on... But in reality you are hiding both your ears.
- So what about Ingres ?
- You know my predilection for this painter...
- Yes I do.
- Of course it has no comparison with my passion for you but Ingres' paintings are really a great tribute *to the Woman*.
- You and the women...
- Not at all, Ingres and the women... Me, this is you. You know what? I read somewhere that Ingres was sometimes adding one or two vertebrae to the backs of his feminine models...
- Ingres, was he a surgeon?
- In a way yes, from a certain point of view he was a specialist of cosmetic surgery, before anyone else was... And for posterity...
- Stop playing your violin Darling, will you? It is now late and I cannot fall asleep. What are you aiming at with your Monsieur Ingres?
- How do you come to speak of Jean-Auguste Ingres this way...?
- Frankly speaking, can you just imagine me, your beloved Darling, with four ears?

- Yes, I can, for the quadraphonic. On the other hand, an ear can hide another ear. Hold on a second! Fancy that! Here is an earwig...
- I hope that you are joking, aren't you? I am afraid of earwigs; I prefer a little creepy-crawly, creeping, creeping on my skin...
- Don't be afraid I can hold the earwig; I can even be a bug-hunter to protect you. Furthermore, I will be delighted to become your crawling-crawling creepy-crawly... You can consider that I am now bitten by the ear bug and that I am going to nibble your exciting ear. You will be happy to hear that the key point clearly indicated in my acupuncture handbook to solve the vertebrae problems is located on the ear.
- I see, you want to take advantage of your position, you feel like a big bug and I hate the idea of you using needles on me! I don't want you to be my bugbear...
- Darling, please hear me: don't look at me bug-eyed, I will not use needles; I will only nibble your ears. I just want to be your teddy bear... This is for your own safety...
- For your own pleasure you mean...
- For *our* pleasure my Darling...
- So your passion for women's ears can be only compared to the passion of Monsieur Ingres for women's vertebrae...
- You can say that in a way *but* you remain my most beautiful passion...
- In spite of the exceptional sensuality of her ears your most beautiful passion tries to get to sleep with her painful vertebrae and you do not move one single finger ! If I could I would pull *your* ears!
- Don't be negative Darling, of course I am trying to help you. My love is blind but thanks to God my eyes can admire you, I have a keen sense of smell and I breathe you constantly, I can hear your charming voice, and... I will use my fingers as sweet creepy-crawlies on your skin as soon as I will have found all the key points corresponding to your painful vertebrae.
- If you don't find them before five minutes I believe that all your theories and our love will enter into turbulent times...

I then pressed gently my two fists in the wonderful small of my love's back not far away from a certain G spot. The painful vertebrae heaved a light sigh of relief, was it a desire? No it was simply an order that my love whispered in my ear making me hope that she would not give me the heave-ho that night. We took a lift up to the

floor of pleasure and reached summits. We refused to climb down from these wonderful heights that a woman lets be discovered only by the man who loves her ears like no one else does... In the early morning my love awakened me singing in my burning ears: ... 🎵 🎵 go tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere 🎵 🎵...

The Prescribers

The Prescribers

« Thou shall carefully listen to the prescribers »

11TH Commandment

- Is it true Daddy?
- Of course, it is true; they announced it on the TV.
- Is it possible?
- Of course, 'impossible' is not possible.
- Is it difficult?
- Of course, the teacher said it was a difficult exercise.
- What is forbidden?
- It is forbidden to inform.
- I thought that it was forbidden to forbid?
- If you keep asking so many questions, in a few years children could be forbidden. Pollution will be accused.
- What is pollution?
- Pollution is consumption at any cost.
- Dad, is it the right medicine?
- Of course, it has been prescribed by a doctor.
- How did he know?
- He studied at the University.

- Is that all?
- Of course not, the laboratory also recommended it.
- When?
- The laboratory invited doctors to a convention.
- But how did the laboratory manage to find out the new medicine?
- They made research-development.
- Is the new medicine expensive?
- Yes, it is.
- Is it easy to take it?
- Of course, the commercial proved it.
- Is it easy to be a star?
- Of course, it is very simple. First you have to appear on a TV screen.
- Dad, you told me that a screen is a barrier.
- Not always...
- Why are the stars smiling on visuals stuck on buses when all the other people who dream to become stars are stuck in crowded buses?
- Because stars are prescribers.
- But all these lonely people in the buses, are they alone?
- Not at all, remember the buses are crowded. On the other hand stars can be lonely...
- I know, when I look at the stars in the sky, they seem far away...
 🎵 But all the lonely people where do they all come from? 🎵
- They have no car.
- They would rather drive a beetle?
- Yes, my daughter, I guess so.
- Dad, you said that stars are prescribers. Stars are not nice?
- Of course, they are nice, they make us dream but they are also prescribers.
- Are we all prescribers?
- I think so.
- Daddy, what is a prescriber?
- This is a person who knows, who knows how to speak or who knows that she is beautiful.
- Dad, is life beautiful?
- Of course, my Darling
 🎵 if you can sing
 In the rain 🎵
 If you can see
 A star

Shining in the skies
If you can see
Driving a beetle car
Life with your beautiful eyes
You will be a woman my daughter...
But for the time being
In this train
You are my euro star

- Dad?
- Yes, my love...♥
- I just said to myself 🎵 what a wonderful world...🎵

The Rib Cage

The Rib Cage

« *The rib cage holds it all, the breath of life, the heart, the tenderness.* »

Proverb from Ardennes

She was observing him. What a funny gymnastic he was doing!

- Tell me, what are you doing?
- I inflate my rib cage.
- What for?
- In order to be able to love more.
- And in order to be able to love better what do you have in mind?
- This will be the second leg. I hope to win both.
- Won't you please stop pulling *my* leg?
- I am not. I cannot press on my rib and pull your leg at the same moment... Don't be aggressive...
- OK, I will not be pushy.
- Honest?
- Promised.
- OK, so you will only be my pushy cat... Let me explain then. For the moment, in my exercise, I give priority to quantity because I consider that real love starts with loving a lot. Even if one is uneasy. Maybe I don't love you the way you would

love but I love you a lot, I mean with passion. I love you with my words, with my movements. Movements are the basis of my *love concert for you and a little rock 'n' roll band* I used to sing in at school. I love you with my caresses, with my poor heart of a man for whom the woman of his life is supposed to leave him in a brief moment. And this man doesn't even know why she wants to leave him. You are my queen of spades. I would love to be your king of hearts.

- You did think a lot on this matter, didn't you?
- Yes, I did.
- The new story you are writing looks like a real Tour de France.
- I always had a little bike cycling in my head. You should jump on the luggage carrier. If you would do so you would be my prettiest suitcase, if you allow me to make such a comparison. I would bring you with me everywhere. Any place I would go you would ride, run or fly with me. We would win all the races. Even the mountain races. If you would need oxygen I would open your blouse. For you, once more, I would invent my most beautiful caresses; my kisses would be your carbon oxide.

During this dialogue, his rib cage was so highly pressured that it kept inflating.

- Are you not afraid that it could burst?
- What could burst?
- Your rib cage!
- Yes, sometimes I am afraid. But you have to understand me. There are too many potential loves in the skies, in your eyes sometimes, and even in some of your so feminine movements. That the reason why I take a chance. A man who doesn't take a risk will definitely live the rest of his life without love. I guess this the same thing for women; to remain without love? I wouldn't be able to bear it more than a nanosecond.

He stopped his exercise, more in love with love than the nanosecond before, more in love with her, in love with her for ever. He sat down in front of his virtual harpsichord. He programmed this unfathomable music of the French Seventeenth century.

- Hey, are you going to play harpsichord? She said.
- Yes, I love the Mysterious Barricades.
- Is it a piece from the composer François Couperin?

- I cannot hide anything from you *my wonder*.
So, I will tell you my last secret: I don't know why but since my youngest age I always have loved the sound of harpsichord. It has always filled me with a desire for love. As soon as I start listening to the very first notes, my sentimental cords begin to twang. I still remember a *minuet* by Boccherini, a *chaconne* I once heard in Spain. Of course, the stronger notes of the piano also strike my imagination. But in this case, this is rather my mind which reacts first. Before my senses do.
- It's high time we split, Darling.
- Dear U, ♡♪ you are so beautiful to me...♡♪ you are even *frighteningly* beautiful to me.
- How come. How can you use such a word when you speak to me? What happened to your customary reserve?
- This is because of my natural delicacy; I am shy, especially when I reach your dangerous shores. But they are so fascinating... I do like my friend Charles when he sings ♪ I have to hide away ♪. So, as far as I am concerned if I have to hide away I usually do it in a ray, using unusual words.

That day he didn't have to hide far-off or didn't have time to do so. After his unusual words she left him alone with his natural delicacy. She looked at him as if she was going to wander from him. ♪ ♡ ♪ He got a lump in his throat when he saw her coming down the aisle ♪ ♡ ♪ of the garden. But before she would disappear behind a dark green yew, she turned back and saw his emotion. Was it the memory of a beautiful perfume he offered her in their youth, or the recollection of the fresh dew which flew from her eyes near a white weeping willow on a morning dawn that stopped her? She came back by him and kept silent. He kept silent too. She was back: this garden was not yet a paradise but a soft purgatory.

In front of her he tried desperately to protect his heart and not to show that it could burst in one thousand and one little pieces of injury. Then he felt strongly like getting close to her. Would it be the last time? He put a headphone on and tactfully set one on her sweet ears. From the composer Marin Marais he chose ♪ 'The Bell of Saint Genevieve' ♪. Maybe such beautiful music would ring a bell in her mind? Maybe their love would be saved by the bell? He moved back from her. He decided that sadness would not be officially invited. But soon longing would appear. They loved each other so tenderly for so many years. As they were just about to break up, they would then listen to the same pages of music. His heart, that he could easily

prefigure soon became bigger and would not let him down. If all his passions had found their places in his breast, one after one they had been thrown out by tenderness. Of course, they were not banished for ever but tenderness would keep them asleep for a while. He was breathing deeply, he was staring at her. She moved then back to the house.

It was he who was supposed to depart first. This was their initial agreement. Perhaps this had been the reason for her not to vanish in the garden. For their farewell to love, together they had chosen and rented a house in Normandy, a house where to say good bye, a house of the rising sun ☀️? They couldn't see any bad moon rising ☺️. They could go out that night ☺️☀️♠️♣️♥️♦️🎵🎵? It was too early to say. The sun was still hanging high in the sky. She was at the window, standing still. She was more and more far-off, more and more? Strange enough, distance seemed to bring them together as she wrote it to him a few years ago...

🎵 🎵 ♥️ ♣️ Godspeed my love! God! Speed her love again to me... 🎵 🎵
♥️ ♣️.

A deal is a deal. He promised her he would go. It was high time he went. On his way out he stopped. He looked back. This was his turn now. He was in the garden, not far away from the dark green yew, looking desperately for a white weeping willow. She was still leaning out of the window. His rib cage was fulfilled with teardrops. There were millions of tears in her light-green eyes. Never ever after would they find out which of the two first ran into the arms of the other! Both had kept their headphones. From Lully they listened to and danced, hand in hand, the *March for the Turkish Ceremony*. The house became the home of a new rising sun, the sun of a clear water revival.

Hands of The Mona Lisa

HANDS OF THE MONA LISA

I Symbols

- I love symbols. I love hands; to be precise I love women's hands; but of course, I can hear you John, ♪ I know I am not the only one ♪. Hands are one of the most represented symbols on my mind, a little bit like Georgia on Ray's mind, On the other hand if one rolls over Human History one can find hands already painted on ancient rocks and rolls. I love paintings.
- Ancient paintings?
- No, I dig all paintings.
- Are you presently making a list of what you love?
- No, I will stop here. My list of loves is like the constant roll of the ocean. I don't want to roll dice. But I did once.
- Was it a bad roll?
- Not really, the die is never cast but I decided to ♪ hit the road Jack... ♪
- Would you tell me what do you hate?
- I hate to hate.
- Why are you looking at your hands?
- Once my father said to me: 'yours hands are full of fingers!' I am just double checking.
- What did he mean?

- I don't know. On other occasions he said: ' you have midwife hands'... ♪ Meanwhile I am still thinking ♪
- What are you dreaming of?
- I dream of her hands... I can see them while I am speaking with you. First time I saw them they were crossed... They reminded me of the hands of the Mona Lisa. Only her hands were crossed, not her fingers...
- What's the difference?
- When a lady crosses her fingers, it seems to me that she is not open to me, her hands are locked. When a lady crosses her hands only, there is some kind of serenity, she seems to me open and she seems to be open to me...
- I understand, I can see your dream: lift up your hands: we are going to pray.

II Portrait

She was beautiful, wasn't she? She was scandalously beautiful. She seemed to have borrowed the hands of the Mona Lisa. I would later discover that her hands had been painted by some kind of god or by some kind god. Was it an act of kindness? I couldn't say... To touch her hands was a dream, not yet come true. It would be something magical, to touch her hands. Her power of seducing me was so high that I didn't even try to resist her; or was it the power of her hands, or ♪ the power of love ♥ already? I loved her face, her eyes; they were continuously producing smiles, I love her lips. To make a long – but beautiful – story short I was totally manipulated by any single movement she would make, I was palmed like a leaf, upside down by a sweet cake, held and moved, knocked over by her presence. She made me mad, madly in love with the distance which was separating us. Her hair was black and thick, her eyes were dark and deep. Her hands ♪ here, there and everywhere ♪, they were riveting, fascinating, extremely fascinating, driving my obsession. Her breast was discreetly killing my last solemn promise to become a religious man; I would only remain a man of religion. Her smile was a bit mischievous, even risqué for me but it was not demoniac, not even a little bit, clear like a sun ray crossing through the transparent window of a room located on the 29th floor of a multi-star hotel in Singapore. Her voice was so completely seductive, as a violin playing a largo in a Bach sonata fostered with a smooth

piano touch. I remember now, Glenn Gould was playing for us. It was gold in Herbert's hands. And she was fragile, making herself believe she was a strong woman, wasn't she? And she was walking like a star in the night, and she was broadcasting her love song to me. Even today I am not able to describe the movement of her lips; when I pray I am still asking *why* to God. I took a white new feather that a dove offered me and I started writing for her, *my Lisa*, on a parchment. A jealous black swan gave me then its longest feather. I kept writing. She was wearing Jimmy Choo shoes. Before meeting her, I had been visiting her, looking at her window. She was always smiling, discreetly. On those occasions I was dressed rather elegantly. I had bought my most elegant shirt ever. One day, she would disappear; I would kidnap her before any romantic Italian would. If she would escape, I would swing ♪ ♥ Oh Jerry, bring her back; bring my baby back to me... ♥ ♪ ♫ ♭ # ♮ ♪ ... I would also boogie woogie my love to her... But to love her the crazy way I would, I would wait... I would certainly not take such a vital decision now...

III

One message from Leonardo

I had a dream. I was just waiting for Naho. We were supposed to meet at a Renaissance Hotel in Ginza and from there to go and visit a painting gallery located in an old Middle Age castle. Suddenly I heard Leonardo playing lute and singing the way he used to in Milano at the Sforza court. His voice was one of a God:

‘♪ ♫ ♥ why do you refuse to love her? ♪ Lift up your heart and sing her a song which was a hit when I was painting and playing ♥ ♫ ♪... Before my mother was born, nobody knew how to discover the secrets of Nature. To whom Nature would give in? Who would win, Orpheus or Prometheus? I felt like both. My mother knew, she told me and then I tried myself to unveil Nature. I was not the first one, I was not the only one, John, just imagine ♫. I started to challenge Science; I almost stopped painting, fishing for Truth in the Galilee Sea. I went through a tempest, I made some miraculous fishing. Should I have given up? No later, close to the End I could see love for the last time. I left my desperate visions and went back to painting. I realized that if Nature would always create and hide new enigmas, painting, music and an artistic heart would unveil love's enigma to me and to the ones open to the Opus one ♥ ♫ ♪... I was

back to painting: Ann would love Mary and a son would be born to Mary and Mary would love Jesus, soon beautiful Mona would be born, her crossed hands reflecting her, smiling, and John the Baptist would also smile pointing at the skies...

IV Blatant Beauty

I listened to all Leonardo's messages, the clear ones and all the ones to come, still well-concealed secrets, probably unveiled to me by her, my blatant beauty. I knew that love would be another venture, like ever, but she would be on my mind for ever. So one night, I couldn't sleep, I finally understood fate. My heart was knocking at the main entrance of my head, asking me to love her and I was refusing... Leonardo was right... He lately accepted Jesus' message. Four boys in the wind would also; all I needed was love, her love... I was wide-awake. Not that I wanted to sleep that full moon night - I would have rather stayed active just to keep looking for her everywhere - but I finally made up my mind, I finally woke up my human forces... From now on I had decided I would love her.

- Who would you love? – My friend John asked me.
- My blatant beauty, my thrilling lady! My ticker was in there, she pulled it and she got me. She was a dream that I could not make true? Of course, I would. In one's dreams one can make anything happen. In other words, she already took a place in my dream book. I never showed it to you but I have a dream book. That's where I could write to her during hours. In fact, I did sometimes, when I was planning to buy a ticket to fly to Tokyo to see her there. In fact, I was actually dreaming when I listened successively to the *Alleluia* of Handel followed by the *Cello Suite n°1* of Bach. (Let's have now a short digression: in this moment I do have a feeling. I feel both desire and serenity. This is a strange and soft and nice feeling, especially the voice of the cello after the voices of the choir and before I call her to hear her voice again.)
- Where did you develop this passion for her?
- It was love at first sight I guess. One cannot explain. Who can explain love? Who can explain life? One can describe, not explain. And what is the interest of explaining? Trying to understand? I don't want to understand. I know only that I saw her hands then her smile, her lips and just started to love her.

I am sure it is clear to you now. If it is not it doesn't change anything. What can you do against love? As you know my blatant lady has very attractive lips. I dreamt of her kissing me for the first time... Will God listen to my desire? It would be like to be born a second time. I would meet with the soul of her, she would introduce me. She would meet with the sole of me; I would invite her for dinner, look at her smile and laugh nicely with her - I like her intelligence -. Then I would invite her to dance. I am sure the soul of my beauty is like music. It has been composed by Tchaikovsky. It is music for lovers. Once I met with her in Singapore. It was in May. The winter was gone. ♪ Chuck Berry was rolling over Beethoven. He even told Tchaikovsky the news ♪. We met there with my Japanese love. You can imagine what excitement I had but I managed to hide my emotion away. My heart wanted to leave the show. It was arguing with me, beating around the bush. Please, let's go away said my heart to me. I answered to it: "I cannot". How can I leave now? How can I leave now just when God speeds her to me? She had been flying from Tokyo. I flew from Paris. And here at the Hilton in Singapore we met.

V Riddle

Recently we had lunch at Hama in Tokyo. She was wearing a black dress with a red jacket. As ever, when I dated her, I was singing, I was even rolling: "♪ I see a red door I want it painted black... ♪". I wanted to rock her; I wanted to open the doors of her. But I would have to wait. Just listen to my story: I leave tomorrow morning for Shanghai. I will stay at another Marriott located at Tomorrow Square and will dream that I will meet her tomorrow, wherever it will be, in Tokyo or Paris, both cities have an Eiffel Tower, in Sapporo or at the bottom of Mount Fuji...

Dear reader, did you now guess who is my Blatant Beauty? Dear male audience, will you stand up? No? No, my blatant beauty is neither the sumptuous Kylie nor BB Rider... But she is sumptuous. OK I can see you are still hesitating, I will help you a bit. Her name is Naho. Isn't that a wonderful first name, the name of a princess, of a little queenie? Dear reader, from now on you may read a little bit of poetry; you know, poetry is good for your health... In fact, as a

privileged reader I will let you discover a couple of poems I have sent to Naho, wishing to enter into a *couple building process*. I will certainly not let you enter into our intimacy but words are all I have to make you understand why, as far as I am concerned, love and lovely hands, and mysterious hands have such a power over my imagination... Especially when they belong to a lady with such a smile, with such lovely sensual lips...

VI
999 haikus

During a long and winding period of my life - this, according to a rough calculation I made recently, can be estimated to 43,200 hours - I was no able to write to Naho. (Dear reader, you could read the minutes of this 43,200-hour period in a lost memo if you find it but I warn you, even Freud gave up. You know... when somebody's life is boring the recap of this period is tiring not to say boring). I still wonder why I was not able to write: hands are also made for writing. Anyway, one day I made my mind from down to up and I decided I would write to Naho, so she could feel a little bit the way I felt myself when I was writing to her... Writing to her was of course a different feeling... a new experience, not a scientific experiment, rather a rare moment of emotion. I would now take a simple example. If one day I was feeling blue, I would ring the bell; I mean I would start writing to Naho. Immediately she would become my blue bell, then, all of a sudden, my sky would jump, I would get thumps in my throat, I would sail to Naho on a boat, I would fly to her on a plane... Here below, in chapters seven and eight - I prefer to avoid chapter eleven - are the first words Woodworth allowed me to send to Naho; they are some kind of résumé of my lovely obsession, the ones she would adore? To apply at the doors of Naho I would need to hold 999 haikus...

VII
Dear Dear Naho



From Naho on
Whatever be nights or days

I will dream of you

Because of you
My nights will turn into mystery days
From Naho on

What about?
If I would write to you
All nights and days...

Yes?
Ok, I will write to you everyday
From Naho on

Never the less
Always the many more
From Naho on



VIII
On a cherry-boat

I knew we would meet again, even in the rain; she would walk me around in Tokyo, her city, to the city of Naho. I thought of her during Valentine's Day, the whole day and the whole night. I was walking alone in the mountain. I stopped by a fountain. I had a dream, Naho and me, kissing on Mount Fuji... But I didn't dare to call her, and I didn't dare to write-up my dream to her. The following night I did... I prayed Fuji-san. Was it possible that...? She was so beautiful to me... Was it possible that...? She made me believe in love again... Was it possible that ...? I had met her... Naho... Was she my Japanese sleeping beauty? Was it possible that Naho and I loved so much painting?



On a *chéri*-boat

From Naho on... my life will go on... sending flowers... to my Japanese Lady... I will cross many rivers to discover... non-stop ... my sweet lovely Lady...

When she will be cold... in winter... her hands I will hold... then... I will offer her... on a chéri-boat... a sweet lovely lady coat... from Naho on...



IX Silent message

If, after I finally dared to send to Naho just a little piece of the movements which were agitating my heart, I would have received a few words from her, then I would have flown immediately to Vladivostok and then up to Hokkaido. I would have taken Naho to the snow festival and then we would have looked for a white magic sheep (*) helped by an Akita Innu blue dog. There in a magic northern triangle comparable to the Bermuda one we would have found this rare sheep and we would have taken a sample of, in fact the necessary quantity of wool to get Naho a knitted woollen pullover. But no word was arriving from Japan. Naho's poetry was silent but I could feel it was growing. I needed no word at this stage. I knew it would happen but I didn't know when. So, on my side I kept writing and I couldn't stop because I was constantly seeing Naho smiling. While I was writing I tried to find out what could make Naho uncross her wonderful hands so she could write to me. I imagined using the transmutation symbols of the alchemists: her still serene hands would then move, they would keep their natural elegance but would write a first message to me, as if Naho would send some kind of personal regards to me... So, I looked for a key, for a lamp, for the Sun but we were at night and the Sun had no scheduled meeting with the moon... So, I looked for another star, Sirius maybe, crowned with a crescent moon, avoiding any bad moon rising. I am not a professional astrologer but exceptionally I was permitted by Nostradamus to read in the stars. I was advised to fly immediately to Moscow. There I went to one of my favourite restaurants and although I was alone I ordered a fish for two. After a strong cocktail made of half vodka and half sake I could catch sight of the lost third eye of Humanity in the triangle of the white sheep. I could see the hands of the Mona Lisa expressing good feelings and actions. They were totally happy. Her hands had a special power that Leonardo

protected in his painting. They were the hands of a queen. She wouldn't hide them, she wouldn't; she is a queen. Moses hid his hands when he received the tables of the law at Sinai. He heard the song of the mighty God 'Let my people go'. But I wouldn't let her go too far away; her hands were an amulet to me.

(*) a magic sheep is a sheep with an inexhaustible wool reserve. One may choose its favourite colour provided it is white and I know Naho loves white. Last but not least, one should not mix up the white magic sheep with the wild sheep that some people have been chasing in a beautiful Japanese dream.

X

Impatience is a flower

I had been impatient. But in Moscow I was still far from Vladivostok. Once upon a morning I was reading a book full of Apollinaire's calligraphies when I received a message from Naho, a message I considered to be the first one, the first intimate one, strictly private, a lovely one, how could it not be lovely. Messages from Naho could be only lovely. It was such a sweet message that it was like if Naho would have put one of her sweet hands up on my face, like a caress, like a massage. My heart became warm, not to say hot, it would never be cold. I kept the hand of Naho on my face and started drawing my words to Naho. A few nanoseconds later other words flew from Naho airport to my poetical magical mystery control tower. She said she was missing me... This was the loveliest missing message from a miss I ever received... A wonderful gift was included in her message, her mobile number. It was incredible, her secret number was +++ 81.33.81.33.81.33 and mine was, believe it or not, dear reader interested in destiny +++ 33.81.33.81.33.81 and I sang to myself

♪ ♪ ♣ what a wonderful-world-based-on-numbers... ♥ ♪ ♪

I flew immediately to Vladivostok...

XI

Sapporo

As in my dream, Naho was waiting for me at New Chitose airport. She was wearing a warm white woollen knit pullover. We took two espressos at a sweet little Japanese coffee house and then we took a coach to Lake Shikotsu. The following winter day we went to Mount Tarumae. Nature was our friend.

With Naho I could just enjoy beauty, the beauty of a haiku, the beauty of life, her beauty. I understood that all images, all feelings I had could be voiced by the love potion number 999, the one containing 999 haikus. I started drawing the word 'haiku' in Japanese writing. For me it was like a religious act, like scripture 俳句. Then I opened a poetry book holding a quantity of 999 haikus. I stop on one of the oldest one composed by Matsuo Basho:

An old pond
A frog jump,
The noise of water

Then I listened to the Japanese music of the haiku reading the original poem.

Fu-ru-i-ke-ya,
ka-wa-zu-to-bi-ko-mu,
mi-zu-no-o-to.

Later I would write two little poems, two cousins of haikus called senryus in Japanese language:

Love?
My love...
Her?
Ever

A flower?
Naho
À Chérie?
Naho

XII

Last conversation with John

- It seems to me that you fell in love just because this young lady had the hands of Mona Lisa...
- Yes and no... Naho appeared first to me as a princess, then as a Virgin...
- And the second time?
- It seemed to me that I wouldn't be able anymore to contemplate a landscape, to meditate in front of the sea without the presence of Naho.
- And the third time?
- Let me fly back to Naho...

XIII

Destination: Naho Airport

Being with Naho was like being reborn, to bring new hopes into my life. Maybe it was predestination. Today I understood the last paintings of Leonardo. But this had no importance. The impression they produced on me was the same one Naho made on me the first time we met and each time I met her after. She would remain my loveliest enigma. 'Nature likes to hide away' said once Heraclites and I could hear everyday mother Mary softly singing ♪ 'Let it be' ♣. I would not try to understand moreover; I got it all reading Leonardo's messages. I would not look another way ever; I would look at love, the love Naho would offer me just when I would be looking at her hands, looking up at her so beautiful face, smiling, looking at her, close to me. Naho was my Mona, but she was first Naho, she was twenty-nine, she was beautiful and in my secret garden she was mine. From Naho on I would always paint her again and again; I would paint her hands, her smile, her lips, her heart...

King of Hearts

King of Hearts

TO PUSHKIN

Dear Russian Reader
As anyone may feel free
One can plant a tree
Or become an amateur writer

As I wished for ages
In the following pages
I see no statement open to dispute
If I just want to pay a modest tribute
Because of Evgeni Onegin
To Alexander Pushkin

But should I leave in the shade
His beautiful *Queen of spades*?
I mean *Pikovaya Dama*...
No! It would be a drama...
In the shade of my tree
I wear no shades I feel free

Dear Russian Reader
I wrote in my hearts
King of hearts
A modest homage to a great writer

PART I
In another life I will marry U

- Let me introduce you to U. U had blue eyes. To be precise her eyes were turquoise. They were incredibly turquoise. Like a wish that cannot be told. Her lips had stolen the rose color of a rose laurel, a rose that had still to be invented and a rose that was still to be born. That night I had to choose between her eyes and her lips. I couldn't. I took her hands. In her hands they were so many messages waiting for me...
- But Grandfather when did you first meet U?
- It was in Moscow, a long time ago. Maybe in another life...
- Oh, please tell us...
- You want me to tell you about my story, about this young lady who came to stay in my heart?
- Yes we do
- Do you all promise to keep my secret?
- Yes, we do.
- OK, so I will.
- Once I happened to be in Moscow and had a very strange feeling. But a rather pleasant one. It was a first of April, a date I have a liking for. If you want to know why just ask Auntie Helen. There was still some snow in the streets. I was by myself. My friend Piotr was working late that night. I decided I would have dinner at Café Pushkin. Then I might go to the Bolshoi ♪. The theatre was said to close its doors for renovation and would then remain closed for more than three

years. Three long years...As it was so often the case the bar at Café Pushkin was crowded. An old black and white photograph of the French singer Gilbert Bécaud drew my attention. He wore a white spotted dark blue tie and was smoking a cigarette. He couldn't be a man like others because he didn't smoke the same cigarettes as the others ♪ ♪. My friend Mick would have agreed with me. I started looking for Nathalie. I couldn't find her. I was about to leave and walk in the snow to the Red Square when, suddenly I saw a nice young lady standing by the piano. She was not turning the pages of a music score, she was only standing. She was not listening to the pianist; she was simply speaking to the piano. Although the pianist was on duty, the piano had no problem to listen to the lady. I could see her, beautiful, with her short autumn red hair. I came closer and discover her incredible blue eyes. She had turquoise eyes. She was whispering. Both the lady and the piano seemed to share. At this moment and under these particular circumstances I thought that the pianist should stop his performance, of course just after he would have finished playing this first movement of the Moonlight sonata. I even decided that if he wouldn't go away soon after the moon was gone I would virtually shoot the pianist. Not that I was not in a good mood, not like in a movie, not to kill him, just to make him understand that he had to go and leave the lady alone with the piano. The piano was absolutely beautiful. It was a Bosendorfer with, as it appeared in the advertising campaign I had seen a few days before 'a very specific shimmering sound'. The pianist stopped playing. Just after this first movement, as if he had understood. Understood what? That after this first movement no other part was necessary, that the sonata should only have one movement and be named the 'one movement sonata', the movement of the heart. The pianist left. The lady sat down. She started playing a prelude written by Sergei Rachmaninov when he was about to leave Russia. Actually, the lady and the piano were sharing the music. But I was there, close. I was admiring her and I was jealous. Why would the piano steal the lady away from me? The lady and the piano understood. She stopped playing when the last note of the already nostalgic prelude was played. I introduced myself to the lady... She smiled... Looking at me she said: We know each other. Will you remember me? I am your friend, U. We met, in another life. U was back, back to me, like the most beautiful notes in a suite

- of Bach, like the ballerina in a Tchaikovsky ballet. 🎵 🎵And I sang to myself 'what a beautiful world...' 🎵 🎵
- And then what did you do Grandfather?
 - I told her what I never dared to tell her during our previous lives, I told her that I loved her...
Before she would possibly ask me why I didn't tell her before that I loved her I added: ♥ I love you because you're U 🎵.
 - Will you marry me? U asked me.
 - Yes, I will marry you, in another life...
 - But then what did you do?
 - Time was stopped. Even the clock was stopped. The clock indicated 19:17. I left Café Pushkin
 - Alone?
 - No, U came out with me. But in those moments when love seems to be going away one feels always alone.
 - Did you take U to the Bolshoi?
 - No, but let me keep my dream going... When I left my favorite restaurant in Moscow, I couldn't see the statue of Pushkin anymore...
 - Where was the statue? It had disappeared?
 - No, the statue was simply quiet, the statue was discreet. Probably Pushkin was writing a new masterpiece.
 - In another square?
 - No, in another life... Life is sometimes a circle.

PART II

I will marry U

- Grandfather, grandfather, please, please, we want to hear the continuation of your story – shouted my grandchildren upon their arrival.
- Did you keep my secret?
- Yes, yes, we did...
- In this case let's go back to Café Pushkin...

Pushkin had just finished his new masterpiece under the title of '*King of Hearts*'. He wrote his new story, still unpublished today, as the following episode of his famous '*Queen of Spades*'. It took him approximately one century and a half to make up his mind and to write this continuation. I could read this new story in my head during a sleepless night, a night I was dreaming of U. But for a reason I

cannot explain the last page of *the book in my head* was missing. Who tore it off? Whoever was responsible for such a blaming act? The next morning, I tried to call Alexander. I was told by the Central Telephone Company that Mr Pushkin had no mobile phone or any kind of telephone. I wrote a polite letter to his personal assistant and an old lady who was born before Tchaikovsky composed his opera inspired by Pushkin's book sent me a polite answer. She was stating that Mr Pushkin had been travelling for the last one hundred seventy years since he left this terrestrial world. She was adding that the quickest way to get in touch with him was to go in a winter night at the base of Pushkin's statue in Moscow when no one else would brave the cold weather in the depth of the night. There I should watch out for Pushkin's statue to move...

I called U. If it would have been possible I would have called her every day. I wanted her to join me in this nightly venture. Going out at night in this area could be a risky business due to the very cold winter that was rife in Moscow that year. But with a couple of glasses of Champagne and one bottle of vodka I would not be exposing U. Her presence besides me would be of great help. Not to mention the pleasure to be with her. When U picked up her phone and before I would have explained the reason of my call she anticipated and said she was certain that I was going to tell her that I wrote another story about our tender love affair. Of course, I did but the story was still in my head not yet written on a paper neither on a CD... So, U wanted another story... Such a piece of news was considerable to me. As an immediate consequence I decided that *if* I would marry U in another life I would definitely love her in this life. And having taken this decision, all of a sudden, her turquoise blue eyes appeared to me, her so rose lips started dancing in front of mine and her incredible smile was such an attraction to me that it was like gravitation...

I know I introduced you to U in the first part of this story but I think it is time to tell you more about my U; yes, I would rather call her *my* U. I love her so I am entitled to call her mine. Anyhow before I walk her to the church I have to prove to her how much I love her. Of course, I will not explain why, it is my secret and to be honest I don't know why anyway. So, U is such a delicious woman that Tsar Nicholas the first could have compared her beauty to the one of Natalya Pushkin. When I met U first she was only sixteen. Immediately I remembered the fact that Pushkin met his future wife when she was sixteen only and I started singing to U: 🎵 🎵 ❤️ you're

sixteen, you're beautiful and you're mine...❤️ 🎵 🎵. I thought: is she mine already?

Not only was U beautiful but she was so kind, she was such a sweet person... She would wait for me when I was late. She would welcome me with a cappuccino that we would share at a bar before I would leave my lovely Russia and my beloved U... U was my sunray in the eyes of which a piece of light jumping on the white winter snow would come and dance the polonaise composed by Tchaikovsky for his opera *Evgeni Onegin*. Does a ray have eyes? Of course, dear reader, a ray has thousands of eyes like U had thousands of smiles... The sun would die if U would go out of my life. After so many years looking for love and having enjoyed so many experiences, if I had to give a final and precise definition of kindness I would simply answer 'U', if I had to give an objective definition of beauty I would immediately show you a photograph of 'U', if I had to give a new and open definition of love I would simply say 'U'. U has been my only love who has been also and constantly a friend.

- Say no more - said my heart - I know that you know U inside out...
- Ok sweet heart I know you know... Let me then come back to my present story.
- I thought it was a fairy tale? My heart went on...
- Of course, it is a fairy tale... You, open heart... This goes without saying.

So, once I asked U to join me at the Pushkin's statue U didn't hesitate. She was even enthusiastic. She said to me:

- You know I never met the Great Pushkin before...
- Neither did I...
- I have an idea...
- Please my Darling...
- Why don't you call Niania?
- Niania? You mean Arina Rodionovna, Pushkin's nanny?
- Yes, herself.
- But if Pushkin has no phone, Niania will not have one either...
- Come on there are so many ways to call on a person... Especially in another life - U added. I can do it if you prefer.

My level in Russian being so low at that time I accepted with pleasure and relief U's proposal. Today I can still see U calling

Niania in the cold wind of Moscow and asking her help in order to communicate with Pushkin. Niania promised U that she would make sure that her little Alexander, her Sasha as she named the great writer, would be available for a quickie that coming night...

It seemed to U and I unhoped-for, almost incredible that on that same night we would meet and possibly speak to Pushkin himself.

U and I decided to have another dinner at Café Pushkin before we would start our long cold night at Pushkin's Square.

Our early dinner started late. We were seated at our favourite table on the second floor looking over Pushkin's Square and were having the black caviar and Champagne we ordered as a starter when, looking out of the window the beautiful and sharp eyes of U saw the right arm of the statue, I mean the right arm of Pushkin, moving. It was like a sign. U put her charming hand on my left arm and pressed it. She invited me to look through the window. So far, I have to admit that I had been looking only at U, mainly through her eyes, only distracted by the wonderful movements of her rose and animated lips so that I didn't pay attention to any other detail. Effectively while my left arm was under the nice pressure of U's hand the right arm of Pushkin was clearly inviting U to come up in his direction. Had Pushkin recognized in U the late beauty of his dear Natalya or had Niania done a good job at an earlier time? Maybe Niania wanted to protect U and me from the deep cold of the deep night... Whatsoever, I promised the waiter that U and I would be back soon, that we had to leave right now for a few moments but that he had to keep the table for us. I paid for the caviar and added thousands of rubbles as a thank you. U and I rushed out of Café Pushkin and ran to the quiet square. The statue was still like a bridge over sparkling waters. We didn't dare to shout out to Alexander Pushkin. Maybe he was sleeping, maybe he was thinking, maybe he was writing... Suddenly the right arm moved again showing something somewhere on the ground to U and I. It was a sealed envelope. U made a quick genuflexion and took up the envelope. We both looked at Pushkin's statue as if we were expecting an order to stay or to go or to follow it somewhere, a little bit like great seducers, at a moment having to follow a statue. But Pushkin didn't move further. We went back to the restaurant, back to our table. There we opened the envelope. Inside was a CD. The same waiter came back to us. We were so excited that we made him wait a little bit up to the moment we ordered, for the second time, black caviar and Champagne. While waiting for the glasses we tried to save the content of the CD on U's computer. The sentence: 'for reading only' appeared on the

screen. Once U had pressed on 'OK' a second sentence showed up 'you will be able to read the following text only one time then this text will disappear for ever' ... What shall we do? Life is sometimes trying to square the circle.

PART III King of Hearts

- Would you like to listen to the end of my story?
- Grandfather, we are all ears...

King of Hearts... It was an interesting title for this new book. Did Pushkin mean a man falling in love with every woman he meets? Did he mean a gentleman? If I had to briefly summarize the plot of the story I would write a digest as follows: an old man at eighty-seven was asked to reveal one of his secrets the one that would make a beautiful and gentle lady happy, really happy, for ever when falling in love and then getting married with a man, a gentle one I guess...

But now my children, I am sure that you are wondering if U and I clicked on in order to read the story written on the CD. What would you have done in our position? Not an easy decision...

We decided not to open the CD, our emotion was too strong and the risk to read and then forget fairly possible. On the other hand, we were very curious, impatient... As ever U saved us. She had another idea, another brilliant idea. We should go, look for and track down a fortune-teller, a person using play cards for this purpose. We both agreed that this person should be an old lady born in the second half of the 19th century so that she could tell Tchaikovsky the news ♪ ♪ ... Which news? That he, the great composer should be prepared or go back in time to offer the world another opera titled 'King of Hearts' as a continuation of 'Queen of Spades'. We both

rejected the idea of asking a clairvoyant using a crystal ball... We didn't want to know the future, what a lunatic idea; we just wanted to know if we could open the CD we received from the statue. There was another advantage in choosing a play card teller: if we were lucky the king of hearts would definitely appear and maybe tell us how to behave.

For the second time that night we had to rush out of the restaurant. The waiter probably saw U and me as a couple of eccentrics. But we had no time to lose. We gave away most of our rubbles to the waiter as I had seen one of my generous friends do during our dinner a month earlier. We only kept a fistful of remaining dollars for our coming venture.

To discover an old lady born in the 19th century in the cold of the Moscow night ♪ was a challenge. We thought that we could call Countess Anna Fedotovna for help but it was late. Furthermore, she was supposed to be dead but we all have several lives, don't we? Her grandson Tom Sky confirmed. So, we hired a free driver for one thousand rubbles. The driver accepted to be paid in dollars and said he knew in the Arbat district an old lady who used to play cards with Countess Anna when both were young ladies.

The driver left us in front of a palace. The lady was living in a nice house opposite to the palace. We were welcomed by a servant dressed as servants were dressed at Tsar Nicholas the first's time. While we were waiting for the old lady to whom we promised not to disclose her name we were offered Siberian vodka. After a few minutes the lady came. She apologized for keeping us waiting. U and I realized at that moment that Niania was still helping us. Not only we had hired a driver who knew where the friend of Countess Anna was living but this friend seemed to have been waiting for our visit. A table with a pack of cards set on a green cover was already prepared. The lady invited us to sit down in front of her. She had a smile before we would explain the reason of our visit. This smile was worth any explanation. She then told us that we would have to choose three cards from the pack.

The first card which appeared was Lancelot, Jack of all clubs. This card had the particularity to display a four-leaf clover. The lady commented that we were certainly lucky lovers. The second card was Lucy in the sky with diamonds. Lucy was temporarily standing in for Queen Rachel. A marriage with diamonds would last at least

sixty years. Maybe more... Maybe for ever... The third card was Charles, King of hearts... The old lady said that she was not supposed to give a precise interpretation to this card; there were several ways of understanding - she added... Life is a circle... But fortunately, we understood what we had *not* to do after King of hearts had given us a wink: a secret held by Pikovaya Dama or King Charles should never be revealed... Then we read the last story written just for the two of us by Pushkin and we would keep our secret: in another life I would marry U for ever... In another life...

A Fish for Two

A Fish for Two

'I was not merely head over heels in love with her, I was saturated through and through.'

Charles Dickens

They had just arrived in Moscow. The Air Freedom flight AF 1944 had brought them back to the city where they first met. He had been dreaming for so long that he would come back to the USSR. With her. Before their departure, from Paris, they had been promised snow. White snow is a necessity in a winter love story. The concierge of the Metropol had booked a table for two at Café Pushkin. Night'in looked magnificent in her Féraud dress. She was singing in the snow. He could see her long black hair dancing in the wind. Before they entered the restaurant, they made a quick stop at Pushkin's square to say a few words to the statue. Then the head waiter took them to their table and offered them a glass of Champagne. Night'in wanted to share black caviar. She also ordered a fish for two. The dinner could start:

- How is the lovely lady tonight?
- Which one?
- Are you trying to hurt me Darling?
- Of course not.
- As far as I am concerned I can see only one lovely lady in this room.
- In this room, tonight, I may agree...
- OK, but be aware, one day, I will get rid of the walls.
- It is impossible to get rid of walls.

- Not at all, remember Berlin...
- That's a special case. President Kennedy was a Berliner. However, do you mean that you want me to be free?
- But you are free Darling, free to love me... I have a dream...
- Martin, do you feel like a king?
- No, I just imagine that I am free to love you.
- I will make no comment!
- You don't have to speak...
- You don't like me when I speak?
- I am not saying anything like that. I just mean that under any circumstances I could be your advocate. I also mean, like in a song, I like you the way you are...

The waiter brought the first course:

- Would you like avocado with your caviar? – said Night'in.
- With crab it will be delicious but ask the waiter not to lump them all together...
- Are you afraid they could fight among themselves?
- Are they in love?

She didn't have to answer the question. The head waiter came and served them the fish for two she ordered, on a golden plate, laid on a pedestal table.

- Do you know the name of the fish?
- Don't tell me. It's Wanda?
- Yes, it is! You're a winner!
- I wonder...
- Why?
- I like wondering...
- Did you ever meet Wanda?
- Not in real life... Only in a book...
- Which one, *Venus in furs*?
- No, a book of poetry, *The Destinies*, by Vigny.
- If I recall correctly, this Wanda was Russian?
- She was a princess.
- Would you have preferred to meet me in this book?
- I don't know. You love freedom...
- That's right. Won't you ever catch me?

He would never answer that question. The waiter offered them the dessert menu:

- What about fresh red berries?
- Good idea!
- With some cream or without?
- No cream for me please.
- It's a pity, I like cream, cream is soft...
- OK let's go for cream. Tonight, we share everything.
- I feel like a '*creaminal*' ...
- Don't feel guilty Darling, everybody has a right to enjoy life the way he or she feels.

She called the waiter. Then she took up the conversation.

- We were speaking of freedom, were we not?
- Yes, freedom, what about love?
- Love and freedom...
- Do they go well together?
- Good question Martin, are you Lutheran?
- This dinner is as nice as the previous one we shared in Moscow...
- When?
- Was it two centuries ago? At least. I remember when we first met...
- You mean, in another life?
- Yes. You know what? I wish I would meet you in all my lives.
- Again, you don't want me to be free.
- Free, free... What will you do free without love.
- I think I will manage.
- Stop joking!
- OK, I agree, Maybe I will be a little bit sad. Maybe, like in another song, I will be weary, feeling down...
- Let's go to the Bridge.
- It's early to play cards.
- Darling, you are right and I am afraid that the winner would take it all. Anyhow, when I said 'the Bridge', I meant the Great Bridge of Stone near the Cathedral of the Christ-Saviour. Like a bridge over troubled vodka, like in your song, whenever for you, I will lay me down...
- Honest? A good vodka is never troubled.
- I know, it is pure. Like love.
- Is love pure?

- Yes, it is. However, passion may not be. Except the one of Jesus. Coming back to vodka, if a good one is never troubled, so my eyes will be when you will leave me.
- Darling, I will never leave you.

He couldn't believe it. For the first time since they met she called him 'Darling'. Of course, life and love should be a two way traffic, but, so far, he had no hope that what he had prayed for, for so many years, say again, for more than two centuries or even more, happened that night. Furthermore, she said she would never leave him. He was very moved. His heart started gambolling and gambling. He kindly asked it to keep quiet. His heart didn't keep quiet. It kept bowling and simply answered him:

- Please, leave me alone, I am your heart but I am free.
- Free, free, why do they all want to be free? Dear heart, if I am in love, you are not free anymore.

Although a prelude of Bach was played, he couldn't come back to serenity. To do so he had to escape. He had to write. She understood. She asked the waiter for a piece of paper. These lovely moments had to be written. He had a miraculous escape. He left the room. Were the walls still there? He met with her again. In another century? He loved so much the Middle Age. When Moscow was still a peaceful village - was it ever? Their fairy tale could start. She had always been his Princess. And today, how could he meet a real Princess if it wasn't in the Middle Age? Only there he would dare to touch her hand. There only he would dare to look at her indefinable eyes. Did she ever pose for Leonardo da Vinci? In another century? Would he dare to tell her so many secrets and to open the door of the magical mystery tour...? Would he steal her heart, here, there and everywhere? And a kiss from her tender lips? The beautiful music on the piano stopped. Night'in broke the silence. She entered the Tower. It was her turn. As one joins the dance of life. The real one? The one that literature lets out? She said:

- You are very romantic, Darling.
- No, just Romanesque...
- Darling, it was impossible for us not to meet.

She ordered tea for two.

When they left the Café Pushkin the snow had disappeared. They rushed down Tverskaia Street up to the illuminated Kremlin. Then they ran along the sleeping Aleksandrovskaia Garden. There they made a last stop and had their photograph taken – will they get married? Finally, out of breath but so happy, they arrived at the Great Bridge of stone... There, a last miracle took place: like them, the river was free, like them it was in love. The winter ice was gone and the Moskova was ready to take them for a long journey. There were so many stars shining in the green eyes of Night'in... They heard the music and the singing of Simon and Garfunkel...

Waterloo and Austerlitz Stations

Waterloo and Austerlitz Stations

“England will always be the sister of France”
Victor Hugo

I

♪♪ when a man loves a woman ♪, he can have different reactions, especially when he often flies or takes fast trains on a regular basis...

As you will soon remember, in a fast train they had met once already. At that time, they were both back home from Brussels. He was travelling alone. She was with two colleagues. Her name was Esther Sarah. Or, to be precise, this was the first name he had given her. The extremely fast train was that day extremely delayed. Nobody would welcome the lonesome man when he would arrive to the station in Paris. So, he had welcomed this setback with a certain pleasure. Maybe it was a way to postpone the moment when he would realize how lonely he felt that day, as one can try to partially compensate a lack of affection. Captivated and bewitched by the beauty of the unknown Cybele, he had attended an active gossip session, this sort of free exchange that human beings, too human, have been going in for, for so long now... Penelope was playing opposite to Esther Sarah. Melisa was punctuating. It was some kind of a waltz of gossips with three female dancers. So, this conversation, ‘full of sound and hurry’, sorry, I mean this choreography, - orchestrated by an admirer of Shakespeare? -, had no particular charm except the irresistible one of Esther Sarah. Was

all this ‘much ado for nothing? Was the intention to excommunicate others? He thus understood better why peoples, neighbours, were most of time communicating upside down. Let’s look to one example only, England and France. After initial skirmishes, both countries had conducted battles and then wars, on two occasions the wars lasted more than one hundred years.

Thus, captivated he had been. In his already a dream of her...On her swing did he push her straight away? Then he had played, still alone, at the “take- a-chance-with-love’ game”. He had always been weak enough to consider himself as a man of communication, especially when he was speaking to a lady. He had been in love, often, too often? Yes, he loved, frequently, with pleasure, sometimes like a crazy horse, sometimes killing her softly with his ♪ ♥ love, sometimes speaking words of wisdom, as mother Mary used to do ♥ ♪.

II

That day when the train finally arrived in Paris, it arrived without whistling. At that moment he was forced to leave Esther Sarah. He had made a vow, just a simple request? He just wanted to see one more time, *one-day-U-will-see-her-again*, Esther Sarah. She would wear a lily in her hair? No, she wouldn’t, she would appear to him without any single apparel and she would have no mobile phone in her hands taking up all her time. When the train finally arrived in Paris, rather than to lodge a complaint to Goliath, the train administration, he, little David preferred to fill out a tenderness application form and to ask a big favour to life.

Since that day when they first met, he dreamt every day of *that-day-I-will-meet-Esther-Sarah-again*. He said to himself: *when a man loves a woman, he should never ever give up his dream of her loving him*. So, in order to take no chances, he left no stone unturned: from now on he decided to travel regularly and only with high speed trains. Each time he was travelling he prayed for the train to arrive late. And we have to admit that each time he was lucky, the train was late. He would never ever lean out of the window, preferring to pay all his attention to each and every seat where his fair lady could appear. His wishes were always granted. During his trips, in order

to be able to check each train he was booking several seats. He was taking advantage of the frequent stops of the trains in the countryside to watch out. He was watching out for Esther to be here, there and everywhere. He was not raving mad, only madly in love with Esther Sarah. Now, on a particular day, it just happened that, having all his train tickets with him, he left Austerlitz station bound for London.

A high-speed train can hide another one... He arrived early at the station. The train left. He fell asleep. As usual he was not wearing any watch, so he used the time machine he had in his head and his life went backwards. When he woke up, Esther Sarah was there. She was kneeling at his feet. As if she was sitting at her usual place? In her eyes was the light, like a birth. Sleep was drifting away. Through the window out of which it was highly recommended not to lean, the sun was already sweeping the mist of his life. Suddenly, his lips opened. Out of the right-hand of the door of his soul, they whispered a unique word:

- You?

Out of the two hands of the window of her soul, a soft answer came:

- Yes, this is me...
- I believed you had returned to the land of Moab...
- I came back; I wanted to see you again... She said somewhat mischievously.

III

Out of her softly cheerful eyes, she cast a look at him, a look like the one he had to her on the very moment they had to split at the station after their first and at that time, probably, their last chance encounter. The memory he had kept of this look was the one of a radiant young lady, with an almost constant smile. The look she just offered him now was different, pensive, but still winning, a tiny bit wheedling. This look could only have appeared and disappeared in the eyes of a woman. She came back to reality:

- Will you remember? When we met and left in the same nanosecond you offered me a miniature of perfume. Since that instant, I believe this little flask to be magic.

Then, theatrical, she added:

- If you ask me to do so, I am able and ready to lie down at your feet. I could even die of love...

- ♪ Like a bridge over troubled water ♪♪? No, don't go that far away. I prefer you kneeling closer and closer to me... He couldn't believe it. It was much more than a miracle...

A ticket inspector showed up, as an angel with blue wings and a cap of the same colour. Seeing her in such a special position, he questioned the beautiful prisoner:

- Do you feel alright?

- Yes, I do.

The ticket inspector went away. One should do his duty but not interfere. Was it a tactical move? Kept free, the almost child-like woman could, question after question, put in chains the man bound to another land. [Wait a second, I am hesitating. Shall I make another translation such as: the almost child-like woman could then put in jail with her questions the man bound to an island?]. [Is it here a new syntax, a complicated one? No, I just do my best to avoid syntax errors or worse, linguistic misunderstandings, which could be born and then die on the lips of a young and beautiful lady, if I may speak this way...].

IV

It's high time we went back to the man. His heart was already going on a fast tick-tock beat when the merry young lady asked at her turn:

- Do you go to London?

- No, I go to Windsor...

- I go there too. The Queen is there...

- I assume you have been invited?

- In a way, yes...

- How come, if I may ask?

- As everyone is. Don't you read the press, all these daily wires, cables and opinions, all these mirrors of the night?

- No. I just arrived yesterday from the region of Castile the Old in Spain, where, lately, I made use of loneliness. In fact, to

be precise, there I was not totally busy with loneliness. Although I was living in a monastery there, if during the day I was reading Saint Benoit, at night I was thinking of you. And you, during all this time which left me completely indifferent except you, what did you do?

- I stopped singing out of tune; I decided not to tittle-tattle if you see what I mean, as you had kindly suggested me to do when we split at the station. I behaved as others quit smoking, because there is no smoke without fire. Thanks to you my flames don't burn the others anymore. They may burn someone one day, someone like you, but it will be softly. I was in London when I took the decision to be a good girl. However, I needed to keep warm. So, I went to Saint Paul's to collect my new thoughts as one would gather flowers together. There, in the middle of a prayer, I decided to become a journalist. I took up studies; I am a student, a trainee in this moment. I write papers, articles. I like travels; they take me out of my troubles. You know, 🎵 nobody knows the trouble I see... 🎵 but you... 🎵 😊 I know that you saw them the first time we met. And maybe I heard you praying in your monastery? I was ready to compose an oratorio for you, to cry you a river, to swim in an ice-stream, to stop regularly seeing the movies of Mel Brooks and then I would follow a little rivulet on the English Riviera which would bring you back to me. I finally ran. I boarded this fast-moving train... and I found you here, sleeping like a baby.

V

And him, he was remaining silent, contemplative. He was remembering that scene at the station in Paris when on the verge of losing her, feeling a little bit shy, even guilty, he was hoping to hear from her this beautiful meiosis said classically by a lover to a lover: 'You can go, I don't hate you'.

He had to try to come back to her with words:

- Are you in a mission?
- Not really, I had no chance recently to live in a Spanish monastery. Did you meet Cervantes there? No, I would rather say that I go on an assignment... I am supposed to comment on a coming historical event, the main European story of this century...

He came back to silence. For him, the main story of his life was to have been able to meet again with this magical mystery bird called

Esther Sarah.

After a long stay at the monastery where, contrary to his happy disposition to speak and although he had made there upside-down vows, he had been permitted to pronounce only two words, he now felt totally ready to evangelize the sunny temperament of Esther Sarah. Is that a question of priesthood? Not really, I would rather think of a magical mastery...

If he wouldn't have been at the same moment concentrated on the internal reading of the life of a saint, struck dumb with the breast of a virgin that the painter never wanted to hide and stoned with the premature worship of this pretty woman specialised in the Holy Writ, here is what this man who loved England would have known: Esther Sarah held out a little portfolio to him. He stopped his internal reading, read what his Esther handed him and understood. He discovered that, without him knowing it, he was on board a special train. This train was running under the ground at a fast speed in direction of white cliffs with a further stop option at Wuthering Heights' station. No, it is not a cock-and-bull or cock-and-lion story, please kindly listen – by the way, ♪ is there anyone who wants to listen to my story ♪?

VI

That day the TGV couldn't be delayed, because that day, at the same time, a certain agitation was taking place at Downing Street number 10 in London and a real effervescence was bubbling in the Palais de l'Élysée in Paris. Maybe two old people in each country had been forced down some kind of ♯ ♭ ♯ ♭ love potion number 9 ♯ ♭, some kind of waters showered under a bridge out of a Youth Fountain? The reason was a serious one. It was a reason that could got the two oldest nations in Europe, among others, all worked up. After only a few months of cultivated exchanges between the two capitals, it had been decided to rename one important railway station in each city. In London, the Waterloo station would become "La Gare d'Austerlitz" while in Paris, thanks to a similar linguistic process "Austerlitz" would be called "Waterloo". (One would think that the two governments were playing with words? It was not at all the case. As a comparison, a few months ago a man in love with all the pieces of mischief of the face and body of a beauty not totally

unknown anymore chose a name for his new love calling her Esther Sarah. Yes, he did. He could have named her differently... But, for the moment, let's come back to the moving story of the Esther Sarah portfolio. On both sides of the Channel all had rolled up their sleeves. Culturally speaking both parties were out of the tunnel. Such a result had been achieved through a great deal of work. Once the first step had been taken there was no going back. Both sides had watered-down its wine or tea. Here are a few examples: in Paris, on a boulevard close to the west wood of Boulogne, a new fashion boutique "very British" had just been opened. During the Wimbledon tournament, in the hotel George V a tea break was now held every day at 5 o'clock, British time. No black tie was requested during the tie-break of any match lighted with players. On an industrial basis a new supersonic aircraft programme was soon to be developed together. Currently, currencies were dancing so the professionals of Finance in both capitals said they had come back to a former project of creating a Franco-British euro. Tabloid revelations even indicated that such a project would definitely get off the drawing-board. A serious article published in *The Financial Eternity* had made it clear:

"♪ Yesterday, all troubles seemed so far away, the Eleanor Rigby Committee, especially created to work on the Franco-British euro project was back to the UFFR, the Union for the Future Finance Revolution in Sharing Costs, where brand new offices had been allocated". The journalist had added: "For these numerous commissions, where do these funds and people all come from? Nobody knows... Shall we listen to these same old songs; shall we go to the Moon guided by a Good Intention Book composed by Mr Armstrong? ♪ "

VII

While the train was belting along, in her way Esther Sarah had started to put her lover in the picture speaking, reading and writing at the same time and high speed. She had become lyrical and declaimed: "should our neighbours remain isolated in their islands? Of course, they will not. Incidentally, England ruled the seas for a few centuries, didn't it? The young talkative lady had approximately twenty minutes left to get him out of his tunnel. He was still half dreaming and had no intention to rail against her. So, once she had finished the fast reading aloud of the portfolio, the consultation was not over, she continued her royal enthronement with her customary oral swiftness. He was asking himself if he should then deliver her

an acceptance speech. He was also admiring her fleetness in writing, she seemed practising her five-finger exercises on her laptop.

Here is the paper that Esther Sarah gave the man who had given her a small bottle of perfume just when the fast train arrived late in Paris. He would be the first to read:

“Such an event has been considered as royal. So Her Majesty the Queen will welcome personally the President of all the French. The reception will take place in a lounge at Windsor Castle which has been especially converted into a European Chamber. The walls have been strewn over with paintings showing the town of Austerlitz in Moravia. At the same moment, in a Windsor style lounge littered with landscape of the dismal Brabant plain, the Prime Minister of Her Majesty will be welcomed by his French counterpart at the Hotel Matignon. Are all these paintings only military decorations or deathly relics? Among many other details, the problem of punctuality, the courtesy of kings and queens, has been thoroughly discussed. It has been absolutely necessary to put the watches extremely right and to tune up the violins. As far as the music atmosphere is concerned, even if a famous group of English beetles has become more famous than Jesus Christ, a Swedish group has been chosen. Sweden is actually a neutral country. Furthermore, this group that for certain reasons we will not mention the name always appeared on the stage in a European vision, some kind of Eurovision, if I may have your musical ear... Both countries has intended this gesture as a demonstration of friendship towards each other. Such a gesture has not been prepared in an upside down French-Latin way; a pragmatic English way has been adopted by both countries. In this manner it would be easy to stop backward-looking protesters from shouting: “down with the *down* line !”. On this occasion, the group will take up, in an aristocratic way, a song of Duke Ellington, ' *Mood Indigo* '. To be totally exhaustive, the Vokals, vocalists coming from Slakov in Moravia will back up the Swedish group of singers. As a relaxing twinkling of an eye, in the new Austerlitz Station, the authorities have placed a portrait of Napoleon as he was still a child, painted by Gainsborough and kept since ages in its so British reserve collection by the National Gallery. Was he already a little monster? (Of course I mean Napoleon not Gainsborough). And in the brand new Waterloo station in Paris, a great portrait of Wellington painted by David has been hanged after having been found in the Louvre's unknown collections. In order to allow all who

wanted to follow the double ceremony, link-ups have been set up a little bit everywhere in England, especially in the city of Rugby and in France, in the city of Lourdes where a certain number of miracles happened.”

VIII

So, according to the recap of Esther Sarah everything was under control. However, two last questions were still pending. Would the trains arrive on time and would they race along the countryside on the left or right side? What the young merry lady didn't suspect was that these two problems had been finally discreetly solved in a smooth way, owing to a very British play on words? Not at that time. In fact the two problems were harmoniously solved by a pragmatic gentleman, a certain Mr. Holmes whose father had been a baker in London and whose sense of observation was particularly acute. He first pointed out that concerning the tilting train question, if a train had left Paris at 10:00 a.m., the time it would arrive in London would depend on the mileage one had accumulated, meaning I guess the experience the travellers had in terms of local strikes, technical complications or natural risks and force majeure (in this particular case would Hercule Poirot have used the concept of “mileage” or “kilometre account?”). Then, regarding the second titillating question Mr. Holmes had been addressed, he calmly answered that he had made himself a scientific experiment inspired by the apple of Newton. He had taken a return ticket to the Continent and a suitcase with him, just in case he would have to overnight in Paris. His conclusion was that the choice of the side of the railroad that the Channel crossing trains should use was not more complicated than the problem solved by Newton with the help of his micro-macro-apple brain during a storm.

[But here, let's make a brief digression: for the man in love with the TGL (the Talkative Gorgeous Lady), this was a secondary problem; he was only admiring the apples of her eyes].

Back to Holmes now: was the problem simpler if the two trains which were supposed to cross were of a different nationality, one being English and the other one French? Was it a political decision? In this case, in the days not that distant in the past, just remember that the French Conservative and English Labour parties happened to understand each other on technical issues; they could develop a flying cooperation in a real concord spirit. They played golf in Le

Touquet and had some constructive meetings there. Then the two parties had been defeated by their local rivals but both nations never flew over a cuckoo's nest. To close the discussion our English observer, who, curiously, was not innovative in his declaration, had a last judicious remark: when two trains were crossing, he stated, one was of course running on the right side while the other one was on the left side, hopefully... Then he added that it was the thought process Newton used when by accident an apple fell down from a tree on his head while he was enjoying a Churchill nap. Was that a deductive, inductive or analogical reasoning...?... These relevant remarks have been brought back to us, not by a young and charming journalist but by a certain doctor, somewhat nostalgic, a certain *Mr What?* (We have to insist on the fact that the family name of this gentleman was actually spelt with a '?' after the final 't', which is not so common in many houses, even in Britain). On another bank, this gentleman had found fair to avoid the already difficult debate brought up by the eldest son of Watt, the physicist, about the necessity for the trains to use full steam or not. *Mr What?* had a question: on board, would French tea or English coffee be offered? Whatever was the case he would definitely add a cloud of milk to his drink while the fast trains would raise clouds of dust as a symbol of disappearing battles and other protectionist policies. The train being late, he started to play a party of beggar-my-neighbours with the eldest son of James Watt.

IX

On board precisely, at this time of the day, the on-duty bartender and barmaid cut into all the debates. The passengers were proposed an Italian espresso, not fast enough? The break didn't last long. Esther Sarah fulfilled her logorrhoea, continuing to read her paper to her attentive lover:

“Although all details were meticulously prepared, the cultural problem was far away from being solved. Such a bomb-project could make implode the City or the French Finance Ministry, or both. A few specialists rose up against it. Would the Sterling pound disappear, absorbed by the euro? It would turn Old Europe upside down (but was it not the case for ages?). After London, did Paris think it possible to kidnap Saint Helen? It was necessary now to put

an end to the cat and mouse game, to stop the war of the straits and to forget the good old times of colonization. But on both sides of the Channel the most active national waverers didn't give in. They were arguing that before building Europe with symbolic new waves of baptisms had one only thought to ask their opinion to the European Commissioners based in Brussels, God bless them? This last attempt to convince the highest European Authority was nothing surprising coming from the nationalist choirs. Actually, regarding the European policy Belgians had proved they knew how to deal with... In Belgium one should pay to visit Waterloo. Commissions were regularly mentioned on their bills... Should the Czechs be also consulted? They were in the middle of the European night ready for a new Austerlitz? Should another debate be organized?"

Esther Sarah was unstoppable on that subject. Fervently, she declared herself in favour of 1001 Franco-British relations. Her memo on that would later be published by the *Fairy Tales Editions*. Such a move would be inevitable, she claimed. She would then make other references to history and sociology.

X

Historical reference

"Did not Arthur, duke of Wellington, declare in a dispatch sent in the evening of the 18th of June of 1815: "Nothing, except a defeat, is as melancholy as a victory"? Did Napoleon really understand England when isolated on his island - by the way which one? He first left his home island and then attacked another island, bigger, I mean, much bigger. At a further stage he had been kindly invited to retire in a third one, smaller than his mother's island. Unfortunately, he didn't appreciate his new home, he found it too small. He left it also for finally being kindly requested to write memories and the last point to his career in the middle of an ocean full of regrets and tears in the sea? He had one time written: "England is a nation of shopkeepers". (A possible excuse for him could be the fact that probably he didn't dominate English language. Let's be aware that for a man of the Continent, or a woman, to pretend to dominate the English language is a pious hope not to say a pure utopia). Fortunately, later on, things had changed rather quickly. Politicians had been positive. Were we arriving to a cross? One generation later, Louis-Philippe, King of the French, anglophile, had successfully proposed to his English counterparts the Entente Cordiale. London agreed and Wellington, bearing not a single penny

of grudges, went further confirming the English order of the French words, *the Entente Cordiale rather than the Cordial Entente*. A few decades later, Sir Winston Churchill had corrected the abusing words of the late disappointed Emperor “The maxim of the British people is “Business, as usual”. Later again, to be precise 125 years after, General de Gaulle, bearing not a single franc of grudges, had on the same symbolic day 18th of June, called out the French people from London. Thanks to their English friends the French could finally speak to the French.

XI

Sociological reference

« Here is the analysis made by a specialist of the Belgian history, with her sharp but so sweet smile and published in the newspaper *‘Le soir de la bataille ‘(*)*

(*) In French in the text: « If one cast a quick look, upside down, on all the conflicts which kept Europe busy between 1792 and 1815, one can, within the limits of a preliminary study for the exchange of the two stations, and before the exchange of cigars, retain two battles: Austerlitz and Waterloo.

Austerlitz: on one side, the Germans; they couldn’t bear disorder, especially the unrest spread in Europe by the French Revolution. With imperial tactics they played a part to restore order to the Continent. But they would not succeed. On the other side, the French were just starting enjoying tricky imperialism. In the middle, the English who played for time - they love sport, don’t they? And so, they counted up the points.

Waterloo: England came to a foregone conclusion. It was high time that Europe became quiet, would start a diet on wars to exploit economic opportunities:

- “After such an end, the one-hundred-year Peace (the Peace of God?), was inevitable...” - the keen commentator went further.

XII

Epilogue

The warbling of the beautiful dove was so quivering with emotion; her feathers were so charming that the man in love with communication and the woman who inspired him had softly and unconsciously left the complex world of impatience and of the human misunderstanding, a world low and heavy like a Baudelaire sky. Arrived in Waterloo, they remained alone in the stopped train wishing peace between all the lonely people wherever they were coming from rather than a negative electrification of the high-tension red phones. The man who loved friendship didn't dare to touch on their burgeoning friendship, obviously a friendship marked with love. He shut up and started drinking pints of words invented every second by a future great political editor. Usually rather talkative himself, he found an unusual charm in practising this quiet form of loving friendship listening wordless to a beautiful young lady. During this happy crystallisation, the train moved off back to where it came from. The ticket inspector, with a blue cap, was not even surprised to discover and bring back to France, without stop-over, two almost lovebirds. He offered them this new journey requiring no valid tickets. Back to France, they realized that they had had no time to admire the cliffs of Dover, to go to London or to say hello to "The Burghers of Calais". Back to Paris, on time, which time? – They hardly arrive on time at a music store... Already, on small or giant screens, numerical or not, the double event was broadcasted from the stations where jeroboams of champagne were sparkling all around the few favoured travellers leaving a last time Waterloo in London for Waterloo in Paris and the other team that they would cross soon under a tunnel. Esther Sarah was taking notes on the Windsor ceremony while her lover who had been dumb with love in a train was now numb with cold in the rain, was observing on behalf of his budding journalist the eventful day in the Hôtel Matignon. He was simply crystallised. Ubiquity was no longer a monopoly of the virtual industry. Love was also capable of producing it. Neither in London nor in Paris would the smallest underhand trick take place. What the French call a "Trafalgar stroke" would not happen. The very last act of the tumultuous relations between the five nations was coming to an end; all the actors went off to great applause.

The curtains were drawn on a last painting, inconceivable, painted together by the duke of Marlborough and his cousin from Gaul. On this legendary stage, one could discover, side by side, Wellington and Napoleon shaking hands with certain cordiality.

Esther wrote her most beautiful paper. Her new observer had it

published in mobile letters. It was the time he chose to go back to his fairy tale: for the last twenty years what he only did was to dream of her, to dream of her name, as one dreams of Mary... In his imagination he had invited her to dinner, in so many different places... She used to refuse, saying she would rather share a breakfast – during which they would speak words of wisdom? They promised each other that they would be back together thousands of times, not to catch butterflies but to London, for lovely dinners in this city that both loved so much and that had, with no hard feelings, given them all in one single day... That was a touch of class comparable to Brenda Jackson parts in her movies. From now on, only a train, fast or slow, on time or delayed, would bring them again in London. It was simply a question of English touch.

Ladies and gentlemen, that ends our programmes for this year...

The End