

My grandmother, who passed away too soon, brought me closer, in spite of herself, to a distant cousin who hadn't been heard of for a long time, but who shared her meagre inheritance with me and a few others : a hovel, neglected for too long and which threatened ruin. My grandmother had collapsed before the roof of her house, proof that there is a sense of priorities.

He kept staring at me, this cousin, as we warmed up at the local tavern after the funeral ceremony. Why do loved ones have to die in December or January when it's freezing cold ? Do they mean by this to make us understand that they would like to be accompanied for the last trip, and that deep down they wouldn't be against us catching pneumonia ! I was deep in thought when, raising my head up from my cup of hot chocolate, I met his steel blue gaze of poisonous innocence, and staring at me.

- Are you Felix, Aunt Anastasie's son ? He threw at me, out of the blue. In his questioning, I felt the beginning of an old and deep hatred. I admit that his icy gaze intimidated me.

- You're ten years older than me ,right?

- Well, yes it's possible .

- Oh, but I haven't forgotten.

And as I widened my eyes, questioning him with my gaze trying to find the meaning of his short reply, he blurted out in an acerbic tone :

- I'll piss you right off. You're not going to inherit from Grandmother Josephine. I know very well that, as a kid, you were already eying up her vases made from shell casings. I could see you, kid that I was, how you stared at the side of the mantelpiece where she had placed her old copper vases lovingly polished with mirror cream. Well, you can take a running jump my man, you won't get them. First of all these vases come from my father's side, whose own grandfather had been in the Great War.

- But then, why were these vases in Grandma Josephine's house ?

My cousin looked down, a bit embarrassed, and as I stared at him questioningly, he suddenly shouted out :

- It's a family secret !

Suddenly Cousin Gabriel had aroused my curiosity.

- Come on Gabriel, because your name is Gabriel, isn't it ? Either you've said too much or not enough, explain yourself.

Gabriel squirmed in his chair, coughed once or twice before continuing .

- As I told you ,they come from my father's side.

- Yes, I said, my uncle by marriage.

- That's right, and Grandmother Josephine had, how can I put it, a weakness for my father's father. As a reward, out of love, what do I know , he gave her these vases.

- Eh ! I exclaimed, Grandmother Josephine and your grandfather Alphonse

- Correct ! My Grandfather Alphonse and Grandmother Josephine well, I'm not drawing you a diagram ! So the vases come from my house.

- So, Gabriel, I told him. They didn't bother with the ancestors!!

His gaze remained fierce. He felt that his story had not unnerved me.

- But anyway , I said to him ,is it so bad that I recover the famous vases ?

Gabriel stood firm, he fixed me with his cold gaze before speaking out.

- I won't leave the vases to the person who stole my teddy bear !

I looked at him, taken aback.

- I stole a teddy bear ? But what teddy ?
- Mine of course, who else ?
- But when, but where ?
- At Grandma Josephine's, don't you remember ?
- Not in the least.
- You're even more evil than I imagined.
- But come on Gabriel. At your age you don't need teddy bears anymore!
- It's a matter of principle.
- I can't even remember that story!

Sometime later, an indifferent solicitor, plump and petty, showed up at Grandma Josephine's to proceed with the division of her meagre possessions. I had to fight hard but I demonstrated theory, flattery and platitudes to try and keep the vases of the Great War, which reminded me so much of my revered old grandmother. In front of me, my cousin Gabriel, finally gave in to my arguments and also to those of the solicitor, who was only thinking of getting it over as quickly as possible. It was only when I held the coveted vases in my arms that I glanced at them distractedly. To my surprise I found that one of them had an additional decoration. In front of Gabriel's dumbfounded face, I pulled out of the vase, by the ear, his teddy bear which, solemnly I returned to him ... in front of the solicitor !