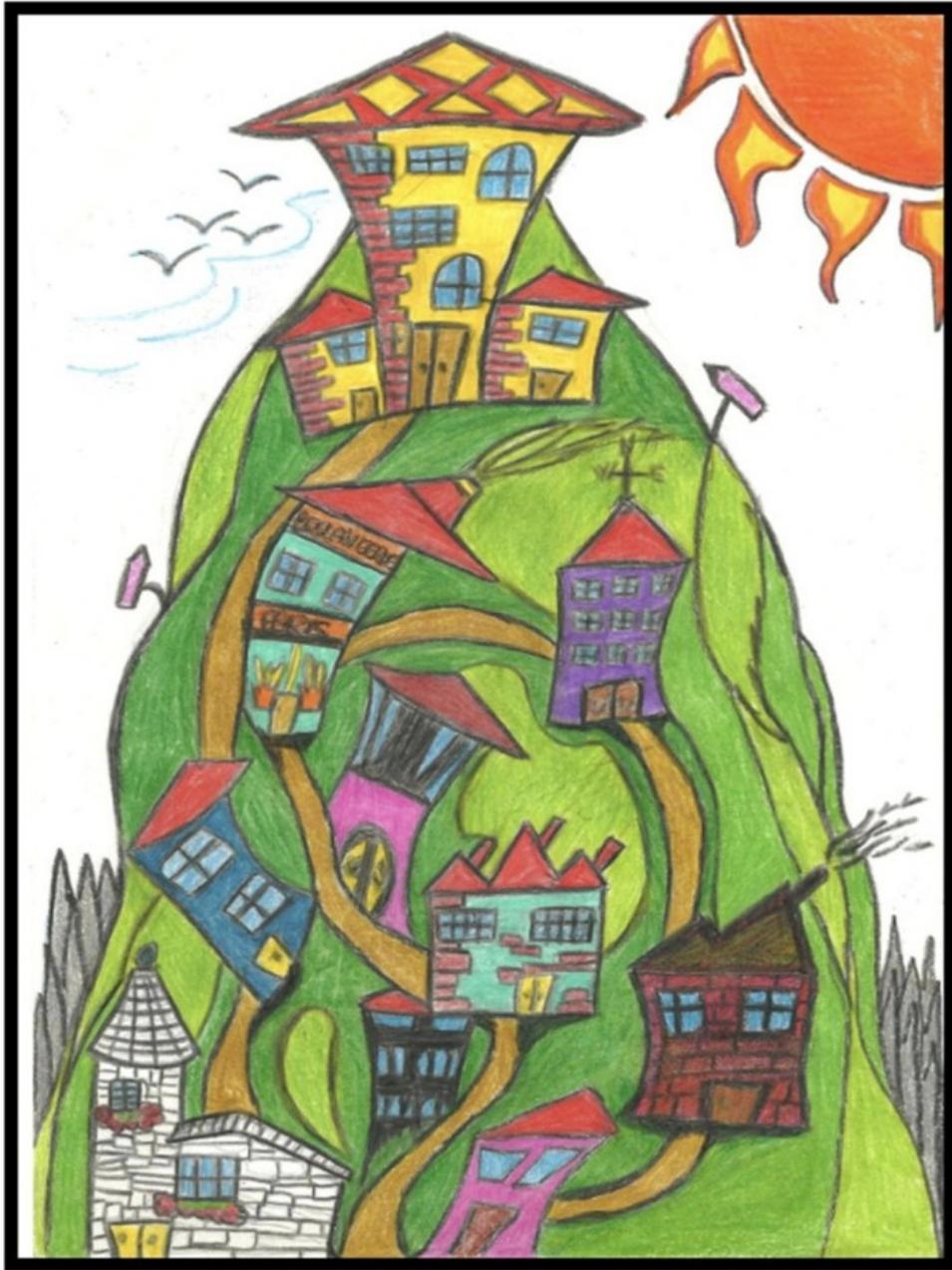




FEDERICO PARRA



A LITTLE GIRL

IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

LOST HER HAPPY THOUGHT

1

This story begins in Paris.

One night, years ago, a few days before Christmas, while softly snowing and the first lights of the street lamps being powered off by a long candle-snuffer.

- Crazy things! There's people doing odd jobs for living!

Madame Tussauds thought to herself.

Outside it's snowing big twitchy flakes, dancing in the wind and in the glow of the lights, before settling on the roofs and the streets of Paris.

- How cold it is! *What a rough night out!*

Mary Jane thought, leaning on the fogged glass window overlooking the courtyard.

Facing Ladurée House, the residence of one of the richest families in the city.

And lastly, the street lamps on the luxurious entrance of the villa are powered off, as if even the light felt a certain subjection to the richness.

Coincidentally, the useless person doing an odd job is the one to ensure that eventually, the street lights on the road beneath that window are turned off. Where far away, he - maybe he's the only one - can see the shape and face of the beautiful and sad Mary Jane.

So, the last light in Paris remains lit on the landing full of snow

beyond Ladurée's backyard...

Then there is only night and few stars in the sky.
You can make out a stealthy shadow, fast in the little and
only light on. Maybe a thief beyond the gate? ... After an
imperceptible second, the shadow vanishes into thin air, and
in the dark of the deep night.

To Mary Jane's misted eyes it seemed to have bent like a
caress or a kiss; she was still motionless in her strong
melancholy, watching the snow falling.

Then there was only night and few fragile stars in the sky.

So, the last light in Paris remained lit on the landing full of
snow, in

Ladurée's backyard. Where now there was a cradle at the
large gate, lightly resting on the soft
blanket of snow.

Inside the cradle, under a big blanket of heavy wool,
there is a child who screams, cries and
despairs; on the edge of the cradle there's a name,
written with the painters' bloody red:

Jane Baptiste.

The sharp crying of the newborn is like a magic flute, like
an ultrasonic fluctuating and invisible call.

Lights up and awakens the other houses in the
neighborhood.

It's creating a small gathering of useless and curious people
who want to know.

Even Mary Jane comes down and the guy comes up; he who
switches off the street lamps with its long iron
now abandoned on the ground.

- Oh God! How little is he!

Mary Jane shouted astonished, bringing her little hands on
her cheeks.

- Surely he was abandoned; let's get him out of the cold
into the house!

Mary Jane's stepmother falsely ordered the housekeeper.

While she invited the priest to enter the house, looking at him with watchful and vile eyes.

Leaving out the rest of nosy neighbors.

The snow kept falling in large flakes.

Now, in the enlightened hall of the villa there were three people plus the priest and the little cradle.

They were all standing still, waiting for someone to start speaking, a task that was quickly acquitted by Madam Tussauds, resourceful and dictator, but also very scenic and theatrical.

- Insolent peasants! They creep even into our homes to bring the evil fruit of their sins! It's incredible!

Isn't it, Reverend? They have fun and then they wash their hands!

- Good lord! ... Peasants and poor people are convinced that your money can free them from their mortal sin!

Rev. Dumas said with his hands clasped in a vain prayer.

Mary Jane became all red with anger.

- Don't you think that poor people, the peasants are just hungry? And they hope that here we could nourish and grow their son?

And who knows why and how much pain they had on abandoning him!

Mary Jane blurted out, nearly in tears, imploring her stepmother with shining eyes,

who, however, was absorbed by a silent whisper with the priest and had not seen

nor heard the words of her stupid and hated niece, now her little desired adoptive daughter.

In the meantime, outside it was getting snowed

stronger and the snow was coming down like a white blanket around the chatter of the curious...
It was coming down on the heads and hats of people asking information to the coachmen of the parked cab, in that rough night out, near Ladurée House.
In the meantime in the glittering salon, Madame Tussauds and Rev. Dumas had already decided on where and how little Jean Baptiste would spend his first Christmas.

- *The orphanage?! ... Oh my God, Madame! ... And you, Mr. Reverend! ... Christ! ... That's a terrible place!*
Mary Jane had so voiced her anger, which was now unstoppable.

- You should tell your daughter she ought to not use the Lord's name in vain!

Rev. Dumas promptly replied with this catchphrase.

- And you, Reverend Father... Shouldn't you do good deeds?

The beautiful and brave little girl said with a trembling and fearful voice.

- Mary Jane, shut up! Go to your room! *Noooooow!!!*

Madame Tussauds blurted out, possibly becoming more ugly than usual and red as a pepper.
Mary Jane, although little, was well acquainted with the nastiness and pettiness of the adoptive Stepmother...
So in a heartbeat, she grabbed the cradle and ran out!
She ran breathless as fast as she could, towards the light of the Full Moon.
She ran a long time, without knowing

where to go and not knowing what to do,
nor why she had done
that gesture so clumsy and stupid.

The snow was still falling in white and quilted big flakes, as
dancers for a music box overturned in the sky.
Dancers who, with their skirts, cover and swell
of a kind of bridal white
all the roofs and the streets of Paris.

So, in this story, in this long night,
there are still white flakes of white snow falling incessantly
and creating an unbreakable and inexplicable connection
between Mary Jane's and
Jane Baptist's hearts.

Exactly this connection, which arises from
a past lived at the orphanage for her,
and a future snatched to the orphanage for Jean Baptiste.

Exactly this connection set out
under the light snowflakes
shortly before Christmas in Paris.

This unique and unspoken connection,
this embrace as fugitives.

Like a flake
tightened in this strange story,
it was author of a great little miracle.

On that night like two fugitives,
they found shelter in a barn, a stable,
among cows and lots of animals.

Clear is that the little girl did not know what to do. For the
cold and for feeding the little Jean Baptiste, but above all
she did not know how to make him stop crying and
screaming!

So, a bit for the cold and a bit for that sense of worthlessness that humans have for the needs of nature and life, Mary Jane burst into tears and sobs that joined the strong ones of the newborn. Fortunately the barn was far enough away from the house inhabited by the farmer.

- STOP IT! We have to work tomorrow!

A big voice thundered.

A voice from darkness and nowhere, in the bottom of the barn where there were the cows.

- Is anyone there? Is anyone down there?

The little girl's trembling and tearful voice whispered.

- More than anyone! We are a herd!

Don't you see?

The booming voice from the darkness said.

- No sir, I do not see anyone! It's dark down there!
- That baby is crying because he is hungry and cold!
Bring him here to us!
- No! And who are you?

The blonde girl

asked curious and courageous.

There was an infinite moment of darkness and silence, while still snowing outside, at that moment also Jean Baptiste suddenly fell silent.

The two small hearts beat fearful and in sync, as one big heart.

- I am Hélène the cow,

the white one with black spots.

- I am Antonin the bay horse.
- I am Fabien the black horse.
- I am Geneviève the chicken.
- I am Ernest the pig.
- I am Faust the sheepdog.
- I am Jean-Marc the rooster.
- I am Cécile the black cow.
- I am Geraldine the brown cow.
- I am Basil the pony.
- I am Ismael the bull.
- I am Eloise the owl.
- I am Bernhard the mouse.
- I am Thomas the cat.
- *Stop it... Stop it!* Please, I'm going crazy!!!

Mary Jane said, holding her head tight in her hands,
and her palms over her ears.

- Get that baby down here, come on!

Hurry up, Mary Jane!

The cow's gruff voice continued;
she knew the girl's name.

The night passed in the animals' warmth that fed Jean
Baptiste and the young Mary Jane.

It fed them like puppies of the she-wolf, with the same
udders of a same, single mother.

Warming them in that warmth much more than family.

That warmth called: *Mother Nature!*

They slept on the cows' bellies and their huge and warm
udders.

They fell asleep together,
like two newborn calves.

So that white night just before

Christmas, spent in the animal warmth and

under the starlight, it marked as a line drawn on the ground, like a street in the snow, the new life and the living path of the two innocent little hearts.

The Moon, enlightened for a quarter, came out to a split in the stable wood, on the side where the two children were sleeping. Its clear light, like a comet star, radiated their redemptive faces.

Christmas was by now!

But the animals did not seem very interested. For them, the next morning, it would be one morning like every other one, with the usual things of all time.

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