

Miserrimus

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Every month : read how the scenario is developing

Synopsis – 1st part-October 2013

1

JADE, a 35 year old woman, visits the fair. She is alone and smiling. She moves up and down the alleys of the fairground and seems a bit removed from the ambient environment, as if she has placed a filter between herself and the world.

She notices a strange attraction : a dark caravan of cylindrical form ; on its side is written « Miserrimus » in neon purple lights.

She enters.

Inside it is like a vaulted cave, with a few rays of light piercing through the roof. A soft atmosphere reigns ; it is an agreeable place and Jade can hear the sound of flowing water, the sound an underground stream might make.

She is greeted by SOREN, an ageless man—he is somewhere between thirty and fifty, perhaps even older, it's difficult to say. He is very elegant, with airs, rather a dandy. He expresses himself in an elaborate and literate manner, characterized by a discreet, humble and sometimes sad irony ; he manipulates paradoxes with energy and jubilation.

Soren explains that he is the inventor of this place, created with the objective of recording the tales of the unhappy destinies of his contemporaries : it is a way of meditating on the unhappiness of the world as well as on his own. Sometimes—more often than one might think—joy, and even jubilation, can be found at the meeting point with unhappy fates—that said without a trace of mockery, on the contrary, with great empathy for the unlucky individual. Misfortune is not always sad, as happiness is not always joyful.

Soren gives Jade a guided visit of his « museum ». He shows her a « modern » confessional that he dubs « Sonomaton » : a small cubicle where grievances and the narratives of people's misfortunes can be recorded. There is also a large collection of previously registered accounts of unhappy fates and the histories of those who have visited the « Sonomaton ». These tapes can be listened to in a peaceful environment. Close by is an authentic psychiatrist's couch in front of a large bookcase filled with books about misfortune—essays, novels, testimonies of all sorts. And, finally, Soren shows her a small stage lit by projectors. In the center is a throne. Three small cameras are directed towards the throne and a screen is placed in front of it : it is a small television studio. One can watch news reports, documentaries and fictions on the subject of misfortune.

On the other side of Soren's museum are presentation cases that offer a large selection of « celebrity » magazines. He is particularly proud of this collection : it is a long litany of the real or purported misfortunes of world celebrities !

On a screen is projected a collection of images—paintings, drawings, photographs—that touch on especially unhappy destinies. A computer allows visitors to consult them at will and to access a database with thousands of references.

But the key attraction is in the center of the room : a translucent stele on which the word « Miserrimus » is engraved twice, the words forming a cross. Soren explains that this stele is a stylized reproduction of a tomb in the Worcester Cathedral in England : it gave him the idea for the museum as well as his vocation. It is an empty tomb engraved with the single word « Miserrimus »—which means « the most unhappy » in Latin. Ever since he saw the tomb, Soren has had the idea of finding this most unhappy of men, this « Miserrimus », the rightful occupant of the Worcester sepulcher. He has traveled the world on this quest and came up with the idea of his itinerant museum as a way of meeting candidates who might occupy the symbolic tomb—and also as a way to finance his noble expedition.

Soren gently invites Jade to recount her own story : he knows that no one enters this place purely by chance. She has the choice : Sonomaton, couch or television

studio, whichever she prefers... And in any event, unless she authorizes him to use her name, Soren changes the names of candidates. Jade can also talk about someone else ; Soren has noticed that frequently people prefer to speak of other people's misfortunes rather than their own—through modesty or shyness. Because, he adds in a state of elation, to be the most unfortunate is a supreme honor ! And in this matter, modesty reigns—on the quest for misfortune, it is not a lesser virtue.

Jade refuses the invitation. She prefers to simply admire Soren's collection. He leaves her alone to do so.

She reads the celebrity magazines with amusement, spends some time in the Sonomaton and exits the cubicle with a hardened face and then opens a few volumes... There is something serious, peaceful and agreeable about this place ; she feels good here.

As she prepares to leave, Soren proposes that she listen to a song : we hear the rhythm of Caribbean music : « Ô papa, quel malheur quel grand malheur pour moi... » (« Oh Papa, what misfortune, what great misfortune for me... »). It is *Scandale dans la famille*, performed by the Surfs.

Jade leaves, happy. Outside, in the fairgrounds, she hums the refrain, « Ô papa, quel malheur si maman savait ça... » (« Oh Papa, what misfortune if Mama knew... »).

2

The next day, in the late afternoon, Jade slips into Soren's museum.

The atmosphere is different : there is an agonizing sort of contemporary music playing. Jade slowly realizes that it is an evocation of unhappiness. Soren is seated in a corner, grumbling, seeming to suffer, overwhelmed. He greets Jade without energy, but pulling himself up, nevertheless. He recites Henri Michaud's poem, of which the music is an expression. « *Le Malheur, mon grand laboureur, Le Malheur, assois-toi, Repose-toi, Reposons-nous un peu, toi et moi.* » « *Misfortune, my great laborer, Misfortune, take a seat, rest, let us rest together*

you and I. »

Jade challenges him : she wants to tell the story of her life to Soren, but not in any of the places he has set up for recording. She proposes that they go outside : an evening stroll in the surrounding countryside might help her to evoke her past...and will do Soren good.

They arrive at the edge of a river. They observe the aquatic plants : the long stalks that undulate in the current and the lights from the fair reflecting on the surface of the water form an aquatic ballet. 'Like an image of destiny', Jade smiles. On the other side of the river is a vast meadow filled with wild plants ; they cross over, using a small footbridge.

Seated on the riverbank, Jade speaks of her life. Soren has a small device to record her voice. We can hear the noises of the animals that live here (birds, insects...) and the wind blowing in the vegetation. The lights grow fainter and fainter.

« Seigneur, je suis très fatigué, je suis né fatigué, et j'ai beaucoup marché depuis le chant du coq. » (« Lord, I am greatly tired, I was born tired, and I have walked far since the cock crowed. »)

She remembers this poem, in the form of a prayer ; she learned it at school—it's one of the few she remembers. The verses had immediately spoken to her, marked her, she saw herself in them ; they expressed what she confusedly felt—most likely the weight of fate, a fate tinged with indolence and self-irony, a child's fate. The strange fatigue that weighs on this « little black child »—it's the title of the poem—was also hers, it is still hers. Jade has the impression she was born unhappy. The feeling has little to do with melancholy, or the « black humors » so much explored, adulated and even cherished throughout the Romantic 19th century and on into the beginning of the 20th—before the two world wars forever changed the coordinates. It is not a monotone languor, or spleen, or a sense of burden when faced with the inexorable passage of time and the emptiness of existence : her unhappiness is neither sad nor solemn.

No, her unhappiness lies elsewhere, and takes on another form, sufficiently unclear as to sometimes seem unreal, sufficiently insistent to make itself known. Jade speaks of the episodes of fear that have overwhelmed her since childhood, episodes that she cannot control. They happen unexpectedly and are paralyzing, making it difficult to breathe, preventing her from doing anything. Her doctor talks of spasmophilia—but putting words on things doesn't make them go away... In fact, in this case it makes them worse. And these episodes may also be the expression of something else.

Jade is sure that these crises are a sort of purge : as if the diffuse unhappiness inside her comes out at these times, as if her body needed to purge itself at regular intervals.

Jade would like to live simply, crossing through life with as few shocks as possible, without any great 'project' either : just to be... not really happy... but at peace. To purge herself once and for all.

Because Jade does have « small happinesses » : placing her bare feet on the cold marble floor of the living room, feeling drops of fine rain on her face, the wind blowing in her hair and under her dress, filling her lungs with that air... It is also good to direct the shower head towards her chest and to feel the intense heat running down her body...

Jade writes texts for correspondence sales catalogs. She is the person who writes : « woman's cable knit sweater with plunging neckline, exists in five colors », etc. It is undemanding work that she can do from home : with her spasms she is not able to work in a group.

Night has fallen. Soren and Jade return in silence to the fairgrounds, guided by its lights and sounds.

At the entrance to his attraction, Soren tells Jade that she must not turn her back on unhappiness, or try to escape it. On the contrary she must face it and cross through it. « Happiness is not the opposite of unhappiness, it is the heart of

it. »

Without pronouncing another word, he goes into his museum and closes the door.

The neon « Miserrimus » clicks off, leaving Jade in obscurity—only a thin dribble of light from the fair exposes the contours of shadows.

3

The fairgrounds : the day has barely begun, but the fairground artists are already packing their things, closing their attractions, hooking up their caravans : they're leaving.

Soren is at the wheel of his little truck—a sort of home-made mobile home—trailing his museum/caravan. At the stop sign at the edge of the square he sees Jade, who is holding a small suitcase. Without a word, not even saying hello to Soren, she opens the passenger's side door and climbs in. « Let's go » she says. Soren, uncomfortable, starts the engine.

The monotone landscape of the great plains is lit by the pale rays of the autumn sun. A stormy discussion ensues.

Soren says that Jade cannot go with him and that she will have to get out at the next town. He lives alone, solitude is necessary for his well-being. And...Jade is a woman. He fears the company of women inordinately.

Jade replies that she is not forcing herself on him. She will sleep at a hotel in all the towns where they stop—she has money saved and she can also continue to work writing texts for sales catalogs. She is convinced that the Miserrimus museum needs a second person. And, precisely, a feminine presence. Many aspects of unhappiness are inaccessible to men.

Soren struggles with himself. He seems panicked.

But Jade holds out. She challenges him and says that she is only following his indications : to cross through unhappiness and not turn her back on it. And that

is what Soren is doing, isn't it ? And so they will be two now, searching for this « Miserrimus »... Who is certainly a woman.

The route slips past in silence.

To be continued...

The rest of the quest remains to be written... Depending on the encounters Soren and Jade have on their travels and the tales of misfortune they record in their attempt to discover the most unhappy of men.