

## 1.The Maze

An angry Raven is hunting a couple of cranes in the magnificent park of Monsieur François de Bourdieu.

The three english gardeners stop for a moment their careful cut of the hedges, forming the biggest private maze of the region, charmed by the sight of the splendid birds taking flight with a slow grace.

The morning is fresh and the mist slowly disperses as the sun is not here yet but its light increases, letting the gardeners expect a sunny day.

The alarming high screams of the Raven reverberate on the large XVII century Mansion elegantly overlooking the park, and the chief gardener lets his colleagues get back to work after the bird scene, while he looks at the pale electric light being lit in the room of Eleonore.

Trough the large and high window he sees her appear, much more by her presence, than the drawing of her shape.

Eleonore is like a small spot compared to the mansion. And from the Maze, he understands that she is holding her morning cup of tea.

Of his spot afar, the chief gardener William Coxy, a simple, honest and talented worker, smiles at the enlightening presence of Eleonore.

He can sense the light of her expression her wide open eyes and her kind self irony.

He senses or remembers her love for life and for all that exists and for all that does not.

Eleonore is not an icon or a gem no. She is very real and does not protect herself much.

Even if she can be seen as a princess by her delicacy and grace, and also her excellent birth, she feels close to everyone, with little hierarchy, as she finds in everyone what good there is in them.

Everyone who has ever exchanged a look or a word with her, is in sympathy. Because Eleonore reflects to one, its own qualities.

He waves at her with the hand holding his clippers, his morning ritual, and she waves back.

But not exactly as usual.

Being unable to ever lie, she waves back without her deemed enthusiasm.

She is not jumping lovingly as usual waving higher than her arms can. She is not laughing and saying; "William Coxy!!!" like she hadn't seen him for 10 years.

He senses it and it is his concern. While resuming his work, he hopes that she will take a walk in the garden and that he will then ask her how she is.

Eleonore shares anything with anyone.

She is not a better friend of Coxy than of the cook Kathleen, or Madame de la Roche Boiseau who will come at ten for tea, as Julie, the chamber maid reminded her after bringing her morning tea.

Eleonore is always the first of the family to be up. She often said to Julie that she would make her tea herself so the poor maid doesn't have to wake up at 5 in the morning.

But Julie loves Eleonore like everyone. Or maybe even a bit more. And would rather wake up at 3 in the morning if it was necessary, than to miss this short moment in her presence, in the deep calm of the early morning.

Eleonore would definitely make her bed but she knows that Julie would feel stolen her

value and function, so she lets her be indispensable. She would rather ask Julie to sit with her and have a cup of tea. But again she feels that Julie feels better and more valued, by standing at attention, and curtsying all the time, showing and living the difference of class, that Eleonore doesn't consider at all important.

But she plays the game with ease, as she was born in it, and therefore, does not trouble anyone.

"Julie?"

"Yes, Miss?"

Eleonore recalls perfectly the planning of the day, especially this very day. But she asks Julie because she likes to hear Julie's eagerness and because somewhere, under this role-play imposed by the grand house, Eleonore's education, and Julie's training, without having to say it, they are friends and like each other as such.

Eleonore asks;

"Remind me, Madam de la Roche Boiseau at ten, after breakfast, and then?"

She gives the empty cup to Julie while listening and Julie takes it with haste and draws a small hurried curtsy, answering diligently;

"At noon Lunch will be served in the garden Mademoiselle de Bourdieu. Monsieur will be here, and..." she smiles wide, unable to keep her enthusiasm for herself "Lord Charles."

Eleonore knows that very well and gives back only a friendly smile. Which Julie tries to not take note of.

"Madame too, and it is expected that Madam Boiseau will stay unexpectedly, Miss."

They both have a good laugh and Julie goes on;

"At four after your nap you are expected at the stables for your riding lesson Mademoiselle."

Julie blushes purple and they both giggle softly at the thought of the very handsome rider who is known to have seduced most of the female domestics of the de Bourdieu domain.

"He won't ever get me Julie!" she says with an imitation of severity. And she adds after a short theatrical silence;

"But he is pleasant I recognize and if it was not for my duty of importance..."

Eleonore laughs briefly, sharing her ease with the good Julie, knowing perfectly that herself would never melt for the most extraordinary man just for the short enjoyment of a kiss, but she is aware that Julie's standards and ambitions are the ones given by her simpler life, that Eleonore often envies her. And so she is happy for Julie, knowing she sees the rider here and there in secret, and hoping that he is not too cruel with the good girl.

Julie smiles because she knows that Miss knows and forgives without effort.

"Very well Julie and then nothing but preparing for the dinner right?"

"Yes Miss de Bourdieu indeed, but Madam has given me strict instructions on your dress Miss."

Julie starts to list all the details and Eleonore's eyes start to wander, empty, at the details of the tapestry, her focus traveling slowly to the window where the dark blue sky is getting clearer. And the chatter of Julie, that she would normally find cordial interest in, smother to become a soft and indistinct noise.

Julie notices and stops talking. She worries at Eleonore's face which suddenly lost its

brightness for the second time this morning.

“Mademoiselle de Bourdieu?”

Eleonore sits down and tempts to smile at Julie

After a hesitation, Julie sits with Eleonore and takes her hand quitting her contrite position.

“Eleonore isn’t it the most wonderful thing? Lord Charles here for dinner? What troubles you?”

She Looks at Julie, thankful for braking the rules and be her friend when necessary.

“I don’t know Julie I have had thoughts since a while and well, today they all come together.

O Julie you can’t imagine but no, I am not simply happy.

And there are thoughts killing my feelings. I love him yes, and I know that except the insignificant jealousy of my sisters, everyone is happy and everyone would be sad and disappointed to know my doubts. But I cannot go against nature, Or.... “

She bites her lips and looks away then back in Julie’s eyes.

“I don’t think it is very good Julie... My thoughts. But, I can’t do anything about it.”

Seeing Julie’s face she adds;

“O don’t give me this angry look Julie! Do you think it pleases me that everyone will be angry and sad because of me?”

Julie looks down, shaken, as her beautiful life plan is falling apart if her mistress doesn’t marry Lord Charles. It had been clear that she would be her personal maid and follow her.

She stands abruptly and says with tears in her throat, unable to hide her anger nor the tears shining in her eyes.

“You do as you wish Miss de Bourdieu! “

Taking her tray and leaving the room, each step preventing her to tumble down.

Eleonore is saddened by Julie’s reaction, but she shakes her head to put ideas back in place, “It is the pulp novel that touches her. Not reality”

As expected the sun points trough the two centuries old oaks of the park, well awake now, and swarming with birds and life.

Coxy and his two men are pruning further into the maze joking about getting lost themselves into it and, detached from the hundreds of birds agitating around and the screams of the peacocks, all distinct in the deep silence of the country, they hear the Aston Martin charge into the park from the solemn portal of the property, one mile from there.

“The Lord arrives!” Jokes Coxy faking a feudal attitude provoking the manly laughs of his helps, who happen to be named Andrew and Andrew, by coincidence. The Butler had hesitated to hire the second one because of the eventual confusion. But Coxy convinced him that it was not a major problem.

Lord Charles, the man to marry, the class personified, the handsomeness brought to a spiritual level. It is not that he is the most elegant man one can dream, that makes him. But rather the depths and natural of his elegance making him shine.

The sharp cleverness of his face makes Julie almost pass out when she runs to the car to greet him and help the butler to take his luggages.

“Good morning Jonas!” smiles Charles with honest kindness. “How are you today?” Jonas, the proud old style butler, giving to everything a taste of protocol, careful about every inch of the air he breathes and the way he exhales words with master skills, makes him more “something” than “someone”.

“Excellent Milord, thank you for asking, I hope the road was smooth and that you are in good shape for the hunt milord.”

“Well, I spent the evening at the club and had to experiment a new Scotch. A double malt of rare quality. I am afraid the impossibility to let this fantastic bottle alone is now taking revenge in my poor head. But the sport will certainly put everything back in order.” He laughs like a child and Julie nearly passes out again, being in the middle of a movie with Clark Gable.

“Julie dear and how are you? Is it my headache or have you been crying this morning?” Petrified, Julie stammers things, nothing intelligible not daring to look at the concerned stare of Lord Charles and feels the irritated frown of Sir Jonas.

“Thank.... Thank you Lord Charles I.... I am sorry Milord” and she runs in the house with Charles coat and smaller bags leaving the large suitcase to Sir Jonas, hurrying in shame and confusion into the mansion.

“What is up with Julie Jonas?”

“I have no idea Milord but she will have to talk.” He then changes subject and asks: “Monsieur de Bourdieu is expecting you in the stalls Milord. I see you are dressed for riding already, would you like to join him directly?”

“I will do that” answers Charles. “And don’t be hard with Julie. She is a darling. You do know that I am a gentleman don’t you? So please be kind on my behalf.”

“I shall Milord.” Jonas answers in his military ways and Charles is vaguely amused.

“Jonas, relax please. Look at this splendid day coming.” He walks in directions of the stalls with his riding crop and hand made leather riding boots, assuming his elegance but not using it. Without stopping he turns around walking backwards and shouts with sympathy;

“Jonas! Keep my luggages unopened! I will have Julie take care of them when I return!” “Very well Milord!” Jonas shouts back, hiding his irritation perfectly.

Eleonore is wearing an off-white cotton dress with slightly puffy sleeves underlining her frail arms emerging just before the elbows. The washed cornflower motive adds to the disuse of the style which Madam her mother always favors, in her will to not see her daughter grow freely in this new world of rock and roll and unattended modern children. The dress is short for the style of the house, But it is late spring and a bit of ease is allowed.

It shows the all knees. When the days become warmer and longer, as it is the case, she is allowed to wear under the knees, socks instead of full pantyhose, and strap black patent flats, contrasting with the impeccable and very cute pelerine white socks covering ankles and calfs.

If it was her decision, she would wear nothing at all on her legs and just sandals or even bare feet in the grass. But she is obedient to her mother’s strict rules on dress code, and values to have many rules in her life, limiting her wanders which could be infinite.

Her hair is attached in two braids hanging, like a good little girl. With a white satin headband and two ribbons finishing her braids joyfully, in a pretty knot.

Again her Mother is firm on modesty and also on style. Eleonore is 19 years old, but

Madame will not let her be a woman before she is officially engaged. She is kept a girl and shall be seen and treated as such.

Whatever the recent Woodstock festival and all this youth's agitation and claims for new ideas might say, "not my daughter!" Eleonore has never worn trousers in her life, except for horse riding. Mother has very defined and definitive ideas on genders, their roles and the different protocols.

Eleonore loves to feel the morning fresh air on her thighs under her skirt. She cannot really define that feeling. She feels like a flower, all is awake in her, every pore of her skin. And despite her perturbed mood she is running and hopping toward the maze, to increase the feeling of the air on her skin and to feel her muscles warm.

"How is the maze going Sir Coxy" she smiles, frank, straight forward, fresh like a white rose.

"I think your drawings were good Miss Eleonore" answers Coxy "You have many talents your Majesty.

But tell me dear Eleonore, is the maze a reflection of your soul?

I feel you are lost my child, this very morning."

Eleonore smiles sadly and looks down briefly. But determined to not drag everyone into her soul complexion she finds a Parry.

"I am fighting with Madam my mother about the dress I must wear tonight Sir Coxy." She finds her smile back, happy of her third depths idiocy. Coxy is not convinced at all, he knows how Eleonore is obedient to her mother and how little she is concerned with such things usually.

He smiles back and she can read his skepticism on his face.

"Conversation's over my girl? Not your style! One more reason to suspect you."

After 10 seconds of silence he adds in a low and intimate voice:

"You can always share dear Eleonore. I have seen you big like that remember?" He shows the size of a trout with both his hands.

She laughs frankly in her purity, and smiling, she whispers;

"Sir Coxy I know I know. Let us say that you will know in time what is in my mind. But not today is that a deal?"

"Fair enough child!" Coxy replies swelling his chest.

The sound of the clippers calls him back to work and he resumes while asking Eleonore.

"Has her majesty seen or heard the Lord coming in his sport car earlier your highness?" Eleonore frowns at him theatrically:

"How dare you asking my celeste being on the good function of my senses abject slave? Guards! Guards!" she calls the Andrews with the clippers.

"Off with his head!" she points Coxy.

William gets on his knees pleading his innocence while Andrew and Andrew, not showing their amusement come to behead him and one says to the other:

"snip snip let us take his ears first it will be good in the soup!"

Eleonore forgot all her worries again and jumps on place joining her hands and laughing like a goose, applauding the theatre play in the middle of the Maze.

"O Thank you thank you!" and she laughs and blows kisses to the three gardeners like a fairy, and waving, she continues her morning exploration of the garden.

"I am not sure I will ever get used to such a lovely person, Coxy," says Andrew. And the other Andrew to add, "She is heaven in a girl I would say".

“That’s right!” replies Coxy, “she make us forget all our dirty jokes don’t she?”

The three gardeners force a laugh, ashamed of themselves to even mention how they can sometimes talk of women, and they resume to their work more dutifully than they would otherwise.

“John dear! What horse today? Can I have "Joy" and beat Monsieur again?” asks Charles arriving at the stalls, puckish .

“I have just mowed her for you Milord” the famous rider replies, smiling of complicity.

Charles laughs loud “Oh deer! It is barely 7h30 and you already make me die.”

“7h30 and you are not on your horse yet!”

The deep voice articulating aristocratically a perfectly mastered British sound with of French, nothing hearable, his large eyebrows wildly going up in the center, the jowls hanging like a bulldog and this voice, like if the words were formed inside his throat with barely any tongue or lips. The great and impressive Count François de Bourdieu, preferring everyone to refer to him as Monsieur, rather than Count, as Aristocracy doesn’t mean anything anymore, he finds ridiculous to hang on those.

Charles fakes to not be impressed by Monsieur but he terribly is, and admires Monsieur greatly and not for his billions. He raises his eyes to Monsieur throning up on his horse already.

“I beg your pardon Monsieur de Bourdieu, I shall reasonably have declined to be here today at this time, or arrange myself another way than traveling from London at night and across the pond. But reason against reason, how can anyone reasonably decline such an invitation Sir, everything about being here is the most exquisite feeling and your daughter is certainly not the least. Let us ride Sir and forgive my lateness.”

Monsieur nods with authority and commands John:

“Help the lad on his mare John I feel he might brake his neck.”

Once both are in saddles, Monsieur finally lets a smile show and a childish light comes out of his eyes. He turns his sharply sensible Thoroughbred, gives a slight stroke of his boot and departs like a rocket, shouting “Beat me if you can greenhorn!”

Charles blinks at John and the extraordinary Persian mare leaves like a tiger, tracing the puma far in front. The grown ups have their fun.

John looks at the sportily spectacle for a while until the two horses are out of sight in the domain. The handsome rider turns back to roll a cigarette and sees the good Julie hasting toward him with a basket. He smiles, fond, and when she is near him he lights his cigarette.

“My dear little pearl how are you this morning?”

“John, sir, I brought you some salami and cheese with good bread still warm and some tea.” She replies all willing and cute.

John smiles tenderly and pulls the girl to him giving her a big kiss on her forehead, and then blows in her hair.

She embraces him with all her strengths like would a squirrel an oak. And abandons herself in his protective strengths.

He whispers to her with a mix of intimacy and condescence, like manly seducers can do. “You are emotional this morning my little thing. What’s up?”

He takes her pretty honest face in his hands and forces looks in her eyes.

She is moved by the deep eye contact and lowers her eyes with modesty.

“Nothing I can talk about Sir. It is Miss Eleonore... she is.... she is in troubles. Nothing we can do. It is in her soul or her head....” Julie clumsily changes subject and asks: “I am in pause and must be in 15 minutes in the kitchen Sir. Can I stay with you for 10 minutes?”

He nods and smiles. She serves his tea from the bottle and cuts bread and salami for him. They sit close on a log together like young lovers. Once he eats his sandwich she folds on him holding his free arm with both hers, and lets her head rest on the strong arm, in trust.

Still giggling of the funny scene with Coxy and the Edwards, and once far of sights in direction of the chapel, Eleonore looks around and takes off her shoes and socks to feel the humid grass between her toes. She kneels near the pond, amongst the tulips and calls gently a duck and her little family, quietly exploring the shore.

“How are you little ducks this morning? Did you see the great cranes earlier? I hope the raven will let them stay!” The ducks come nearer Eleonore and watch her for a while. A new born wants to come in her hand but the mother scolds him and he returns in the water hurriedly.

Eleonore pulls up her dress to spare it from the humid grass and lays down, looking at the Blue sky. Some clouds on the leave, draw giant creatures slowly metamorphosing from a goat to a man’s face, to a woman’s body, to a demon... a ladybug lands on her finger and she plays gently with it.

When her perfect body cools and the celestial creatures disperse, she stands up sportily and puts her socks and shoes back, taps her dress, and heads trough the little path crossing the forest that she knows so well, to the family chapel.

The Chapel is a marvel. Nearly a mile away from the mansion, alone in the deep silence of the park, almost hidden but slightly over looking the surrounding from a small hill, its size, build, and spirit is the fact of a very inspired Italian architect.

Eleonore visits it everyday. It is like a materialization of her soul. It is her home.

The mural late renaissance paintings were made by renowned Italian artists, and are invaluable and extraordinarily inspiring by their delicacy. The Good Saint Francis is favored in the themes, as well as Mary, and of course Jesus Christ, That Eleonore calls “My friend”.

She enters her den, runs to the Crucifix and kisses the feet of Jesus on the cross, curtsies and smiles up at him.

She then kneels to her wooden kneeler and stays silent for a while.

Then she starts whispering:

“Jesus my friend, advise me,

Your severe Father made me as I am,

with a silky skin,

with beautiful eyes.

with inviting hair,

with pretty ankles, calfs thighs, firm bottom and breast, small and fragile hips and long neck.

He made me so vivid that I feel I am the grass between my toes and the sun warming

me.

He made me with a pretty face showing my inner self to everyone.

He gave me a good heart and gave me everything to love life and humans and His creation what so ever.

He made me clever enough to sense people and to feel the power of the trees, sensible enough to cry at the beauty of this chapel and at the indispensable irrationality of us humans searching, working, doubting, creating, working in ourselves for some and in building for others.

I vibrate constantly at the delight of existence.

I love myself as I would a gift of inestimable value.

I love myself without pretension, but full of gratitude.

Thank you Lord.”

She pauses searching the words to express her feelings.

“But it is not my call what I have been made.

Though it is my call what I do with it.

Jesus my friend, Jesus the best man ever, you have been through things we will never know us simple servants of creation.

Advise me.

Should I stop working, and make my surrounding the gift of a short sighted happiness?  
Or should I refuse this easy gift and work harder?

Should I make everyone happy? or should I sacrifice this to the call I feel?

Now I have to pay.

I have to pay for the luck I have been given to drive such a vessel as “me” Eleonore.”

Eleanor cries large and burning tears.

“Oh Lord I am so grateful to be me.

But it is not made easy.

If only I was Julie, if only I was simpler and truly as small as I wish I was.

What if I fail?

What if I make everyone sad and angry for nothing?

Will I not have then turn beauty into dust?

I feel so lonely today.

The ordeal is to hard.”

She kneels in the deep silence for 15 more minutes, after a while starts reciting the rosary brainlessly to empty her mind and collect the pieces of herself, to be light again for the rest of the day.

As it is Saturday, Breakfast is served late. At Nine, but nine sharp. The two sisters, Clotilde, 18 years old a beautiful girl, healthy, ambitious, clever, and Charlotte, 16, pretty, but temporarily covered with puberty spots, lazy and a bit pretentious, both are lining up in the same dress, same socks, same haircut as Eleonore, feet straight together, arms in their back, waiting in tension due to Eleonore lateness.

Mother, pacing up and down the dining room, sighing at the hitch. Julie and Geraldine, Madam’s personal maid lining up near the wall of the grand dining room, in the shadow while the daughters are in the middle, not allowed to talk or move.

Eleonore runs desperately having heard the kitchen bell from the chapel which is at least 4 minutes away, sprinting. As she gets nearer the Mansion she sees her Father and Charles processing in chatters from the stables in direction of the mansion and runs all

she can to get there before them, enters through the service entrance, crosses the kitchen and arrives in the dining room to immediately line up with her sisters.

Madame looks at the swiss high complication pendulum clock on the marble of the fireplace and addresses the breathless Eleonore firmly and calmly as her sisters frown at their sister, exasperated.

“4 minutes late Eleonore and not even ready! You are breathing like a cow and your are full of nature on you!”

Eleonore finds as much air as she can to reply, totally in fault.

“Mother I was in the chapel I had a lot of thoughts and forgot the time.

It is not an excuse but an explanation Mother and I present my excuses to everyone. I am deeply sorry.”

Not touched by her daughter’s explanations Madame then claps two times in her hands, meaning “show me your hands”.

The three girls immediately put out their hands for inspection and it is at this very moment that Monsieur de Bourdieu and Lord Charles arrive in the dining room.

The situation is very embarrassing for the three girls, as none of them want the brilliant young Lord to witness the humbling condition of their old fashion education.

“Good morning Lord Charles” the Mother greets on a totally different tone, cheerful and civilized. “And good morning my dear François” she smiles lovingly and adds “let me finish with the girls please have a seat dears”

With their hands in front of them since more than a minute now, Charlotte is red in shame, Clotilde is annoyed and embarrassed and Eleonore, sorry for her mistake, smiles, melting at the glances of Charles, loving the humiliation because she senses that he loves it. Because she knows that he loves her and this hierarchic situation is immediately felt by both in a kind of erotic way. She imagines that she will be given to the Lord like an object, and that he will have all powers on her and that there will always be a hierarchy between them.

It is not the case at all and they both know it. This is probably why it feels so good and exciting.

Seeing that Eleonore’s hands are not washed and taking a twig off her hair and showing it to her under her nose, Mother says; “Eleonore you don’t deserve breakfast. You will stand here facing the wall during breakfast and will not talk! You will have your food in the kitchen after your punishment”

Eleonore does not protest. She never questions her mother’s orders. She lowers her head, says shy, “Yes Mother” draws a small crusty, truly humiliated this time, turns around and stands still as taught in such situations, arms holding each other in her back and head down.

The Father says a quick grace and everyone seats “Amen”

“Why are you depriving us of Eleonore’s delightful presence dear Madam?” Lord Charles asks, at the same time disappointed to not exchange words and glances with the loved one, but at the same time finding the situation pleasantly intense.

He can’t get his eyes off her back and enjoys the sight. Even if her eyes and face are still the most moving part of Eleonore, she is very pretty on all angles.

Mother replies without emotions “She was four minutes late and not ready for breakfast, Charles. It is not acceptable.”

“ I see” replies Charles not wanting to argue but still asking ”Does this happen often Madame? I thought Eleonore was a very obedient and precise girl.”

“It never happens Charles. Eleonore is usually neat. But it doesn’t mean that it can still happen. It shall not. Period”

“You are right Madame de Bourdieu, perfectly right” Charles insists imagining how it must feel for Eleonore to be talked about in this posture, not allowed to add anything and not seeing while being seen. And he wishes she could see his accomplice smile and playful contact, but loves that she cannot and finds it touching.

Eleonore feels exactly as Charles imagines. And the delightful humiliation empties her mind of all her doubts as it makes her succumb to the attraction to live her love and stop thinking.

Julie and Geraldine are serving the eggs with care. No cook or domestic ever gets confident when it is about soft boiled eggs. So much timings come in the way that after years of practice it is still possible to fail.

The lateness of Eleonore has added this trouble. The eggs are too cooked and the fingers of bread won’t stick into the soft yellow as they should.

Mother is irritated but knows that it happens. Father the same and take his spoon.

Charles doesn’t care and even adds “wonderful eggs, are they from your farm Madam?”

Clotilde hands her egg to Julie “to cooked! Will you ever learn?”

“Clotilde ! Ask the permission to talk! What is this?!” Frowns Madame ashamed of her daughter.

“Sorry Mother I was just talking to the maid”

I know Clotilde and I shall make you serve breakfast for a few weeks maybe it will make you understand a few things! Do you want to join your sister?”.

Clotilde lowers her head and whispers “No Mother I am sorry”

Julie quickly looks thankfully at Madam who stares at her with almost a pinch of a smile. Enough to allow Julie to breathe again.

Charlotte looks at her sister raising her eyebrows and looking at the ceiling and Clotilde replies with the same exasperated arrogance.

After the polite chatters at the table relating the wonderful horse ride in the domain and how Charles had no merit with such a mare, insistent glares of Clotilde in Charles direction and vaguely polite smiles back from Charles, everyone stood to end the breakfast.

“Clotilde and Charlotte you go to your room and do your homework, at ten Madame de Boiseau will be here you will come down at 10h15 in the same dress.” Madame adds her famous two hand claps and the sisters hurry to their rooms. She then addresses Eleonore still standing facing the wall, “Eleonore have breakfast in the kitchen and go to your room. Be here washed and clean with your sisters in time”

There is something in this disciplinary situations, such as Eleonore just had to submit, that compensates the humiliation. Of course it is intensely embarrassing, especially in presence of the man for whom she would have wanted to look like a young lady. She would have liked to smile at him and have a few amusing spiritual words increasing their complicity. She would have expected her mother to dress her more like a young woman than like a little girl, in such a day where she was to meet Charles for the third official time.

But the strengths of the system, the impartiality of Madame on order prevailing on feelings, makes Eleonore feel safe and accept the frustrations and humiliations as

something above her.

When Mother orders her what goes next, she turns around drawing her small curtsy saying "yes Mother" and then she sees Charles looking at her.

At this point no protocol protects her anymore. All of a sudden, her knees between her girly dress and her girly socks look pink and very fragile. Her shiny children shoes her neat two braids with the white ribbons, her position facing, in distance from the handsome, free, powerful Charles, makes her feel like she is just a toy. She would like to claim that she is a woman that no this is not what it seems.

But Charles doesn't look at her pink knees amused, nor is he making her blush with an engaging smile.

Charles stopped to talk in the middle of a phrase as their four eyes got stuck like magnets for what seemed eternity.

Eleonore's eyes receiving his desperate call into her eyes and the extreme flux get right into her belly making her spasm.

Charles forgets to breathe and such does Eleonore. They both want to stop to look at each other, but they can't.

Charles sees, deep in her eyes, himself. He screams in silence. It is primal it is pure, vertiginous. He is falling. He feels, his turn, a little boy. His self is not more his home. His home is in Eleonore. She is home. He is trembling. The stroke takes her to her throat and she sees in his eyes, the violence, the warm violence of being in someone else. And her subconscious echoes in her skull "is that..... Love?"

When driven by an immense strengths she can undo her eyes off his, she runs desperately in the kitchen and she hangs at the table to not fall and breathes deep trying to gain back her composure.

Trying to pierce the veil in his voice and to make two neurons meet, Charles says without any of his usual kindly dominant cheerful tone "Julie please.... come and... come... and help me with my... with my things...in.... in my room I mean... thank you" and he spaces out in a kind of hurry.

Eleonore arrives in the kitchen shaking and leaning on the working space, putting her hand heavily and fully in a pile of freshly cut onions.

"Mademoiselle Eleonore" says Kathleen the corpulent and generous kitchen help.

"I prepared you a bread and marmalade, the one you like Mademoiselle.... Are you feeling unwell? come and sit Mademoiselle"

"Thank you Kathleen" replies Eleonore in a sigh, trying to smile reassuringly at the good woman. "I must be hungry that is all".

Kathleen, not being born from the last rain, smiles, attentive and says in a friendly and motherly way;

"I have watched you all the way Mademoiselle. It is called love" she smiles.

"But of course, Mademoiselle cannot do things by halves"

She laughs lovingly at Eleonore and hugs her tight, with a tear of emotion making her laugh from deep down to all her generous corpulence.

"Come in Julie" says Charles, sitting on his bed downtrodden, lost, frantic, happy, desperate, excited and fragile.

She enters, very nervous and shy, blushing at every look and every word, always feeling

like a hair on the soup in proximity of the immense Lord Charles, the hero of her own pulp novel.

"Are you... all bright Milore? Lord..d. All... all Right I mean? Right?... Ssss Sir?"

He smiles, pale, sick, "Well your stammering is charming dear Julie and you make me feel better already. But I am a bit... floaty I would say. I feel like I am back from a very long trip."

"A... a long Troup... trup? Trip? Sss Milord ? Sir?"

"Julie I wanted to talk to you before when I was still in my normal state... I remember now. You are a lovely person Julie you know? I truly care for you. And you seemed.. you seemed a bit like I am now if I can say" he laughs ironically at himself.

"yes Milor....d ... I" she takes a deep breath and out of the same exhales, lets go the all thing at once "I am always very nervous in your presence Sir because I admire you very much and I had been crying because Miss Eleonore..." his eyes widen and he straightens on his bed. "Eleonore? Yes? Yes? what about me? about her I mean what about her julie talk!"

She looks down, mute, Paralyzed.

When Madam enters the kitchen Eleonore and Kathleen, identifying her steps, stand up immediately and Eleonore quickly lines up with Kathleen who is in position to face the arrival of madam.

"At ease both of you, Kathleen thank you, you may return to your duties"

"Yes Madam" replies Kathleen hurrying back to her potatoes.

Madam sits at the chair Kathleen was sitting holding Eleonore's hand and makes a sign to Eleonore to sit down where her plate is.

While Eleonore seats obediently, not daring to look in her mother's eyes because of her earlier lateness and inappropriate presentation.

"My girl I hope I am not witnessing a transformation in you!"

Eleonore listens looking down.

"From one of your sisters such a behavior wouldn't have worried me. But I don't think I ever had to make you a remark for years." She pauses looking at her daughter petrified posture. "you do agree that there is something rather unusual and reasons to be worried Eleonore yes?"

"Yes Mother" answers the girl promptly but softly.

"Charles?" continues Mother on a low voice.

"Yes Mother" answers Eleonore on the same tone, knowing that she is transparent anyway.

Her Mother lets a few seconds of Silence giving importance to the discussion.

"Being in love is not a sin Eleonore. But what you make of it might be"

Eleonore listens attentively. She is further already in the thoughts in the subject, but intimately knows that if she eventually already knows what her mother has to say, she will always take it as a teaching because it is the role of the mother to know and the role of the daughter to listen.

"Love is a strong feeling Eleonore and we all saw just before that it is strong between you two" Mother looks into Eleonore's face without demanding her to look into her eyes. And she goes on "Eleonore I will not have a girl forgetting her manners and humility because she is overwhelmed by feelings, as strong and beautiful those might be" and she adds: " Your Father and me are fond of Charles and want you to marry him. Everyone

knows that. But don't put shame on yourself by forgetting your humility. I want you to behave perfectly as you always did and I will have no tolerance for inappropriate postures"

"Is that clear my girl?"

Eleonore, ashamed of herself nods and gets a weak "Yes Mother" out of her teared throat.

"Look in my eyes now Eleonore!"

Eleonore looks in her mother's eyes immediately, unable to hide her tears nor her fragility.

"I will behave Mother I am sorry and I understand what you say"

Mother nods sternly and leaves with authority.

Eleonore tries to finish her bread and jam but can't and goes to her room full of tearing emotions, forgetting to look at Kathleen.

Kathleen understands and smiles gently finding Madam a bit too harsh but understanding what she is doing and finds her brilliant. Indeed Eleonore needs to be brought back on earth rather than use compassion. And the compassion is here. It simply remains unexpressed.

After taking a shower washing her hair, brushing them, drying them brushing them again, doing the two braids again to not see her mother frown at new ideas, applying creams on her white immaculate baby like skin, brushing and ironing her white dress, putting on a fresh pair of socks, shining her shoes, it is 10h10 and she sighs as for the first time in her life, she is not excited at coming down to have tea with a guest.

As she has a last check on her nails she proceeds to the door of her room, and when she is about to open it, someone knocks at it.

She opens the door much earlier than Charles would have expected and he is surprised and seems unprepared.

Her breath stops and she doesn't smile, nor does he.

"I am expected downstairs" says Eleonore over-determined, without hellos, smiles, excuses.

She passes between the frame of the door and the inert Charles without saying another word, crying silently, but uncontrollably.

Charles has the face and posture of one who has just been shot and finds no words to add.

Eleonore sees through the half open door, Madam Boiseau and her Mother in the boudoir tending their cups to Geraldine serving tea diligently and waits, out of sight.

At 10h14 Clotilde arrives and Eleonore finds no cute word to tell her as she usually do, always trying to cheer and calm her sisters who are always tensed and down to earth.

Charlotte arrives at 10h15 sharp causing a sigh from Clotilde and a reassuring, if not spontaneous, smile from Eleonore.

"Oh the three angels are here how lovely you all look you three!" coughs Madam Boiseau, a very funny woman with a heavy smoker's voice, too much jewels, too much lipstick, too expensive dresses, too purple hair and too theatrical manners, which the all family enjoys as a good friend. She is a leech, but a very pleasant and entertaining one.

The three girls curtsy together and say in choir, "Good morning Madame de la Roche Boiseau!"

They stay in line waiting for mother to invite them to sit and Madame Boiseau admires the sight, lighting a cigarette and says with delight "look at those knees Beatrice isn't that lovely..." Madame smiles back and makes a sign to the girls to sit all three on the two and a half seats Louis-Philippe fragile looking couch, forcing them to keep their back straight and find a demure position according to the lack of space, which is an excellent exercise and does not allow them to look too relaxed, which gives a much more appealing and proper sight.

"I don't know how you do that Beatrice, your daughters are porcelain dolls, a painting. Is that fear or respect? Have you seen how girls behave nowadays? Have you seen our youth? Parents seem to have given up and children consider obedience, respect and loveliness as words of the past. I don't blame them, our old ways need reform. But when I see these darlings... Well it is definitely more pleasant."

Madam replies with her usual precision, sharpness, serious and intelligence, and adds, for complicity with her friend of the world, the smoking lady, widow and happy to be, known in all the cabarets, theaters houses, clubs and jet set gatherings of the great cities of our world, a little smile that just means - We understand each other - "I never give up dear Madeleine. That is my very simple way and it is not a secret. I rarely have to use the rod, but they know that I will not hesitate. I don't think it is this threat that motivates them though. They know that I am better in a good than a bad mood, and they know that nothing escapes my vigilance" She looks deeply in Eleonore eyes with insistence while talking and is taken by a slight weakness.

"Eleonore has to finish her homework I am afraid Madeleine, I just wanted her to give you her greetings"

Eleonore looks at her mother with all the gratitude she has, as she precisely was wondering how she would survive this torture. Madame smiles gently, which is not perceptible on her face but can be perceived through her eyes.

"That is a shame! Eleonore I hope I will see you soon, we will have a cup of tea just the two of us" answers Madam de la Roche Boiseau between two coughs.

Eleonore stands and curtseys briefly "Yes Madame de la Roche Boiseau thank you, and I am looking forward to it"

"You seem unwell my child, I have never seen you so ghostly" smokes Madeleine.

"I have a work to give back on Monday Madame de la Roche Boiseau. For university. About Mallarmé, Madame. And I am almost a bit late I need a few more hours to conclude Madam"

Madame Boiseau shakes her many bracelets dismissing Eleonore, letting an ash fall on the Persian rug "duty first my girl, be well"

The treat of her mother comes straight from the sky. She walks with less freshness than usual to her room, where she finds Charles sitting like a zombie on her chair near the window where in normal times she loves to sit for hours reading, or doing embroideries while listening to the radio at certain hours when imminent philosophers exchange in very long programs.

Grabbing a stool on her way, she comes to him and seats on the stool, near the private arm chair where nobody sat except her since she can remember.

He is so exhausted that he doesn't even stand when she arrives. She is so exhausted that

she doesn't make any polite jokes, nor smiles nor is seductive in anyway and she observes how fragile he looks without all his ritual artillery of jokes, self irony, elegant words, kind attentions and spirit.

"love" he whispers in agony.

"Mother let me" she whispers back trying to show a smile.

After a few minutes of an extremely tensed silence, Charles jumps in first. "I... it is painful, it hurts. You know?"

She nods, totally still, eyes wide open. He adds with precipitation and extreme nervousness "Eleonore my little bird, what is the problem, Julie told me, I had to torture her to get two words. Thoughts and doubts, she said. What is that about Eleonore please I am scared! I am suffocating, please my flower my love, my pale beauty, you were always much more than charming and much more than beautiful to me, but what is invading me now is deadly!! Tell me what is it? I need you now. I need you to breathe!" Eleonore hesitates "you are not alone Charles I am also in the same state." Charles nods somehow relieved. But he asks desperately:

"Thoughts and doubts Eleonore. You told Julie talking about us. You have to tell me more".

"I didn't tell her more Charles. But in about one hour in a half, dinner will be served. I will get everyone there and I will talk.

But be sure of one thing. I love you. This love fills me as it fills you. You might be very sad after my talk. Please prepare for that. We will not Marry Charles. But I will love you all my life. And I will never love someone else this way."

Charles takes the dagger right in his stomach and folds himself in two.

He looks at her with furry and slaps her very strongly.

She takes the slap with peace, looking into his eyes.

"I understand Charles and I am sorry." She then kneels and takes the hand who slapped her and kisses it with all her heart, longly and deeply. Charles is sorry to have slapped her, but the dagger is here in his stomach, in his heart and he wonders if he will ever heal.

After a few minutes of this abandoned state, in blueish half-light in front of the large window facing north, from which we can see the sun flood the green old oaks with light, Eleonore stands and asks gently and sadly:

"Leave me now Charles."

Charles stands and with tears in his eyes leaves with dignity until the door, where he takes a small glass table with a collection of porcelain sweet boxes and smashes it against the wall. He doesn't look at Eleonore and leaves the room without slamming the door.

Eleonore feels very sad and hopes he will not hurt himself.

She starts to collect all the glass debris when Julie runs in, alarmed by the noise she heard.

"Julie my dear julie, I am starting to doubt of my doubts and to think about my thoughts. But I don't think it will change my mind"

Julie kneels with Eleonore in precipitation and starts to collect debris with her: "Miss this is my work please you will cut yourself"

"It could be your job in other circumstances Julie but not now. And if I cut myself it is only deserved Julie. Please go to Jonas and ask him if he could manage that everyone comes for dessert and don't touch those debris. Thank you"

"Very well Miss Eleonore" she curtseys briefly and leaves in a hurry.

When Eleonore comes back from the kitchen with a bag to put the debris in, Jonas runs after her "Miss Eleonore Miss Eleonore! is it true you want everyone in the dining room for dessert?"

"Sir do you think Julie would invent such things? yes it is true and if possible, please ask Kathleen to make more dessert so that everyone can have some. If she has enough of course."

"Very well Miss. But you don't want all the personal to sit at the table do you? whatever the idea, I would have to ask your mother and father for such an event."

Eleonore nods: " You are right Jonas I want to be kind humble and equal to all, but I don't have the power to do so" She smiles, forget the dessert then. It is a stupid idea"

"Miss it is not stupid at all. But difficult to manage. If I find a way I will try to realize your wish in one way or another Miss"

"Thank you Jonas. Very much."

She goes in her room, collects the pieces, leaves the bag near the door, puts on her alarm clock at 11h45 and falls asleep all dressed on her bed.

## 2. The speech

When the bell rings she hurries to prepare checks again her neatness carefully brushes her teeth checks that her white dress has no creases, takes a deep breath and goes down to be ready to line up for lunch inspection.

After her sisters arrived, after everyone has seated and the hygienic ritual is proceeded, after Charles arrives late and pale, after Father said the grace, she sits down with her sisters, demurely and the meal starts, much less animated that it should be, because of the strong desperation Charles exudes.

Monsieur tries to talk affairs and finances with Charles who is an talented financier, but Charles replies in a depressed manner without being able to follow the line of his thoughts.

Madame de Boiseau feels the tension and her jokes don't work well so she stops.

Mother is desperate of such a gloomy dinner and the maids serve nervously, being unexpectedly observed each their gestures in the bored and embarrassed silence.

Just before dessert, the all staff comes in the room led by Jonas who lines them up carefully respecting gender and hierarchy.

Mother frowns seeing that, and asks Jonas sternly "what is this visit everyone?"

Jonas replies, ready for the question, "Miss Eleonore asked everyone to come at the moment of dessert Madam"

Mother sends a very concerned look at her daughter and Eleonore stands, taking her chair with both hands and dragging it one meter behind her, to mark the fact that all is in control and that this is no improvisation.

"I am sorry" she starts. "Sorry for taking so much importance. I have asked everyone to come, because everyone is important to me. And it would be hypocrite of me to pretend that I have no importance in this house. It would not honor the importance you all give me. It would be excluding you Coxy who has seen me big like a trout, you Kathleen who

has fed me since I was a cockroach, you Julie who has been my confident since I was 8 years old, you Geraldine who has helped my mother in raising me since before I was born, you Edward and Edward who always showed me so much respect and kindness, your Sir John who taught me to be elegant on a horse, and finally you Sir Jonas, who are the only one in this house which I have never been able to understand nor to share my love with, but who has been running this house masterfully and made my sisters and me smile so many time with your elliptic mannerisms, your forced auto-depersonalizing military ways who would be unbearable if it didn't come from an intimate sense of duty, deep kindness, and perfect modesty.

You Madame de la Roche Boiseau in your permanent cloud of smoke, who has with your language and notions of the world opened my eyes on many things and who can laugh to tears, which is extraordinary for a lady of your rank, who should not be seen like a child that you can be at times.

I know that I am important to everyone, it would be dishonest to pretend that I am not."

Charles looks at Eleonore with as much self control as he can. If he would let go, he would cry loudly like a baby and lay down on the floor screaming. Not that Eleonore intelligence and honesty is necessary to make him on his knees in her presence or when she is in his thoughts, But it certainly adds a layer to it, which he currently doesn't need at all.

"The orchestra" says Charles not too loud and showing his admiration.

Eleonore smiles at Charles preoccupied: "the orchestra? Milord?"

"Yes the soprano sang all day and now the orchestra arrives and if we were already in tears, we are now collapsing of your beauty my love. The orchestra is your eloquence and verb my bird"

"Don't make me lose tracks of my discourse Milord by unfairly making me blush" she smiles, trying to be lighter than she is.

"I summoned you all here at lunch. I wanted to wait until dinner but I felt ready and I cannot hold it anymore. I need this confrontation now, I cannot stand to hide my thoughts and I am too impatient to share my struggles.

In what I will say, everyone will be disappointed, angry, sad, and eventually" she looks at Charles with a sad smile "desperate."

Charles watches the spectacle with an hint of cynicism.

Mother starts to show worries and Monsieur fills a pipe, in expectation, his large eyebrows marking his frowns.

Clotilde and Charlotte look at each other smiling at the eventuality of a scandal and Julie cannot stop crying silently frequently blowing delicately her little nose. The domestics in duty or not, all standing in line, gents with hats in their hands, and maids lined up more tightly, Geraldine and Kathleen holding each other's hands.

Mother looks at Monsieur: "François!" she whispers. Monsieur doesn't even look at Madam, still focused on his pipe and makes a gesture toward her shaking briefly his head and closing his eyes, "let the girl talk Beatrice. For once!"

Madam nods and is calmed by the exchange of responsibility and can listen more fully to her daughter now.

Madam de la Roche lights a cigarette with the previous one that she then stubs out without care, fascinated by the general tension, enjoying every bit of it with very serious ecstasy.

Eleonore notices her mother, and addressing her, goes on :

Your education Mother has made me who I am. I was given a delightful being from God, but you moulded it. You taught me humility, you taught me obedience, and you taught me to forget my feelings in favor of other's, and in favor of duty. And this is a crucial element of my actual struggle.

Jesus Christ agrees with you in all, he told me."

Everyone smiles at this phrase, understanding that in the mouth of Eleonore, it is not an exaggerated mysticism, but a way to make fun of herself.

"Papa, you are responsible for my thinking. You made me read books that encouraged me to be a free thinker. You took me on your lap and we spent long hours talking, thinking, reasoning. You were never satisfied with my logic and always encouraged me to go further. You told me that Mother's education was a way to free my thoughts, to extract my ego of my thoughts, to extract the need to be right and to know. In favor of understanding and research. And your love for me was the motivation for me to try to excel in my research on the meaning of life, as well as how the world works.

Clotilde and Charlotte, I am sorry to put you in the same boat, but in this event you have the same function. You made me confront to the real world. You represent the real world to me. I love you, you are my sisters, and if you share more you two, than we share us three, it is not by lack of love. But simply because we don't really have the same concerns.

You are often unsympathetic to me, but it never hurts me, because it will pass or not, but you are my family and so you are me.

You are important in my education because you are the world that I will confront with and you make things less easy and you don't take joy as granted, like I tend to do."

The two geese get the giggles stupidly out of nervousness.

"Julie you are my friend. You have shared all with me, discretely, humbly, living our friendship only when appropriate and otherwise being a good and hardworking servant, without any other pretensions, only wishing for everyone's best. In a way Julie, you are my hero. My role model. Your honesty, your respect, and you have this thing. I am obedient, like you. I accept my role like you do. I am humble like you are but my position and my character, make that I am not submissive. My obedience relates to the rules of the house, my Mother in which I have an absolute trust, my father as well, Sir John when he scolds me when I am not perfectly still on the horse and makes me hold it until my hands bleed" she smiles at John who almost blushes and Monsieur lets a small and brief explosion of laughter in his direction. "My teachers, you are all my teachers. But I have my pride. And this pride embarrasses me at times. Julie, I have often dreamed of being you instead of me. You are such a devoted girl. You think only of others at all times, and I envy your concerns.

Very well. This being said, Charles and me are in love. Today more than ever, we both felt a stroke. This stroke is something violent, In a few seconds, in the depths of each other's eyes, we have made love. Oh I don't know much about making love Sir Coxy don't look at me like that, but I cannot imagine that touching each other can be even stronger than it has been already.

The feeling of this is like a violent joy. Something of great dimension. And what do we do with that? All has been lived and said in each other's eyes. Without words. What can we add to this? Marrying? Having children? setting another mansion in England? Lord

Charles's mansion, that I have seen a photograph of, with a park almost as big as ours, a house almost as historical and extraordinary? Be the mistress of a house, like Mother is, marrying the man I love, and killing this extraordinary moment of being in each other spiritually. Sleeping in the same bed, kissing, a lot, until the marriage is consumed and the passion with it.

Charles will do his business, I will read and pray and heighten all my most superficial wishes, investing myself into a house and a garden.

What will the fact of consuming something beautiful until it becomes insignificant will bring to us, and to the world, and to God?

I have greater ambitions.

Greatest self demands."

Monsieur looks at his daughter smiling and sucking his pipe slowly, obviously proud of his daughter and declares "Eleonore, what are your great self demands? develop my child! This was a good exposition even if much too personal. But so far, you will do as you are told. Convince me that your point is worth you doing as you intend."

Madam is motionless staring at the table, with dignity waiting to understand more.

The sisters are bored and play with their knives.

Charles is looking at her love with a mix of admiration and furry and does a good job not falling on the floor or planting the big knife in his heart to calm it.

Julie looks down, not really understanding.

Taking her father's energy she smiles at him, refilled, and goes on.

"Father and Mother. It is your fault" she smiles. "It is your fault that I go to the bottom of things. You have taught me to do so. It is your fault if I do not take things easy, your fault if I cannot satisfy myself with a bright, obvious, easy, golden door inviting me.

The self discipline you have inculcated me, and the self critic you have imposed me, has entered into my flesh.

I cannot take the golden door right in front of me.

Of course I would make everyone happy. But what is this offering? Isn't this traced future, asking me nothing?

I will be a lady, in a beautiful house with a beautiful husband and lose all desires.

What will I desire except this dress, that jewel, this lodge at the Opera... what about love? What about the cosmos? God? What about what we feel my Charles? Can it be stronger than it is? I doubt it. We don't eat the cakes we see in the window all day permanently.

What about my place in this world? Will I have built it? of course not it was given to me.

I am stuck in the upper floors, stuck in a cloud of well being, free of charge, free of consequences. The only charge I will have, is to have to be careful about who I talk to, as I will be surrounded with envy. I will become cynical and Charles will not love me like he does now. We will burn this love quickly. It is too incandescent. Too quick.

And what will Jesus christ see when looking down at me? Just a girl full of life, dying slowly? My life and love will be replaced with vanity, fatigue, superiority, achievement. It will lead me to melancholy or cynicism.

I have to decline Charles. I have to refuse the true kiss that we never had yet, because it will be the first spark of the destructive fire. The fire is alive now and will always be. If we kiss, it will die. The desire will fade. Then from the kiss we will want to make love.

We will need to. Then we will get tired of it too. And in a few years or months we will not even remember. This love is impossible Charles it is too intense and too unreal. We have to keep it this way and dream, keep our dream."

I am happy. But I lack experiences outside of my shelter.

I want to know what it is to count every penny and to have to earn every one of them.

I need to work like those simple people who would love to read books and write and look at the sky and embrace life like I do, but can't. Because they were not born privileged.

I want to work in a factory, live in a small maid room up in the attic of a building without elevator and not well heated and for that discomfort have to work hard.

I want to be simple. For this I need to have simple problems. And I want to please and be liked, not loved to death! I want to love dearly, and keep this passion for the bottom of my heart, for my dreams and my desires, for Charles.

I want simple desires.

Tomorrow morning, I will take a small suitcase and walk to the station with only the content of my porcelain pig, which should be enough to take a train for Paris.

I will go there and find a small employment as a waitress or so. And I will see what this life is and if I will find simplicity.

This is my high ambition everyone. To find happiness deep inside, without it being given to me by all this happy surrounding. Without... being spoiled. And offer this true humble happiness to the world, sharing the position of the struggling mass."

### 3. Going down

In the deep silence following this statement, Charles finally fell off his chair and hurt his forehead, Julie immediately took water on the table and a napkin and jumped to him tapping his forehead with the humid cloth. "Milord are you alright? are you alright?" Mother stayed seated, totally still and unable to find the way to save the situation. We could see on Coxy's cheek a tear but he quickly and discreetly wiped it with his sleeve.

The two sisters were looking at each other in awe, mouths open and chin falling.

Madame de Boiseau forgot to inhale from her cigarette and the inches long ash fell on her satin dress, while she was staring, perplex, at Eleonore.

Jonas did not show any reaction, apparently not impressed and worrying about the unserved dessert.

Kathleen and Geraldine had the same expression as Edward and Edward, looking down apparently plunged into deep reflexions, and such would probably be Julie if her all attention was not on Charles who was slowly waking up from his short coma.

Charles stood up slowly, watching Eleonore and said with anger:

"I will buy systematically all the bars you will work in you little precious saintly hypocrite! And have you fired.

I will have you one day! by force if needed!"

He then sat at his chair and stole a cigarette from Madam Boiseau's pack without asking and lit it, exhaling in Eleonore direction.

Eleonore was standing still, expecting bad reactions, but now living it was something

else and it hurt.

Then Monsieur tapped his glass two times with his knife and lit back his pipe. The growing rumors in the room stopped immediately at Monsieur' manifestation. He let the silence grow and started to talk with a calm authority.

"You will not do what your imagination makes you wish Eleonore, you don't have my permission."

Eleonore was shocked and surprised. She had not even thought of that and she stepped back to bring back her chair, not sure what to do with that, and feeling like running away like a burglar.

"Don't sit Girl! Stay here stand with your arm folded behind, and your feet together! Discipline!"

Eleonore obeyed immediately, programmed for those things and unable to resist his Father.

" You will not leave this house. But we will not keep your silly desires unattended."

Everyone was listening religiously Monsieur, all wondering what will turn up, and Madam Boiseau didn't smoke at all for at least 5 minutes. Charles was extremely attentive to Monsieur, drinking a lot and fast.

"You will serve this house. We are hiring cleaning services for years as it is no more possible to find scrubbing and laundry maids in 1985.

You will be hired at the minimum legal wage, you will be under the authority of Julie and all the above of course, but Julie will be your direct superior, coached by Jonas"

Monsieur looks at Julie who hangs on a chair trying to not fall and adds in her direction:

"Julie, this is not a great responsibility, the new scrubbing maid just has to work, you don't have to talk to her and I forbid you to remember Eleonore, Eleonore is no more! Is that clear?"

Julie thinks for a few seconds, looks at Eleonore, who is getting very pale, then back to Monsieur and nods "I... I understand Sir I will do my best" "You will not do your best Julie! It is crucial! you will get a raise for it. But if you can't forget Eleonore you will be replaced!" Julie nods and whippers "Oui Monsieur"

Monsieur gets back to Eleonore:

"You will not be called much, but like in the victorian era we will change your name to our ease, you will be called...." He thinks for a few seconds, "Nora" he smiles at the name representing nothing known and depersonalizing her efficiently.

You will sleep in the basement there are rooms there where scullery maids used to reside still about 50 years ago, I remember that from where I was a child.

You will work 16 hours a day or more if necessary but the work will be done. You will be given half a Sunday a week and be given no vacations. We know that you have no family outside so you will not be allowed to leave this house. You will be forbidden the park and the chapel and will be seen on the upper floors only to scrub, at the time when it disturbs the less."

Most cannot resist to whisper to themselves indistinct things and we can hear a rumor grow. Eleonore trembles and cannot really believe it. But somehow the bubbles in her belly grow and she starts to be in a daze.

"I will see with my lawyer Monday first thing how to repudiate you from the family, you will not be part of us anymore and it will be legal, you will lose all belongings."

To this Jonas finally lets out a sigh and Julie looks at him and sees that he is looking at

Eleonore with scorn.

After six months you will enter Lord Charles house in the same position, because you will be trained then.

In one year, the 13 of July 1986 you will be presented to us here and we will see what you became.

If you repent, you will come back to us as you are now, and we will discuss reasonable option for you." He quickly looks at Charles reassuringly.

If I happen to die during this year, everyone will know what to do.

This is the harsh life Nora and you got what you deserve, and less than that in fact.

Because no "nobodies" know, inside of themselves, that this is only an apprenticeship.

They start this life, that you are going to experience, much younger, instead of studying, and will be found probably without husband at 65 years old having had this life and die without ceremony, all their savings being spent for the coffin.

But I hope that you will forget who you are. That the 16 hours work, the blisters, the lack of reading and spiritual food, the days without seeing daylight, and the total absence of love and consideration will make you regret your scandal, and come to reason.

But I also know that you will learn great things, and that if your plastic beauty and freshness will suffer of this year, your experience will make you a better person.

And this is the only reason I choose to brake everyone's heart and mine too.

It is the only reason why I can even consider "spoiling you" this way. Because if my ancestors knew that all they have built for you! Yes for you and your children! Is refused!

It is not arrogant of you, I know. It is not a tantrum. That is why I take it and do something with it. But then I want it harder than what you wanted, and I know I am right.

Now rejoin the ranks of the domestics Nora.

Jonas and everyone, I hope you understand that is for her own good that you will not sneak in the basement to bring her comfort and apples. Enter in your head that the girl is gone for a year. Consider she is on an educational trip and that if you come and bring her love, the all process will be spoiled!

Jonas you will make the contract and make her sign Monday first thing. Her name is Nora and she has no family name."

Jonas nods and immediately answers "Understood Monsieur"

Now julie bring her in the basement and help her make her room.

Jonas you can cover Eleonore's room with cloth for a year, she is gone and regretted, but her furniture shall not suffer from it.

For the first time since she was a little girl, everyone could see Eleonore, now Nora, cry with sound, she was taken by spasms and couldn't help but cry like a baby.

Monsieur said loud "Julie get the girl downstairs immediately we don't want to hear her whining! And get her a working blouse she is starting her work immediately! and take her dress for care and don't be soft!"

Julie is visibly overwhelmed but she doesn't want to lose her job and works hard on herself to play her new role and finds herself even pushing Nora in the good direction "hurry up there is no time to lose Nora!"

They get in the basement and she turns on the neon lights showing a desolated sight. The basement floor is in ancient tiles, the walls in cut stones and all is in perfect state

and not humid. The vault wine cellar being still one floor down, and this basement was used by tens of domestic servants for hundreds of years, it had not been used for tens of years and it was full of spider nets.

"You have to clean the basement Nora!" Julie throws a nylon blouse to the girl and shows her a cell with an iron bed, a small table a stool and a chamber pot, the room is not broken, but very dusty.

"Change to your blouse and give me the pretty dress Nora! And here are some sandals and woolen socks, we don't want you sick."

Once done she adds "follow me now" Nora follows her still crying like a baby "and Stop crying!" Julie adds coldly. They arrive in a large laundry room with no machines but very well organized for hand washing and there are all kind of brooms, and different soaps.

"You will learn to use all those Nora, I don't have time to teach you. It is 2pm. I will come back at 8pm and the all basement will be reasonably clean. If it is not you will work until it is. Get to work!"

When Julie goes back up, she finds Sir Jonas right behind the door leading to the basement, staring at her. "I wanted to check, Julie. Don't over do it. But better that, than being too soft. Good job Julie" She nods sadly "thank you sir" and curtseys briefly. She gets back to the dining room where she sees Charles drinking Scotch at the bottle, talking to Madam Boiseau "She will come back to our world don't you think Maam?" "I don't know Milord..." replies the lady taking the bottle from Charles hand and serving herself a large glass. "Charles for sure her cruelty toward you is punished. I hope it can heal you to know that she will have the worst year of her life. And let us hope that after that, she will fall in your arms, her silly complicated ideas totally annihilated."

Madam is in Monsieur's arms, sobbing. All the other domestics are gone, only Kathleen is cleaning the table in this chaos while the two daughters are giggling imagining that they will torture their sister and Julie thinks; "what a mess".

Nora, hearing the upper door close, is left in silence. She falls on her knees and then lays down on the dusty tiled floor of the laundry room still taken by spasms, in her living nightmare. She then hears piping noises as someone probably went to the toilets. The piping noises are loud and she realizes that every time any water will be taken in the house it will makes this loud hiss and that this will be her future, and she hangs on this fact, like if it was her only problem, obsessed with piping noises.

She falls asleep on the floor, totally desperate and sobbing in her ugly nylon blouse buttoned in the back which adds to the humiliation and will make her life more complicated as it will be difficult to dress and undress.

She wakes up one hour later realizing her nightmare is real. She feels better though and remembers why she was sent here. She convinces herself that she is being loved, even if temporarily abandoned, but at the same time wants to make this as real as possible. She looks for the cleaning tools and starts to work slowly, trying to evacuate her remorse.

At 8pm she is exhausted, her arms are hurting, her hands are full of blisters, her legs are heavy, she feels extremely dirty, her knees are bleeding, she can't stand the neon light and the hisses of the pipes really fill her head. She has cleaned only half of the basement and not her room yet.

Julie arrives with Sir Jonas following, with a stick in his hand.

Julie looks at the work and nods, "It is clean Nora. But you are far from done."

"I know Julie but it was too much work I cannot finish it today"

"It is Miss, to you is that clear?" Nora sighs and nods "Yes Miss".

Julie then looks at Sir Jonas "what shall we do about the work undone Sir?"

"Let me handle it Julie and you will call me when ever it is needed"

He then addresses to Nora "Girl Julie didn't know you were not so efficient yet. We cannot reasonably ask you to go on until 4 in the morning we still want you in good health! But you didn't do the work asked so I will punish you. Then you will know that we will not tolerate work undone."

Nora is looking down at her feet, thinking "what ever as soon as I can sleep".

Jonas goes on "You will receive 10 strokes of the cane on your bare bottom, each of which you will count and thank me for. Then you will wash briefly and sleep in the room that you have not cleaned, in the dirt of it. You will wake up at 4am." He raises his hand, holding a mechanic alarm clock that he brought for her. "At 9am julie will come and check that the basement is entirely clean, and it better be!

This clock will stay in your room. You have to wind it everyday. If it stops you will not know what time it is and will not be able to follow the schedule and there will be no forgiveness!

Now get in position for the caning!"

Nora hadn't received the cane for many years but remembered the protocol perfectly. She raises her blouse over her hips, pulls down her shorts, puts her hands against the wall, and waits obediently and feeling very low and ashamed.

The pain of each stroke is as intense as Jonas cruel determination and the humiliation Makes her lose her self-esteem.

She will be fed only with left overs in a bowl and when there are none, with a bowl of tasteless porridge.

Day after day she improved in her new activity and managed to hurt herself less and less by learning the economy and efficiency of every movements, as well as the different techniques to make floors shine. It became slowly her only goal. Filling her dreams, her thoughts and marking her body, she was becoming nothing but a polishing machine, with no thoughts others than polishing. She was caned often as the work was often too much for a girl, despite her growing efficiency. She never complained and the punishments were part of the life, like we force the head of a kitty in his feces to teach him property. We are not asking the kitty to think, but his system to adapt. Nora was in this state.

She went in the upper floors daily to scrub what Julie, coached by Jonas, told her to clean, without words, only showing the area to finish in the time given. She was doing the most used areas between 4h and 8h in the morning. Then she changed areas to avoid as much as possible to disturb and be seen. During lunch or dinner, it was the hardest. She could hear voices in the house, her mother's her Father's and her sister's, as well as Kathleen, she could hear the nice noises of the table, sometimes laughs, sometimes a bit of music even, it made her feel even more lonely.

Very rarely someone walked near and she was in sight with her ugly nylon dress, her hair covered with a thorn kerchief. She didn't look and didn't know if she was watched. But if felt like she didn't exist for anyone anymore.

Only once, Charlotte walked back from lunch, smelling rose, in her pretty dress and fine tights and pushed over the bucket of dirty soapy liquid intentionally and sighed "you are

right on the way idiot!" Nora apologized to the miss and had to start for about 30 minutes over her waxing and rubbing the floor work, totally spoiled. This time lacked in her schedule and despite her doubled effort to reach up, she ended with 15 strokes on her bottom in consequence, for her laziness. But somehow, she transformed the injustice in love for her superiors.

She was focusing on her work and the floors were shining like they never had before. This made her proud and gave her a feel of achievement.

Yes she was making these floors shine with all her heart and it was a very simple and brainless act of love.

She was given all the laundry that could only be hand washed. The all laundry would have been much too much and there were machines for that at the ground floor in the modern laundry. So she had about two large baskets a week to take care of, all containing precious things, underwear, Kashmir wool pulls and ensemble, woolen socks and all kind of beautiful delicate things. She knew how to wash. Mother had taught the daughters. This was for her the most pleasurable duty. It smelled her mother and her sisters and even Julie for socks and woolen tights. She was putting all her love in it and after a few weeks in her condition, she sincerely felt privileged to be given this important task. There was nothing else left in her life than those little things and she was immersed in them. She was trying to keep up with the load of work. The mansion was 4000 square meters times three floors plus the basement covering the same surface. 16 to up to 20 hours a day she was making the floors shine with all her love and she sometimes even didn't want to stop because she was so passionate about it. Then the laundry was much less exhausting, it would have been if it was for the white cotton blankets, but they were only little things. It was like a present for her, and she was always hoping there would be more of it. She often spent a part of her free half day taking care of that.

There is a door leading directly to the outside from the basement. It was formerly the "service way" But the heavy door is locked and she can only see the outside through the key hole.

She had taken an old broken broom, took a saw and made two small pieces of wood, she found some wire and a nail and a hammer and built a small crucifix that she hanged in her room. She felt better knowing Jesus Christ was with her and she was questioning him if he was proud of her, and if all this was right. She felt so lonely and cold and so much needed love, Jesus was more his friend than ever. But after weeks she was really finding happy accomplishment in her new life and she could have been seen smiling at work if she had been watched. Every night before bed she only said the two prayers and fell asleep. Only Sunday afternoon he had time to communicate with Jesus Christ.

One Sunday afternoon, that she was spending in her room without windows, talking to Jesus Christ and napping, Coxy sneaked in. He had found a key of the service door. He brought her an apple, the first Sunday. A softer soap for her skin than the ones for cleaning floors and laundry, the next Sunday. He brought her a bible after that, and one Sunday, a small olive branch that he had found in the kitchen with the delivery from Italy. So she could decorate her crucifix and it felt so much better. He brought her once, a calendar so that she could know what day she was living, and she hadn't realized before she had it, how important it was. She thought: "the less you have the less you

need".

He whispered to her the first day he came : "Eleonore, if I am caught here or discovered, I might be fired. So I don't want to change your status. You are Nora and you are living your punishment, I don't want to take it away from you, nor do I want to contradict your Father's wisdom. I will tell you once and only once. We all love you and we are all thinking of you. But if anyone is too soft with you, then the penance will not be as efficient. I just want to offer a few little things to you. To ease your life. We will never talk again Nora until you come back to us. And tell me you will yes? You will repent and ask forgiveness when the time is up yes? Please Eleonore please do. Now I give you a small hug. Not a big one. I will give you a small and brief hug every sunday afternoon... Be good and work hard and do not complain. Oh and I will never tell you what happens in the house." He then gave her a small smile with as little sadness as possible.

5 very long months later, she noticed the preparations for Christmas were starting. The smells were stronger. Cookies and cakes and oven preparation of lamb and she was salivating.

There was not the slightest difference with anything for her. Not a little cookie added to her bowl, not a small card saying "we love you courage" Nothing!

Sunday before Christmas was a 22nd. Coxy didn't show up.

Thursday 26th she was waxing the hall way. There had been apparently very social parties there were traces and a fur coat that probably a lady forgot or maybe she stayed for the night. The all house was warmer than usual and some rests of odors of marvelous christmas meals remained. She went near the christmas tree very carefully. She thought that if Sir Jonas had organized her to shine the hall way this very day it was maybe a message.

She carefully went to the living room and found an envelop, all alone under the christmas tree with on it written "Eleonore".

She had not been asked to clean the living room. So if she touched the envelop, she would have been in fault. Her drilling and brainwashing had been so deep that she was unable to touch it.

The 29th was the next Sunday and Coxy didn't show up. She started to be scared that he had been caught.

The Sunday after, she broke the rules and went upstairs during her free afternoon, Sneaking in the house looking for Sir Jonas.

Entering very timidly the kitchen she saw Kathleen working and went out not being seen. She then took off her sandals to make less noise and looked like a cat in every corner of the house. She didn't dare to go outside that was too risky, nor to enter any room. She abandoned and returned to the door to the basement and Sir Jonas was standing here just in front of her.

She didn't dare to look into his eyes and whispered "Sir I was looking for you, could you please come down for a minute so I am not seen accidentally?"

He replied in a normal voice "You have nothing to do here! I give you one minute and I am not going down!"

She whispers grimacing at the loud voice "Sir what happened to Sir Coxy?"

"I have seen the calendar silly girl and the olive branch. I quickly led a small enquiry and Coxy confessed in the next minutes. I warned him that if he stops totally his mischief, I will keep it for myself but if caught again, he will be reported and fired"

"I understand Sir" she whispered back and added "I am very sorry to cause troubles please assure Coxy that I understand and that I hope he will not take risks again. And Merry Christmas Sir and thank you for letting me the calendar"

Sir Jonas nods coldly and turns around to walk off while Eleonore hurries through the door to the basement. He then stops and returns and talks through the door up the stairs : "by the way Nora you will be leaving tomorrow for England, be ready at 6am with long socks, you will be given a coat and you can take your cross and your bible we are next year so you can leave the calendar. And I should punish you for seeing you upstairs! Who do you think you are?!" he then closes the door brutally.

She looks around her, checks every room of the Basement to say good bye, checks that the laundry is dry and folds it with particular care, then inserts into a sock of Julie, her olive branch, as a present, that is all she has to offer. She then hears Sir Jonas come down with Julie, and receives 30 painful strokes, more than ever, for her disobedience.

At 6 in the morning, still feeling the caning's pain bump, She was brought to the station by Jonas himself, in the little truck, she was behind with tools and boxes and rests of leafs and potting soil.

She took a first train to Calais she had no seat reserved. Then the ferry where Eleonore would have been breathing the sea on the deck but Nora being Nora, ashamed of her ugly clothes and feeling not allowed to see large, stayed seated downstairs, not even looking at the windows. She then took a train from Plymouth to London, standing all the time as she had no seat reserved, then a very slow regional train from London to Brandon. She then had to wait for one hour for a bus, of course it was raining and cold and the station was closing so no waiting room and she had no money for a coffee, she had the exact coins for the bus trip.

Sleeping standing under the edge of the roof of the station with her small plastic bag containing her bible her cross and a soap, on her head to not wet her hair.

She thought hard, "we are the 6th of January 1986! six of January, six, six six, Monday Six! Monday Six!, January January 1986!

I am going to Sir Charles's mansion where I will work for the next 7 months. Lord Charles, Lord Charles. Will I see Him? Probably not I didn't see my family for all this time it will be the same.... But he loves me doesn't he? oh yes that is right and I am also in love wasn't it how all this started?"

Nora the humble worker is talking alone in the loud sound of the rain around her and some big drops land soundly on her plastic bag directly from the roof. She is trembling constantly at the humid cold.

"But it was so long ago. I wonder if he even remembers me... oh it would be much simpler if he forgot about me"

"What am I saying? what am I thinking? what am I doing here?"

"He probably forgot about me. It is my fault. I destroyed it all."

The bus then arrives and she gives all the coins she has to the driver and says timidly with her french accent "I am going to... West Tofts, West... West Tofts? Sir?" "I suppose you mean West Tofts" "yes Sir I am sorry it is hard to pronounce."

He counts and says; "one penny is missing my girl!" I will have to drop you at Lynford.

Just 30 minutes walk before. She desperately looks at him with pleading eyes. "Sir please, there should be a car waiting for me at West Tofts, I am sure the driver will have a penny for you please?"

"And what if he doesn't? And what if he is late?"

Nora nods docile "I understand Sir" and she goes to have a seat.

The driver stops his empty bus at Lynford "destination girl! here you go!"

She nods and goes down the stairs of the bus "I continue the road straight in front Sir?"

"That's right girl " she then wants to leave the bus saying politely "Thank you Sir have a good evening" he then closes the doors just in front of her.

"You have to learn British humor girl, and also British hospitality" he smiles and laughs gently "Sorry for that girl, but you have quiet a nice attitude. I think that if I really had meant to drop you here, you would have changed my mind with your prettiness. A very good girl, come on take a sit and tell me, what are you going to do in this no-mans land?"

"Oh thank you so much Sir, I found it indeed a bit cruel I must confess Sir. But you are the master of the bus, you rule Sir, but thank God it was a joke" she smiles.

I am just a worker Sir I am a scullery maid she says with a strange mix of embarrassment and pride.

He explodes in laughs "scullery maids don't exist anymore girl for about 60 years! Are you into a child play? Cinderella?"

She blushes and looks down "I don't know Sir... then it is not the right word. But I clean floors Sir I make them shine, that is all I do how would you call that Sir?"

He looks at her in the mirror and does not laugh "well yes a working girl you could say indeed... What is your name good girl?"

"Nora, Sir"

"And where are you going? Are you hired at the Ashford's mansion?"

"Yes Sir yes, Lord Charles Ashford's mansion indeed Sir"

He smiles and turns on his seat in her direction.

"Nora there is something funny about you. You don't look, sound nor feel what you say you are. First of all you have a french accent but much less than usual French's, and a good vocabulary. It means that you were well educated. There is something in your eyes that working girls usually don't have. And last, a working "scullery maid" knows the name of the mansion, which is Ashford's and eventually the name of the butler, who is Mister Brown. Lord Charles is not a pop star. We know him around here of course. But how could you know him coming from France?"

Now, do you know what we say at the pub? About lord Charles?"

She blushes, feeling caught and understanding she has a lot to learn about the world:

"No sir, what are you saying at the pub Sir?"

"He has a broken heart it seems. His heart was broken by a french young woman it is being said. He is not working anymore and his affairs are going down because of his desperation. The French young lady is from a wealthy French family. You are her! But why then? why coming here as a working girl? what is this strange story Nora?"

As always unable to lie, Eleonore looks down and is shocked by what she just heard about Charles. She thinks for a bit and raises her eyes to the brave man staring at her, waiting for her to talk.

"I am punished sir"

"For breaking his heart?"

She nods and adds low and ashamed "more or less Sir"

The driver laughs and adds loud while turning on his engine "Then it is the end of the end! hurray!

You know we all live from the Ashfords here. Without them we are bad! So if you save lord Charles you save our county! We might well raise a statue at your image" he laughs frankly and starts singing "here is the little Nooooooooooraaaaaaa, coming to save the Looooooooord"

At the stop a dirty little van is waiting with a long man smoking leaning on the side of it. "Hey Broody I bring you the package!" shouts the driver.

"Broody doesn't smile at the driver, he looks at the girl going down the stairs of the bus from head to toes with scorn"

Nora turns around and unable to smile at the driver, only says politely "Good bye Sir, thank you for the ride"

"Hey Nora save the man remember?"

She nods hesitantly and proceeds in direction of Broody.

Broody makes a brief gesture with his thumb to tell her to get in the other side.

She proceeds and sits on the very dirty passenger seat taking a few detritus sitting where she has to, and letting them on the floor of the small van.

When Broody gets in the car several minutes later as he was smoking with the bus driver, she smiles at him and says "Thank you Mister Broody for coming to get me"

He doesn't answer and doesn't look at her and starts the car. He drives very fast on the muddy paths and she is scared.

They arrive at the mansion 10 minutes later and he stops in front of the service door.

"This is your door, get out"

She gets out of the car immediately "thank you Sir see you soon probably are you the gardener?"

He doesn't answer and starts his car so fast that it shuts the door.

She proceeds to the service door and knocks.

After a few minutes she knocks again louder this time.

One long minute later she hears steps.

A cook opens the door and stares at Nora interrogatively.

"God evening Madam I am Nora I was hired as a live in cleaning maid"

"Never heard it. I try get Mister Brown. Come!" said the large woman with a german accent.

While they walk the dark hallways leading to the kitchen the woman asks "you french? So far away for cleaning job?"

Nora doesn't answer. The first thing she observes in the shadow, is the lack of shine of the tiles. And she feels a bit reassured to come back to her only goal in life, making floors shine.

#### 4. Filth

The kitchen is warm and is filled with a wonderful odor of stew.

She is starving.

"Hungry?" said the large female cook.

"Very Madam yes" smiles Nora.

"Sit" replied the cook showing a stool at the central table.

"Nora you said? Me Birgit.

Nora smiles grateful for Birgit humanity.

Birgit serves Nora a bowl of porridge that she mixes with a tea spoon of sugar.

"Stew for masters, first and second class servants" Says Birgit in a purely informative way.

"Of course Madam Birgit, thank you very much for the porridge" replies Nora doing her best to not show her disappointment and starts eating without joy but relieved to ease her hunger.

"You stay here I find Mister Brown" says Birgit on the same informative tone, and leaves the kitchen.

The ten or twenty or thirty minutes or more waiting in the silent kitchen felt very long. The already dark rainy day was fading and she didn't dare to put on the lights. She stayed on her stool long after finishing her tasteless porridge.

Then when it was nearly dark the door opened and Birgit reappeared, alone.

"Mister Brown told me what to do. Follow me"

Nora Stood, took her little plastic bag and hurried to follow Birgit already gone.

Birgit was going back in the direction they first came from.

At the service door they turned left and followed an other corridor. Birgit had a pocket lamp as it became totally dark.

She then took a bunch of keys from her apron's pocket. She tried two of the large keys and the third opened the lock of the door. Nora was scared. Everything had been so strange since she arrived at the Brandon station. She was remembering the driver.

"hospitality he said" I feel so terribly unwelcome. It is so dark so cold so inhuman. I am nobody alright but I am a person still am I not?

The door led to stairs going down in absolute darkness.

Birgit lit the lights of the stairs and Nora saw the stairs going down deep. The stairs were in stone and apparently had not been used for years. It was full of white spiders hanging. Birgit took a kerchief from her large apron's pocket but did not propose any to Nora.

She went down and Nora followed trying to say something but Birgit seemed so deaf to anything. She didn't want to seem like complaining and being ungrateful but that seemed to go a bit too far.

After much more steps than for a simple basement they arrived on a earth floor, dark and humid. it was very cold down here. Nora finally talked "Look Madam Birgit, where are we going? It is not human to house me in this basement it is dirty and humid it is not for humans! I am used to harsh conditions but this is far beyond. I'll sleep in the kitchen no problem. But you cannot let me down here, look there are insects everywhere!"

"Sorry girl. Not normal. Orders of Mister Brown. But you here not normal. You not working class. You not normal"

They walk a bit and find a door. Birgit opens it. It leads to a minuscule room with a metal bed. There is a neon light that Birgit switches on, and Nora sees that it is very dirty, full of white spiders hanging. The mattress on the bed is 50 years old like the bed and there are no blankets. it is terribly humid Nora says; "I cannot stay here Birgit! I want to see Mister Brown immediately. I work hard I ask for nothing, but I am not a rat!"

"I told him already" replies Birgit "This no place to stay, I told him and I will say you are unhappy. Now you wait for Mister Brown"

She leaves the room and closes the door. "Wait Birgit wait! No don't leave me here!" But she hears Birgit locking the door of her cell. "Orders of Mister Brown" says Birgit one last time across the locked door.

The old Neon light is blinking but working. It makes everything ugly but Nora is scared that it would stop working as it would then be absolute darkness with not the slightest glimmer even after staring at the darkness for ever.

Nora, always positive and accepting, tries to find the way to find peace and stop shaking. The silence is such that she can hear her heart beat and her blood circulating. She starts singing softly, with a trembling voice, to reassure herself and fill the deafening absence of sound. The neon light makes a whistle that would normally not be hearable but here, after a while it is becoming a huge sound as big as an organ.

She thinks she can hear the fleas in the mattress and the centipedes on the floor and on the stone walls full of spider nets. She sings to calm her anguish and fear. "I will not sleep here, not one night! Why am I locked? what are they doing to me? I will not sleep here! She looks at the door and tries to open it as maybe she had been dreaming, hearing the lock. But no, it is locked. She looks around and there is only this horrid metal bed with bars at the head and at the feet. She starts to get into the obsession that if she can dislodge one of the bars she could make a lever and maybe force the door. But the bars are welded to the frame and won't move at all. She tries to jump on the door but she hurts her shoulder and the door doesn't move. No way out at all.

She cannot relax at all, she cannot rest she is disgusted by the room. She doesn't dare to sit on the bed. She prefers to kneel on the earth floor and focuses to merge with nature. She kneels and joints her hands. After a while she feels her knees have burrowed the earth a bit and it gets warmer in the hollow. She then lowers her woolen long socks to have contact between her knees' skin and earth. It feels better slowly, she is finding some kind of peace by making home with her knees. She has no idea how long it has been and has a spasm realizing that she has not heard the clock in the bag, in the silence and that it must be unwind. She checks and sees that the clock stopped at 2 in the afternoon already.

She breathes slowly now and is sitting on her heels. She is very tired but is not calm enough yet to find sleep. She whispers to Jesus Christ. "This is too difficult a challenge my friend... Harsh it was but I found salvation in the love of work done. It didn't feel that the harsh conditions were against me. I could find sense between my condition and my work. But here, here it is against me! Why? Why do they punish me?"

She hears the door of the basement open suddenly. It is not near but it is a sound and it is shocking. She prepares to meet Mister Brown and tells to herself ; "I must be determined! I must not accept this treatment I must not use my name and my family as a threat. I must make Mister Brown human. Make him understand!"

The door unlocks and opens. Nora is standing, facing the door, very scared.

"Charles!" she whispers, not finding voice.

Charles looks scary. His eyes are mad, his chin is trembling, he is unshaved and his hair are a mess, he is wearing a silk pajama with a velvet housecoat, bare feet in leather slippers. He enters the room and lets out between his teeth "Nora".

And slams the door behind him while looking at Nora with a menacing expression. Then he opens the door again and slams it while saying ; "Nora!" louder and with aggressiveness growing. Nora is petrified and understands now what she is doing here. She sees the desperation in Charles and wants to cure him but he is mad and he looks so

vulnerable and full of hate.

He opens the door and slams it like a mad man and constantly and at each door slam he says always louder "NORA! ONORA!! EONORA!!" slams and slams and slams "LEONORA!! ELEONORAAAAAAA! ELEONORE! ELEONORE! ELEONORE!" she screams "STOOOP, STOOOOP! STOP STOP STOP!" the he slams the door so hard that the handle stays in his hand, he throws it on the wall with fury, he then kicks the door so violently that he brakes it and dislodge it and he cries shouting "E.L.E.O.N.O.R.E!" she jumps on him and shouts to him "CHARLES COME BACK LET US TALK COME BACK WHERE ARE YOU?" He takes Nora's hair and puts her down on her knees pulling them then slaps her with all his strengths, which is huge, she is thrown against the wall of the cell, her nose starts bleeding and her ears are ringing at the shock on the back of her head, she talks not too loud "don't destroy Charles you are angry I am sorry you are angry you can be but come back, if you destroy me it will destroy you, my family, your family, everything, everything will be destroyed before me! and she shouts "IT IS NOT TOO LATE WE CAN LOVE EACH OTHER LOVE ME! LOVE ME! I LOVE YOU!". Charles cries, in agony then jumps on Eleonore and starts strangling her. She looks in his eyes, helpless, without resistance, then closes her eyes and thinks of love, she feels so sorry for Charles she feels so guilty, but she doesn't want to die and she doesn't want him to be a killer, she opens her eyes again and since she cannot talk, loves him, remembers the Charles she loves and looks into his lost eyes and almost smiles, ready to die but not willing to. She then raises her hands on his and shakes her head a little, making a sign with her arms on his, meaning "I am not scared". And she feels his hands loosen, and the man falls on the floor crying like a child.

She is happy she won, she takes 5 seconds to take her breath and then leans on Charles and gives him a warm kiss on his forehead, then another one on his cheek and his neck and she covers him with kisses and on the corner on his lip and she takes his hands and kisses them and he says warmly and gently "I am here now Charles, forgive me please forgive me, we will marry if you still want me yes? I will be yours Charles. I did all wrong. I would have deserved to die. But you don't deserve to be a killer. I will let my heart be yours Charles. You will heal, I will make you happy! Yes? Yes Charles? Yes?"

He closes his eyes and lets her kiss his hands and she then starts licking a finger with so much love and devotion that he cries again but not for the same reason.

He then raises and leans on the bed, sitting on the floor and looks at Eleonore and he lets a small smile, almost peaceful. He lets in a sigh, "Yes Eleonore we will".

He then pulls her to him and holds her in her arms and they both fall asleep like that.

When she wakes up he is still sleeping, holding her. She feels his power and she doesn't dare to move to not wake him up. At the same moment she hears steps coming and a Tall and thin severe man in a tuxedo appears, frowns at the destroyed door and looks at the couple on the ground. She looks at him smiling and puts a finger on her mouth and shows Charles sleeping. Mister Brown looks at Charles for a while and then lets a smile come. A deep smile. He then looks at "Nora" and nods at her with his hand on his heart smiling with complicity and he puts his finger on his mouth, still smiling, and leaves in silence.

She has a lot of time to think, it seems Charles needs a lot of sleep. She feels in love, she feels very happy, she sees her scratchy woolen socks and her ugly sandals, her nylon working blouse and this old rotten coat that Mister Jonas had given her. And she thinks,

I want to live this still. Maybe Charles will understand...

She coils up in his arms for hours and then he moves and makes a groan like a bear after hibernation. She looks at him and smiles. He takes a few second to remember where he is and what happens. He then embraces her tight and groans "oh Eleonore I was not dreaming!" he kisses her hair and adds "you are filthy! " and he smiles and she laughs. He then stands and as soon as he is standing she hugs him, her head on his chest as he is so big and she is so tiny.

"Come Eleonore let us leave this horror" and she replies "horror Milord? This is the most beautiful place in my heart".

He lets a small tear get out of a spasm and laughs gently: "You are the most beautiful person on earth Eleonore and I almost killed you didn't I?"

"Yes you did milord, but I am alive and nobody will ever know you did.

And do you want to know a secret? I am sure you already know. But I love when you beat me". He nods with a little naughty smile, not surprised.

"I have a favor to ask you Milord"

He nods smiling at a child: "Ask, we will see, but I will not ever let you go you are warned"

She smiles back: "I have not finished my experience of being a servant Milord. Would you hire me as the last of the 3rd class servant for the planned remaining 7 months?"

He sighs: "Do you really need that Eleonore?"

She nods "Yes Milord, more than ever. I have learned at the Bourdieu house and now I want to practice at the Ashford's."

He sighs again: "Alright but you do that 4 hours a day and you will have meals with me and sleep in the room that I will let you arrange, the most beautiful room of the mansion."

She shakes head. "No Charles, I ask you more effort than that. I want you to know in your heart that I am yours and that I will be your wife when my penitence is done, the penitence ordered by my father. But I want to live in absolute slavery, like I did for the past 5 months. I don't want any favor. All I ask is a 1986 calendar, a branch of pine to decorate my crucifix, maybe a second blouse like this one for hygiene, and soap for washing my skin. I will work 16 hours a day, will be fed with left overs if there are any, and please don't eat less to leave me some, I want to make your all mansion's floor shine and this will be my only goal in life. I don't want you to visit me and to send me attentions, I don't want the other servants to know that I am not just a scullery maid and I don't want them to like me or have pity on me. But I want a clean room. Not larger than this one, I don't need a window, I just need it to be clean and healthy."

He smiles at her and kisses her on her forehead.

"Very well my girl but I am not sure I will ever want you to leave this station, be careful for what you ask! filthy slave! I will look at you shining the floors from the shadow and love what I see. And I will love to see you so poor, so humble, so nothing, and maybe, I will get a taste for it" he smiles looking into her eyes, and she smiles back visibly moved and nods in eager agreement.

"Mister Brown saw us Milord when you were still sleeping, please tell him that I don't want anyone to know who I am and please ask him to not see me as his future mistress, I promise that I will not take revenge on anyone."

He nods to her and seemed totally cured and strong like the Charles everyone loved.

"I feel so warm Eleonore, I was so cold down to the inside of my bones and my heart was

black and dead. And now... How can one be cured so suddenly.

Very well Nora I will tell Brown to arrange a room under the stairs somewhere and oh please know that if the work planned is not done according to the schedule, you will be caned!

He looks at her with a stern face, visibly not joking and excited at the idea.

She nods humbly and looks down and as he leaves, takes her little plastic bag and follows him hastily, feeling bubbles in her belly because of his positively disturbing statement about punishment.

The seven coming months were very hard for Nora. Very real. And it made her happy deep inside. Also, as she was not in the basement but a bit more in range of the master's house, she could sometimes hear the parties, the laughs, and the voice of Lord Charles laughing and making jokes to women. She could smell the wonderful meals also from time to time. And the duty was as promised gigantic, and so she was caned on her bottom, very cruelly, at least twice a week and she thought that Lord Charles was probably enjoying it and it made her feel excitingly strange.

One day, there was a party at the house which seemed a good active and joyful house again, and Charles came near Nora's closet with a woman and told her poems and compliments in a soft voice and the woman was moaning. Nora found that very cruel but it made bubbles in her belly and she thought about her attraction for cruelty and wondered why feeling rejected and humiliated and hurt felt somehow good.

At the end of her penitence the family came, there was joy in the air.

After a month they married.

She became a figure in the nearby village and took care of the ashford's manor quiet well.

No man could dream having a better wife than Eleonore. Charles was the happiest man on earth. They exchanged a lot of tenderness but didn't make love like rabbits. Actually after 8 months, the marriage was still not consumed. The desire was here in an extreme way. But both loved the erotism more than the realization, they could stay, like suspended, exchanging extreme erotic energies while not touching each others. Added to this part he loved to see her suffer, and she loved to be hurt. She was never jealous, never intrusive, giving him all the space he needed and being here soul and heart for him only, anytime he wanted. Except once a month, when Eleonore, now Lady Ashford, disappeared for 4 days. We could see the house become silent and more severe suddenly during these days except maybe for Charles who often invited women in the intimacy of his apartments during those 4 days, making enough noise around a certain little door under stairs to be sure to be noticed. And one could walk, by an invisible nobody scrubbing the floors until they shine from 4 in the morning to 8 in the evening. Her name was Nora and everyone carefully ignored her.

The end.