

Café Dog
by James Yaoyung Hu

Honorable Mention in 2013 Young Adult Short on Words Competition

Your own imagination is your own worse nightmare. On a stormy night like this, where you can hear the rolling thunder and the rain beating on the roof over your head is when your imagination takes you for a spin in your sleep. The ironic thing is that today is supposed to be the first day of spring.

In this nightmare, I see myself running away from this demon that is trying to eat me, however just before the monster catches me, I wake up. My father is standing over my bed nudging me. I slowly crawl out of bed; still disoriented, I look around at the dark room. As I'm looking around, I hear the cracking of the thunder echoing throughout the rooms of the apartment. I jump, and begin running around the house trying to find something to hide under. But then, father grabs me and says that everything is alright; we are just going for a walk.

Too frightened to walk outside, father picks me up and carries me. He carries me through the streets of Paris. Being so close to father puts me at ease. I bury my nose into his scarf as he carries me. Feeling the warmth that radiates from him transports me into another world where nothing bad could happen. However I am pulled out of that world when father puts me down on the cold wet ground. He looks at me, but I see no love, or happiness. All I see is pain and sorrow. I am confused. He bundles his scarf around my small body. Father kisses my head and stays there for a while. I feel a warm drop of water land on my head. Then father whispers, "I'm sorry." Father starts to walk away; I start to walk next to him, but am yanked back by my collar. Father had tied the leash around a tree. He keeps on walking away, I struggle to pull away from the tree's grasp, but it is futile. I turn to father, who was still walking away, and start to call out to him. I call and call, but father began to walk faster and faster away from me. I begin to cry for him, screaming at him. But now father is gone. I am alone. I am alone in this horrible storm, tied to a tree with only the scarf left to remember father.

I wake up now to the rays of light that phase through the windows of the café. I hear the river tour boats start up their engines, prepping for the waves of people that wish to explore Paris. I crawl out from under my scarf, doing my morning stretches, and that is when I hear the front door to café open. I run to see who it is and it is the owner. She has been like a mother to me. I run to greet her and she greets me by picking me up and giving me a kiss on the head, and I give her a kiss on the cheek. She puts me down and goes about opening the café. A few minutes later the six other employees that worked there walked in, and began helping out as well. It is the first day of spring and it is my second year at this café. It is warm; however it is cloudy, so the natural lighting has a hazy feeling to it. The café is open in a matter of minutes, and customers began to flow in.

When the café is in full swing, I walk around and greet customers. I usually get a pat on the head, and occasionally I have been picked up to sit with the customer as they enjoy what we have to offer. I play with the children that come by, and turn the crying babies into happy babies. This spring, there has been this customer that has been coming to the café. He has been sitting in the one corner of the outside patio that I consider to be the best spot. It is the best spot because you get to take in everything the café has to offer. A person can take in the entire location, and see the boats that cruise up and down the Seine. A tree covers that spot, allowing the right amount of light to come in, making it the perfect temperature during the warmer weeks. What makes this customer stand out is not that he sits there every day, or that he is an artist, but of how he interacts with mother. Mother sits down with him and talks with him during her lunch break. He sits there all day drawing until day's end. Once the café is shutting down and I'm put to bed, she walks off with him.

Of course it perplexed me of why mother was acting the way she did, but in time I learned why mother took such a liking to him. I learned that his name is Léon. Léon is an artist, and when I am sitting with him, he shows me his drawings. They are just sketches, but when I look at them, I can see that there is something more to his art. I can see his feelings emitting from the drawings. I have seen the drawings of other artists that have stopped by the café, but I see no feelings in them, it is almost like their art is dead. Léon has mainly drawn motifs from the café, and some of his drawings have been displayed in the café by mother. Beside the drawings, when I am around Léon, he gives off this comforting vibe. When I am around him, it almost feels like I am with father again. I feel safe.

As spring turns into summer, the days have been getting warmer and brighter. Compared to the beginning of spring where dark and rainy days were a common event, we are getting weeks of bright days full of energy, with only a gloomy day few and far between. Léon does not come to the café on those dreary days. On these luminous days, I see smiles fill the café and I find myself spending my time sitting with Léon.

I wake up to the crack of thunder one morning. I jump out of bed thinking that something bad has happened to the café. I take a walk around the café; I am half-way done until I hear another crack of thunder echo through the café. I am frozen. I hear the rain beating on the glass, the whistle of the wind that sweeps by the building. And it is then that I realize that I am alone. I run to my bed and burrow as far down under my scarf as possible, escaping from this terror. I hide there, wanting mother to come as soon as possible. However she never does.

I cannot remember how long I stayed in the café and I cannot remember how long the rain come pouring down. But it rained for a long time. I hear the door open and I run to it. I do not care who it is, but I just want to be with someone. It is Léon that came; I am so happy that I am not alone anymore. But as Léon picks me up and kisses me, tears are flowing from his eyes. He never puts me down; he bundles me in my scarf and takes me out, locks the door and carries me to his house.

Léon says that this is my home now. His art studio is a loft that allows the natural light to illuminate the place. It is still raining, but it is obvious that the storm is passing. He places me down on his couch by his fireplace. Léon goes over to this canvas that is opposite from the couch. Léon uncovers the canvas and begins to paint; his eyes are still red. I just sit there, listening to the rain patter start to diminish until it is gone. I fall asleep.

When I awake, the sun's rays are out and lighting up the studio. Father is gone but oddly enough I do not feel lonely at all. I get up, shake away the scarf, and walk around the studio. Father has many works all around. He has many awards for his art as well. Finally I see this one canvas still propped up, covered by a sheet. I grab the sheet with my mouth to uncover what it hides from the world. After I see it, I just sit there, staring at it, and fall asleep in front of it. All I can dream about is that painting. It is father, mother and me. It is all of us at the café, sitting together in the center of the patio, with rays of light shining down on us.