

Concours de nouvelles en langue étrangère :

“No Man is an island entire of itself”
(John Donne)

Cette nouvelle de 1994 mots est inspirée de la citation suivante (traduite de l'allemand) attribuée au pasteur allemand du XXème siècle Martin Niemöller, dénonçant l'absence de réaction des intellectuels allemands suite à la montée du Nazisme et à la persécution successive de différentes cibles :

*Lorsqu'ils sont venus chercher les communistes
Je me suis tu, je n'étais pas communiste.
Lorsqu'ils sont venus chercher les syndicalistes
Je me suis tu, je n'étais pas syndicaliste.
Lorsqu'ils sont venus chercher les Juifs
Je me suis tu, je n'étais pas Juif.
Puis ils sont venus me chercher
Et il ne restait plus personne pour protester.*

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)

This short story of 1994 words was inspired by the following quotation (translated from german) attributed to the german pastor Martin Niemöller(1892-1984), denouncing the inactivity of German intellectuals following the Nazi rise to power and the successive persecution of their chosen targets :

*First they came for the communists,
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left to speak out for me.*

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)

- "Who will it be this time?" a farmer asked his wife, embracing his 5-year-old son.
- "I only hope our children will be safe..." she whispered in a reedy voice.

As they had for the first sunrise of every month, all the people of the kingdom had gathered in front of the castle, waiting under the main balcony for the king's speech. Everybody was speaking in a hushed voice, possessed by the same feeling of fear spread across the main courtyard. When the familiar drum roll sounded, the crowd instantly fell silent. The king slowly appeared, dressed in his ceremonial cape. He leant on the rail of the balcony and addressed his audience with a sincere smile. The crowd bowed respectfully in a deathly silence. The king's smile was famous for conveying happiness in the kingdom, but today it only filled his people with a sense of profound fear.

- "Dear people of Khemia, it is a great pleasure to speak to you once again. First, I would like to thank you all for your hard work and precious contribution to the harmony of our kingdom. Thanks to your constant efforts and to the recent implementation of new laws, our realm has become a true haven of peace and justice."

He paused to take a deep breath, and continued with a beaming smile.

- "As the realm becomes more prosperous, it becomes harder every month to find ways to improve your living conditions. Our children are the citizens of tomorrow, and must be treated like princes to ensure the future of our land. The craftsmen, farmers and merchants embody the present of Khemia, and my role as king is to ensure stability within their lives. However, the elderly are the past of our land. They contributed to our success, and I am grateful to them, but today they live at the expense of their poor families. To free these families from the burden, a new law will come into force today. The elderly who are unable to work anymore will be arrested and kept in the basement of the castle, where they will peacefully end their lives."

A faint whisper of protest began to rise from the crowd, but vanished right away as the king continued.

- "A final announcement for today. Angia, my beloved daughter, will be returning back from her long journey in the neighbouring kingdoms within a few months, perhaps with a foreign prince that will become the next king of this land. Let's pray that he may be a brilliant king!"

As the king disappeared, many families burst into tears in the crowd.

- "Grandpa, I don't want you to go..." a young girl cried, hugging an old man with all her strength.
- "I knew my end was near, but I would have preferred to end my days with you all" an elderly lady whispered to her family.

The drawbridge drew down and a swarm of guards in armour came out, covering the kingdom. The elderly were forced to follow them and slowly disappeared into the royal castle. As the sun set, the high priest of Khemia gathered the population in front of the main church. As every month after the royal announcement, the priest invited the congregation to make a circle and pray to the Lord for the elderly. Darksteel, the blacksmith, suddenly entered the circle and addressed the crowd :

- "Are you just going to pray like this every month? The king is becoming mad! Last month my daughter was taken away because she was left-handed. Today my parents are taken because they are too old... They are definitely no burden to me..."
- "He took my two sons because they were drunk in the streets!" a woman shouted.
- "No one can run counter to the king" the high priest said. "Let's hope he will treat our elderly with kindness and..."
- "Everybody knows the basement of the castle is a prison!" a minstrel interrupted.

Erwan, a young juggler, entered the circle and spoke:

- "There must be a way to help them. We cannot let innocent people be arrested without acting!"
- "What can we do? We cannot enter the castle. The king would kill us all if we rebelled."
- "Our king had always been wise and kind before these recent laws. He wouldn't have killed anyone fighting for justice."
- "For half a year, the king has no longer been the good king we used to love and respect" an innkeeper replied. "You shouldn't trust his righteousness so blindly! Let's hope princess Angia will come soon with a prince who will reign wisely... For now, praying is the only thing we can do."
- "Praying is not enough!" Erwan shouted, staring at the entire congregation. "We must save them. If you let the guards arrest your relatives without saying a word, who will save you when they come to arrest you?..."

A deathly silence fell on the crowd. Erwan was usually a kind and funny juggler, contributing to the common cheerfulness. No one had ever seen him so serious, and despite his young age, he suddenly inspired respect.

- "I'd sacrifice my life to save my son", the minstrel said. "But I don't want to die in vain. It's impossible to enter the royal castle."
- "It wouldn't be as difficult as you seem to believe", observed Darksteel. "The castle was not built to prevent attacks, and the moat surrounding it has been drained. There's no conflict with any other kingdom, and the people are so docile that no surveillance is set up."
- "And there is a passage at the bottom of the moat closed with an iron grid that leads to the basement of the castle", an architect added with excitement. "My father contributed to its conception, so I may be able to find the map at his place... "
- "I can deal with the grid!" Darksteel exclaimed.
- "Excellent", Erwan concluded. "Let's gather our strength and save them as soon as possible!"

Though everyone was aware of the huge risk of the plan, they all gathered into the church and contributed to the preparation. The architect found the map leading the way to the basement. Darksteel went discretely near the passage to analyse the grid and came back, claiming proudly that even an amateur blacksmith could overcome it. It was decided that five people would enter the castle: Erwan, whose spirit restored hope in people's heart, Darksteel, the architect, a doctor in case of any wounds inflicted, and a locksmith. A weaver offered them black cloaks to provide stealth in the dark. A cutler skilled in throwing blades proposed to join but Erwan refused to resort to violence.

Late in the night, as the moat was in total darkness, the team of five slipped their black cloaks on and approached the entrance of the passage. Once out of sight, Erwan lit a candle and Darksteel dealt with the grid. It was old and fragile, the only challenge was to open it silently. He finally succeeded in bending two adjacent bars enough to allow the team to pass through.

The team was able to find its way through the corridors with ease using the architect's map. They went through several unlocked doors, and took note to be extremely careful for noise. Finally, they reached a heavy wooden locked door in a wide area of the basement that they suspected to be where prisoners were held.

The locksmith carefully unlocked the door, and the group slowly proceeded to the next room. Lit by the flickering firelight of candles, the area was perfectly silent. As soon as the whole team entered the room, a dozen torches suddenly flared up, each one held by a guard in armour. In the midst of the chaos, the king appeared standing in his ceremonial scarlet cape.

- "Don't even try to escape", the king ordered, but the five intruders were too paralysed by fear and surprise to make a single move.
- "Why were our parents arrested?" Darksteel shouted, losing control. "Our children? Did they commit any..."

- "I ordered them to follow me, your Majesty", Erwan interrupted, kneeling in front of the monarch and crushing the blacksmith's foot to force his silence. "I forced them to assist me. I am aware of the seriousness of my fault, but I ask your fair and venerable Majesty to let these innocent people return to their homes."
- "Would you give your life without resistance to save theirs?" the king asked, terrifying the intruders with his usual smile.
- "Yes I would, your Majesty."

As the blacksmith was about to protest, the king ordered the guards to take the four others outside, and to announce to the population that there would be an exemplary sentence for the young juggler the following morning.

At the first light of dawn, the entire population of Khemia gathered in front of the castle. There had never been a death sentence in the kingdom before, and the crowd was terrified to witness its inception with Erwan, who, overnight, had become the sparkle of hope in their sorrows. As the king appeared on the balcony, for the first time in the history of Khemia, the people did not bow. Some even shouted "Unfair!" or "He's innocent!", but when the King addressed the crowd, everyone fell silent.

- "People of Khemia, you all know the reason of this unexpected gathering. Yesterday night, a juggler and his accomplices broke into my castle and intended to oppose the laws in force for the kingdom. Thankfully, their discretion was not very well maintained, and some of my guards were able to stop them from committing any malicious crime. Today I will decide the fate of this juggler."

As the crowd began to shout "Let him go!", Erwan appeared on the balcony next to the king, wearing very elegant clothes and addressing a serene smile to the people beneath him.

- "The day has come to reveal to you my misdemeanor", the king whispered. "First of all, your relatives that have been arrested were never treated as prisoners, but as royal guests. They lived in the wide hall of the castle, and are already aware of what I will let you know today. They will all be freed right after this speech."

The crowd stared unbelievably at the king.

- "Every month I arrested innocent people. First the beggars, then the left-handers, drunken people, the sick and ailing, and recently the elderly. The rescue plan attended by Erwan was shaky and easy to thwart, but you dared unite your strengths against my authority. My late father used to say that no man is an island entire of itself, but a unified people is the most impregnable island. I think you understood his words yesterday when elaborated on this plan. For this I congratulate you and I am proud to be your king."

The king bowed in front of his people, paused momentarily, and went on.

- "My daughter, princess Angia, will never come back from her journey. She died six months ago from a disease that none of our doctors were able to cure, and with her disappearance, my only descendant is gone. My recent behavior was neither madness nor a malefic game. In this situation of fear, you all revealed your strengths and determinations. One of you, the juggler Erwan, especially showed exceptional bravery. He was the fire that kept your hearts burning with hope and courage, and sacrificed himself for the sake of his companions. I saw in him a model for the kingdom... That is why, if you people of Khemia accept it, I would like to make him the next king of the kingdom of Khemia.

After the few seconds necessary to take in the situation, the crowd burst in a thunderous applause of approval, and shouted joyfully "Long live King Erwan!".