

The Paradise

I feel the morning light on my eyelids, it is warm and comforting: the sign that a new day is about to begin. This smell of clean sheets, the soft and thick quilt, all this is like a big hug for me. I slowly and gently open my eyes, it doesn't matter how long it has been since I live here, I just can't manage to get bored because of it: I always love this familiar feeling rushing through my body, goose bumps coming out my arms at the sight of the landscape that I have in front of me. I face "the Great Bell" and even though it has been here for nearly 200 years, this old good friend remains the same: it shows time but it does not have an impact on it, it is some kind of symbol of posterity for me. Just like every morning, I wake up in order to prepare for work: I put some of my favourite songs, pet my beautiful cat, prepare breakfast, the only reason why I get out of bed, get dressed, put on some makeup on and I constantly end up staring at the reflection of my right eye on the mirror, that even seems as repulsive as always. As long as I can remember this two-coloured eye never left me, to my terrible disquiet: one is blue and the other half is green whereas my left eye is entirely green. Anyways, speaking about work, it has been a while now, but we are not as pressured as before in our job. Surprisingly, we manage to finish out projects five times faster than few months back then, without doing more, even less. I'm not going to complain, to be honest, I feel way better than before. I used to be persistently anxious and even started to have serious health issues. Indeed, a few years ago, it was announced by the King Louis I that people would start working at sixteen years old, and this without exception in order to revitalise the economy. Luckily, I got noticed for my hard and diligent work, and I got hired by a very important organisation that works closely with the government and that is still what I am doing today. The new instructions from the government were really a relief, however, on the other hand, we were all asking ourselves how it was possible to reduce the hours of work of people and at the same time try to save and make more money. They also announced that they would be putting some more CCTV devices across the city, in order to protect all the citizens. Even if I do not really like the idea of being watched and observed all the time, I couldn't say that it was fundamentally a bad idea. Currently our city is the most peaceful and ecological city in the world, but who knows what could happen?

The beginning of the week went really fast, maybe because I was looking forward so much to today that my brain decided to skip this part of the week. Today, I have a meeting with a childhood friend of mine. He is currently a reporter for a newspaper that is, on my point of view, not really reliable and, if I dare say it, questionable. With him, I always avoid talking about work because it systematically ends up with debates over silly things which I am totally not interested into and I end up being bored. Five years ago, his newspaper even got censored by the government for spreading false rumours: he always knows how to get into really bad troubles. Otherwise, I can't stop looking at the clock wishing time would go faster until he reached the time of the appointment that I have with Kieran, because it is his name. He told me that he had a present to give me, it is curious and surprising because he doesn't usually make gifts or something like that: what is his problem these days?

Ten minutes before the hour of the appointment, I take my bag, my keys and leave my flat. I run to get to the café, where we are supposed to meet. He is waiting for me and I just can't stop myself from smiling. I enter but I suddenly notice that he is looking really preoccupied with a drop of sweat coming down his forehead.

I greet him in a rather timid manner but he jumps and reacts aggressively. Surprised, I back off instinctively however he hurries to apologize saying there are many things on his mind lately. I urge him to tell me more about this because it is really the first time in my whole life that I have seen him in that state. He agrees to explain to me what is going on but at two conditions: that I would listen to him carefully and that I would take his words seriously. I agree without even turning it over in my head because I am way too curious to know what it is all about. He takes a deep breath and while he is doing that, I just keep staring at him. He starts speaking and I am hung up onto his every word. The only word that I can understand are “underground”, “society” and “migrants” because he is talking too fast, but from what I understand this conversation is not going to please me but I ask him to repeat but more slowly this time. He swallows and starts again. He explains to me that two weeks, he discovered the existence of an underground society beneath our feet with all the migrants working to produce wealth in order to make more money and that this is the reason why we are currently working less but gaining more money at the same time. Taken by surprise and shocked by what I am hearing, I have the reflex to yell at him, saying that, as always, he is talking nonsense, that he is going to get in trouble. In my head, I am asking myself what is going to happen to him if he spreads these rumours, is he even thinking about the consequences. I can feel the tears starting to well up in my eyes so I decide to leave and look back one last time to discover his face, sadder than before our appointment.

I just can't forget what Kieran told me two weeks ago. While I am working, I think about it, when I am eating, I think about it, when I am with friends, I think about it and when I am in my bed, I think about it. This thing is literally haunting me! I just can't sleep anymore because of this piece of information, even if I don't really trust it, it calls all that I believe in into question. However, I like how life is today, my health problems are nearly gone, all the people that I know are in good health and constantly happy: for me, this balance should not be broken nor disturbed. But I hate myself for thinking that way because I normally despise selfish people but I feel like the suffering of those people is the cost for our happiness, and I would not change it for anything in the world. I try to ignore this thought over and over, to not imagine the life of those people that is summarized by tiredness, work and sufferings. My head aches, my hands are shivering, my body feels cold but I need to pull myself together because the King Louis I is giving a speech tonight in the headquarters of our organization, just like he does every year, but tonight is special because it is my first time witnessing one of them are there is also going to have big celebrations since London just became the first economy in the world. Important event means a new dress, so I just bought one that I plan on wearing tonight: I am going to focus on that: it is for the best.

I get out of my apartment, with my beautiful gown on, I cross the street and there is always this smell of sweat, dry blood, waste, when I walk on this certain manhole which gives me this wish to vomit.

When I arrive in this big and crowded place, full of well-dressed people, all my problems disappear. I wait for the King's speech by eating buffet, speaking with my colleagues. The time of the speech arrives because I can see the King heading to the stage with a big smile always on his face. The King opens his mouth and, from one second to another, I just can't hear a single noise.

After his speech, half of the people gathered here are crying and applauding and warmly smiling at the same time: as for me, I was between those two!

I look at the time on my watch, which makes me realize why I am tired, so I think I'm going to get home: my bed is calling me. I take my coat in the cloakroom and a

doorman opens the door, I thank him. The air is so cold tonight but remembering this evening draws a big smile on my face: it was such a wonderful and magical evening! Suddenly, I hear a muffled sound coming from my left, so I turn my head in this direction to see a man, approximately of my age, full of blood and sweat with a ripped t-shirt: he has an unhealthy thinness. Behind him, I can glimpse two tall men, running after him like they wanted to catch him. Once they get closer, I notice that they are guards by their uniforms. My hands are sweating, my heart is beating wildly and even if I wish to, I just can't move until a sound resounds behind me which makes me turn over. I notice that the King, Louis I, is walking in my direction. Immediately, I run to hide behind the first building that I can find to realize that he was not walking in my direction but in the strange man's direction that, in the meantime, got captured by the guards. Intrigued, I started looking, hidden behind a wall. The only thing that I can hear is "What are we supposed to do to him?". After hearing those words, my blood turns to ice and my mind orders me to escape, to run away from this scary situation.

So I run, run like the wind to get home as soon as possible.

I couldn't sleep last night, this poor man, the guards: the situation just keeps reminding me of what Kieran told me, this thing that I wanted to forget. Not sleeping doesn't have just bad sides, I'm already ready for work, even if my mind is not ready because it is elsewhere. I got bags under my eyes, I just can't help myself from gaping and my stomach is going into knots: I must go to work, I have to convince myself that what I saw last night never happened.

I walk through my usual path to get to work, always those beautiful landscapes, always that strange smell on that particular manhole, and that street where everything happened: this thought gives me chills.

The first face that I see this morning is my boss so I greet him cheerfully because we get along really well, however, even before greeting me, he tells me that he has something he wants us to discuss and that he wants me in his office in five minutes. Puzzled, I go to my desk, put my stuff on my chair and take my way to his office. When I arrive, he tells me to sit down, so this is what I do. He announces to me, still without a smile, which is odd for a happy person like he is, that I got a promotion. This announcement makes my jaw drop and my eyebrows raise. I ask him if he is serious because it has not been a year that I am in the organization and I don't have the pretension to provide a better work than the others. He remains impassive but he tells me that he has something to show me before I accept this promotion.

We leave his office together and take the elevator. He suddenly moves his card in front of the elevator buttons which makes the elevator go down for at least five minutes. During this time, my boss did not say a thing to me. The elevator's doors open, and I put a foot forward in order to go out of the elevator, like some kind of old reflex but he instantly put his arm in front of me to keep me from moving forward, and he orders me to look in front of me: I just can't speak at the sight of the scene that is taking place in front of me. I will not describe what I am seeing because this thought will haunt me for the rest of my life: one person traumatized is enough and I don't even know if I would even be capable of doing it. I squat in order to catch my breath, my mind is on fire, realizing that everything is real and that this nightmare that I am witnessing is the cost, the sacrifice to the happiness of all. My boss puts his hands on my shoulder and tells me to look him in his eyes. He declares that I would be one the person in charge of the proper functioning of this place and asks me:

"Will you make it flourish, the Paradise?"