

YOUNG AUTHORS FICTION FESTIVAL



The American Library in Paris

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About the Young Authors Fiction Festival

The American Library in Paris is proud to be the organizer of the Young Authors Fiction Festival. YAFF aims to strengthen community among English-speakers in the Paris area through the art and craft of storytelling. YAFF is open to all students ages 5 to 18 in France who write in English. Submission to YAFF 2023 closed on 1 April 2023. For more information about YAFF please visit americanlibraryinparis.org/yaff/



photo: @losangelestimes

THE FORGOTTEN POET

I am walking slowly, surrounded by art, looking at the old paintings and observing all these faces go by. I'm in a museum, an empty museum. An asylum for all the broken minds. If I listen carefully, if I take the deafening silence out of the equation, I can hear the soul of the painter, crying, desperately. The heart of the pianist beating too fast. And the voice of the poet shouting at the world. All these lives, imprisoned between four walls of stone, are meant to be exposed for ever. Born to never be forgotten. Loved in posterity. Damned. Inevitably forced to see their world changing and their art being altered by the years. If anybody had ever asked them if they would have preferred to pass into oblivion. Would they have said "yes"? Because who doesn't know that eternity is a ploy?

My name's Juliette. My mom loved Shakespeare so much... Museums are my favourite places in the world. I particularly love the Orsay museum. There is something different there, an imperceptible change in the atmosphere, in the air. Even the light of the sun illuminating the painting I'm standing in front of is warmer than usual. The beauty of art always strikes me so hard that I never have enough of it. But today, for the first time in my life, I'm not really focused on observing my favourite painting "By the table" from Henri-Fantin-Latour. There is this man standing still next to me. He's so absorbed in the contemplation of the picture that he doesn't even seem to realise that a tear is coming down his cheek. He's well dressed, wearing a brown three-pieces suit and I feel a bit ashamed in my simple pair of jeans. His messy hair contrasts with the rest of his appearance. I don't want to interrupt his reverie but as always, my curiosity is stronger than my will.

"It's an outstanding painting, isn't it?" I ask.

A large smile lights up his face.

“Yes... It’s probably my favourite one.” He answers thoughtfully. The mysterious man turns his face towards me. There is a glimpse of something in his expression. Something I’m not sure to understand. I can’t take my eyes off him.

“I’ve been waiting for you, he declares. Nice to meet you. “

His previous sadness seems to have completely disappeared. I’m beginning to feel worried. Why would a stranger wait for me?

“Who are you? What’s your name?”

“I’m nothing but a poet. The only way I can enjoy my existence is with a thousand of words in my head and a pen in my hand. And my name...There’s no need for you to know it. The way my parents decided to call me is not the most interesting thing about me.”

He is crazy. Or arrogant. But I’m intrigued. I can’t deny it.

“What is it then? The most interesting thing about you.” I demand.

He smiles again, turns round, and opens his arms, pointing all the visitors out.

“All these people, they don’t see me. They all probably think you’re talking to the statue over there.”

I laugh nervously. When did the conversation start to become this weird. I have my confirmation now: this man is insane. I turn around and walk away. But then, I feel a hand holding mine and I have no other choice but to stop. I sigh loudly and close my eyes to calm down and control my irritation. I just want him to let me alone!

“Are you going to let me leave ...”

I'm not in the principal hall of the Orsay museum anymore. I can't breathe. This is impossible.

I'm at the top of a tree sitting on a branch, ten metres above the ground! My heart beats so fast. I feel some tears of panic running down my cheeks. My whole body is shaking like a dead leaf.

"What are you waiting for?" shouts a voice at the bottom of the tree.

Him. Again. This mysterious poet who apparently has the power to teleport himself.

"WHAT THE HELL AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?" I yell.

"Jump! I'll catch you!"

"BUT IT'S 10 METRES HIGH!"

I can hear a smile in his voice when he declares:

"Listen, I know you're scared. But I just brought you to this place so maybe you should stop thinking about what is possible and what is not. I don't seem like a trustworthy person but if you could believe in me for one or two seconds, things would appear a lot easier."

I close my eyes; listen to all the birdsongs and the little sounds the forest makes when it breathes. I am dreaming, that's the only logical explanation. In dreams, everything is possible.

So I jump.

And 2 strong arms catch me.

"Let's go now" he encourages me. "We've got someone to pursue."

"Who?" I ask.

"Dawn."

The sun is slowly rising above our heads. I can feel the delicate sunbeams on my skin. We run together. And I follow him because he has my hand in his. I follow him up the hills, along the plain, across the little city and on the marble quays. He still has my hand in his. I stopped thinking about the possible and the impossible. I stopped looking for answers. I'm now running in some wood with a stranger. And I have never felt this good.

The two young people fall at the edge of the wood.

I'm back at the Orsay museum. In front of my favourite painting" By The table". Alone. I'm crying. Crying so hard that the visitors are looking at me. I feel empty. Completely, totally lonely. My soul is broken, shouting inside of me. I straighten and look at the painting and something strikes me. The man on the left, Arthur Rimbaud, reminds me of someone. Then I remember an old poem I used to love. A magnificent poem.

Dawn, from Arthur Rimbaud.

By Lisa Guerin

