

A Picture To Tell

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Prolog: The Emotion Of Colour

Today was the day. Noah worked on this picture for weeks. But today – and he was very sure – he would manage to finish it. And this would be finally the moment when he gave it to Lilou. At least he *planned* to give it to her. In the end he wasn't quite sure if he actually would muster up the courage to hand it over. Noah has always been a shyly fellow. Since school he was always a loner. And now that he was in his forties, nothing changed. Because of his xenophobia he became an illustrator, even though it always has been a real struggle for him to work on commissions.

The good thing was: through his work he managed to buy a flat next to the *Rhône*. Along the river was *Vieux Lyon*, a place full of old buildings and interesting alleys. The better thing was: he got to know Lilou and her son Bastien. They lived next door. He sometimes saw them in the morning, when he did his shopping. They were very polite, even though he knew that Bastien sometimes brought trouble upon his mother. At times, when Lilou had a smoke on the balcony, she told Noah that her son cuts school way too often and seemed to be very withdrawn when she tried to talk to him. It happened that her ex-husband left them three years ago, what started the troubles with Bastien.

Noah always listened very careful, but it was hard for him to say much. He just couldn't open his mouth, way too afraid to say something wrong. But Lilou didn't seem to bother. First he was d'accord with being just the neighbour she could share her problems with. But time went by and he fallen in love with her. Of course she didn't have any idea of his feelings though he never had much to say. It was way easier to paint than to socialize. So he worked on a picture for several weeks – every time they met on their balconies – to present his feelings to her. And he was really afraid of this moment. Lilou was truly beautiful with her short blond hair and her big grey eyes. Next to her Noah looked like the typical outsider. His tousled brown hair always seemed a bit greasy, while his hook nose made him look like an eagle. Because he often worked at night his eyes had dark circles, what made him look very miserable all the time. He didn't believe he was Lilou's type. But this wouldn't change his decision to tell her his feelings today.

A bit wobbly on his feet he arranged his canvas and the colours on the balcony. The gorgeous sunset already bathed the town in fiery light. It wasn't the best moment to finish the picture, but perfect to talk to Lilou.

But she didn't come.

He looked over his canvas for many times, but her balcony door remain closed. Of course they didn't have a date or something (just to think of this made him blush), but after work she always had a smoke. Maybe she met a friend or had to do extra hours. Noah decided to wait until the light was too bad to paint. Time flew, and in the end he couldn't recognize any colour on the canvas.

"Let's call it a day", Noah sighed and placed down his brush. Of course he still had to finish other commissions, but he had the sudden urge to hole up in a blanket and sleep through the night.

He collected his paint materials and put them back on his messy desk. After finishing that he went back to the balcony to fetch the canvas. Even though it was already too

dark to recognize all the details, he stood there and viewed the picture. Maybe it was a bad idea from the start planning to tell Lilou his little secret. After all Noah was very sure she wouldn't return his love. Losing all his courage he felt silly and embarrassed, but at least there was a solution. It was better not even try to tell Lilou anything. So he turned back to his flat and fetched his brush and colours.

Back to the balcony he opened a white paint pot and hesitated. The easiest way was to paint over the picture to make the canvas look blank again. Should he paint top down? Maybe it didn't matter, as long the result remained the same.

It appeared not as easy as he thought it would be. After all he worked on this for several weeks. The brush tickled an edge of the picture and left a small white point on it. *Maybe I should continue tomorrow*, he thought resigned. Yes, he really should take his time. But just at that moment he turned back to leave the canvas on the balcony, some very awkward sound caught his attention.

How strange! He was sure he heard something watery – very near to his ear. Noah turned around and froze right away. A tidal wave, big as *La Tour Eiffel* appeared from nowhere. This monster was ready to eat up the whole city and all what Noah could think, was that this wasn't even *possible*!

He tried to think of a solution to save himself, but there wasn't even time to run away. The wave swallowed him and *Vieux Lyon* at a glance. The picture was lost, and so was he. All that was left was endless water and the colour black, that was absorbing everything in an instant.

Epilog: Dreaming Of The Colour Blue

Noah felt dizzy when he opened his eyes. He couldn't see much, but it seemed that he was still alive. Miserably as he was he tried to close his eyes again. It surely must have been a bad dream. Next time he opens his eyes he would find himself safe and sound in his bed – bone dry. Even though this must have been a dream, he can't remember what happened to his picture. Yes, Noah wanted to whitewash it. But did he put it back to his flat, or left it on the balcony? Annoyed with himself he stood up and tried to find his door. Unfortunately this room appeared to be unfamiliar. It was pitch black and kind of mechanic. At least there was a door. Obviously he was still dreaming. And maybe his dream could help him to remember what happened to the canvas, so he decided not to question it anymore.

With unknown courage (after all it was just a dream) he opened the door and went to the mechanically floor. Everything was black here, too. But Noah didn't mind and went from door to door. He repeated this until he found himself in a very large room. As a matter of fact it looked like a bridge of a submarine. With wide opened eyes he ran to the large window and couldn't help himself. Open-mouthed he stood there, unable to believe what he saw. There was Lyon: *completely underwater!* Fishes and jellies swam through alleys and parlors while a group of blue glimmering sardines fluttered out of tree crowns as if they were birds. There was even a giant whale curving his way through the narrow clefts! What an odd dream! At least it was kind of fantastic, even though Noah suppressed the thought that this wave must have cost thousands of lives. But this was a dream after all, so logic was irrelevant.

Noah decided to stay for a while to keep this unusual picture in his mind. Maybe he will remember after awakening, so he could paint this right after breakfast. Actually he felt like he starved to death, so morning couldn't be far.

"Noah?"

He startled and looked over his shoulder. There stood Lilou with horror in her lovely face. Doubtfully she hesitated, but after a moment she suddenly started to cry. Before Noah could understand a thing she rushed into his arms and clung to his shirt, sobbing frightfully.

Of course this was just a dream, and it wasn't the first time he tried to imagine this kind of scene, but this was unusual. This was the first time he saw Lilou crying, and even now he had no idea how to help her. Uncertain he softly pat her back while she tried to catch a breath.

"Thank god, you are alive! Please Noah, you must help me! Bastien ...", she started but whined even louder after saying her son's name out loud. But she pulled herself together and continued.

"Bastien ... didn't come home before ... before *all of this* happened! I tried to talk to these people, but they won't help me!"

"People? What do you mean?"

"I don't know. They saved us. There are more survivors. There are even more ships, they say."

"So ... Bastien isn't here?"

Lilou seemed unsure if she should react angry or despairing, before she answered.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you! Maybe he's on another ship, but there are so many people who lost their family ... I don't know what to do!"

She started to cry horribly and buried her face in her hands. *Why can't I dream of something peaceful? Counting sheeps or something*, Noah thought. But even in a dream he couldn't stand seeing Lilou suffering. And he surely would sleep way more peacefully if he knew that Bastien was alive and safe.

"I am sure he is safe. Don't bother, we will find him."

Lilou seemed to be reassured.

"O thank you, Noah!"

She took his hand and trailed him a bit.

"Maybe he will listen to us, now that I'm not alone anymore!"

There was no other way but to follow her. Even though he wasn't sure who this person was she wanted him to talk to. Probably the captain although he has to be the only person who can help them now. But only imaging to see a crowd standing in tight space, in same despair as Lilou, made him shook. Hopefully he could end this dream very soon.

They went through endless mechanic corridors without seeing a single person. But the further they ran, the nearer came the sound of chattering people. Very unpleased people. Noah tried to ignore his wish to jump out of the submarine as long he had the chance to flee. Even though the thought swimming with the fishes seemed very attractive in comparison to face his own anxiety. At least he wasn't alone in this, he remembered himself. So he squeezed Lilou's hand a bit and looked ahead.

They arrived in a room that was filled with survivors. Like feared they were way too many people for such little place. And in the middle of them there stood the most unfriendly looking man he ever met. With his Fedora, the tired eyes and the long black coat he looked like a picture-book mafiosi. *Botheration!* Maybe he was!

But Lilou didn't seem to be fearsome at all. Single-minded she forced her way through the crowd, what made Noah even more nervous. He tried to avoid the bodies and glances, and found himself sweating like a horse. Lilou didn't care, or she didn't notice. In the end they stopped in front of the mafiosi looking man, what made her remember that Noah was still there. She pushed him a bit forward and gave the Fedora wearer a murderous look.

"*You* again! I already told you, that the captain can't care about everyone! Get lost!"

"I won't! We won't!"

To clarify her words she tucked her arm into Noah's and continued.

"I want to speak with the captain! *Now!*"

"You are not the only one who wants to talk to him, young lady", the mafiosi said unhappily. But Lilou didn't care and continued furiously. Noah felt more and more insecure, but it didn't take him long to notice, that the mafiosi didn't care much about their problems. In the end he might even could be a watchdog to hedge his bets nobody disturbs the captain. And he wasn't alone, Noah recognized. He took a peek at other fedora wearing men who stood in the crowd. They were just watching, but he was sure they weren't here to help.

Lilou still had a dispute with the mafiosi, and Noah recognized, that the others were already watching them. It maybe was just a question of time until they would chuck them out.

"Let us talk to the captain, please", the artist interrupted them. He trembled in every limb but he also had an insane wish to end this conversation very soon. He just couldn't stand disputes, even dreamed ones.

"Haven't you listen, *moron?* You can't talk to the captain now! If you haven't noticed, France is flooded! Our first priority is to save the survivors, not to risk our life!"

That gave him an idea.

"Then let me tell you, that you are grievously mistaken! This boy is the key to save us all!"

Even in his dreams Noah felt bad for lying, and it got even worse when Lilou and the mafiosi goggled at him with disbelief in their eyes. He continued so they hadn't a chance to answer.

"I know, it sounds completely insane! But listen! Bastien knows where we can find the *bath plug*!"

"The *bath plug*? Are you kidding me!?"

"I'm afraid I'm not! Just try to think about it! There has to be a giant bath plug to remove all this water! And Bastien is the only one who knows where to find it!"

Dream logic was never very credible. But flooding whole France wasn't very believable, too. But instead Lilou and the mafiosi watched him, as if he were insane.

"Ah yeah. Sure. The *bath plug*. How could we not think about it sooner!", the man said sarcastically.

"Just get lost! It's not my job to handle crazed people!"

In his belief that it's not impossible to control dream plots, Noah didn't give up. He really wanted to get up and forget all this, like he usually does.

"Aren't you afraid, that you could miss the chance to know how all of this happened? We will never know, if we just stay here and do nothing but flee! All we ask is to learn if Bastien is safe and sound as well!"

It felt good to shout at the mafiosi. But Noah regretted it immediately when he watched the mafiosi's face getting red as a tomato. The man grabbed his arm rudely and pushed him towards the big door in his back. Lilou followed them with confusion in her eyes.

"If you know just a bit about all this mess, I have to bring you to the captain – he will decide, what we'll do with you", the mafiosi said with an evil grin. Noah had a bad feeling about this. The man didn't seem to be very cooperative, so this answer came very unexpected.

But even more unexpected things happened after this reaction. After this Noah couldn't remember every detail, but he would never forget what happened this day.

They met the captain – a stocky old man with a big scar in his face – and were forced to tell him everything what Noah knew about this torrent. Noah learned, that the mafiosi was called Alberto. But he also found out, that he was a way better liar than he thought. Lilou remained quiet while he told them the fibbed story about a meteor which crashed in the sea, what caused all this flooding. And he repeated his theory about the bath plug, that was the only chance to get rid of the water.

It was obvious his fantasy ran riot when the captain actually believed his nonsense. Or he just wanted to get rid of them as well. But like asked he proved if someone called Bastien was on another ark. This took many minutes, but in the end the answer was frightening. There wasn't any clue where Bastien was, and now they didn't even know if he still was alive. Lilou sobbed stricken with sorrow, while Alberto wanted to push them towards the door. But Noah could persuade the captain, that they could search on their own, if he would release them. And unexpectedly his wish was granted. The captain gave them his mini-submarine – with the requirement that Alberto make sure they will return what they lend. The mafiosi wasn't pleased at all to leave the big ark to spend his time with two strangers, who he still believed were nothing but weirdos. But the situation was desperate, and the captain had to clutch at every straw.

They made very strange bedfellows. Alberto was so unhappy with this situation, he

made sure they felt his affliction. Lilou became peculiar quiet after learning, that her son seemed to be truly lost. And Noah? Noah had no idea how to continue. At least Alberto knew how to control this unusual vehicle.

So they began their journey.
