

■
DAWN &
DUSK

Lætitia
Paviani
■



Interior. Kitchen. Night falling.

A woman stops crying and starts writing.

On the kitchen table we see an old withered apple, still worthy of being eaten. Red wine sits in a glass – and very close by, the rest of it in a bottle. A few administrative papers and their empty envelopes hastily torn open, waiting to be paid. In a big pot is a great bouquet of mimosa that stopped, weeks ago, its slow race to death in pretty elegant curves. Cigarettes. Two Kraft paper bags opened wide enough to let some hands pick at its contents. A mix of dried superfruits in one, and roasted almonds in the other. In the background of this odd garden, hiding behind the still unpaid bills, two golden dolphins swim together courageously, cast in bronze. One is on top of the other, holding the second with its fins. It seems to support this loving friend as gently as it can and with the most affection a tchotchke is capable of. The dolphin below floats in what's supposed to be water, on top of a mound of dripping mud that's like a little pile of fresh shit, still bubbling. Out of the jumble, a snail made of ceramic elongates its extravagant nose, nostrils and smile, enhanced by a ridiculous little hat. Its house is full of pens.

Voice asks.

Woman answers.

DAWN

What do I look like? Tell me.

DUSK

Can't really say you're in good shape!

DAWN

You either. Can't really see your face but it sounds like a disaster.

DUSK

What shape are you in now? I don't know. A seed, a peanut, a very expensive new kind of mini miraculous organic berry?

DAWN

Well, I'm four weeks old, Mom, so...

DUSK

Don't call me Mom, please.





DAWN

I guess I'm more like that undesirable beany flavor you find sometimes in the soy milk. Barely bean, barely ghost, unpleasant anyway, a tiny percentage of interest, mixed with too much water, surrounded by too much cardboard transported around and around by trucks or whatever polluting transport.

DUSK

Don't be sarcastic. I'm transporting myself by bike, not by truck.

DAWN

You're right. When you're snarky, something unfortunate happens to your face.

DUSK

Come on, you won't have any face. Don't torture me. I just wanted...

DAWN

...needed.

DUSK

Needed, if you want. I just needed to

speak to you, for a little while...

DAWN

As little and limited as I am and will be!

DUSK

OK, maybe this isn't a good idea.

DAWN

Sorry. This isn't so easy for me, Mom.

DUSK

Please, don't...

DAWN

What should I say? Like, "dear broodmother," or "large and welcoming royal suite," or "cozy nest"?

DUSK

How can you already talk about this in such an Airbnb way?

DAWN

How do I know? DNA maybe. Just a couple of vague intelligence dispatches, something





growing all around the planet. Is it a plant?
'Cause plants have DNA, as I have, as you have.
All beings have DNA.

DUSK

Gosh! I can't follow this conversation.

DAWN

Are you drinking?

DUSK

And so what? Are you some kind
of priest disguised as a bean?

DAWN

Well, at least I can enjoy some wine before I leave.

DUSK

Haha. Sorry, what were you saying? I was
picturing... Well, the priest, in a big green limp
dress. A cheap costume bought at the last minute,
in a crappy shop. The so-confused religious man
in it. You're just a sad, limp, little glowworm.

DAWN

Yeah...

DUSK

Oh, sorry darling.

DAWN

Don't call me darling.

DUSK

My baby?

DAWN

...

DUSK

Okay, I'm a little buzzed. Sorry.

DAWN

Never mind.

DUSK

When do you get a nose?

DAWN

Dunno.





DUSK

Perhaps you are already growing this charming big nose, like your father had...

DAWN

Daddy's dead ??

DUSK

No, I guess he survived. As well as his charming nose that hid so well his ugly little ideas about family. And the dick? When does it appear? That nose that hid so well his ugly little ideas about family. And the dick? When does it appear? I've never understood if the size of the dick was something hereditary. Do you get it from your mom or dad? I mean from your mom's or dad's line? How was my father's dick? And my grandfather's? How can I transmit it? DNA again? Which one you would have had? I don't even know. Do I carry his dick-genes, my father's? Or is it a completely freestyle creation?

DAWN

Maybe you should sleep. And maybe I'm a girl.

DUSK

Right. Of course. You're definitely not the father here in my belly, that's a huge historical and psychological and dramatic fake perception of the situation, I guess, I mean, well...

DAWN

Yes.

DUSK

You know what, it reminds me of, somehow, a very sordid anecdote that my mother told me. Once in the summer, she was about thirty, spending a few days in the South with a friend. Her parents got divorced when she was 4 maybe. Can you imagine that? In the end of the forties!


DAWN

Not really...

DUSK

She grew up in Gabon, my mother, which at that time was a former French colony and where her father, an Italian migrant, had a construction engineering job. Though quickly her mother, my





grandmother, couldn't stand it anymore: Africa, husband and child. She decided to go back to her sweet and dear hometown in Lorraine. Husband and child followed but she got rid of them very quickly. My mother lived in a boarding school in France for the rest of her childhood, with only a few visits from either parent, and when she grew up she went to Paris to live with her grandmother, my grandfather's mother, an austere Sicilian widow who was very religious and dressed in mourning black until her own death, hiding cheese and gold in her cupboards. Very often the old one knocked the young one on the head with her cane and once the young one stole the old one's checkbook and used it to pay that funny and luxurious little trip to the South I told you about earlier, going through all of those blank checks, but they both loved each other sincerely. From time to time his father would appear at night, drunk, and knocked on her as well, but worse. The rest of the time he was a ghost.

DAWN

Was that the sordid anecdote?

DUSK

Oh no, darling. Where was I?

DAWN

South.

DUSK

Oh yes! South. She was such a beautiful girl, my mother, did I already tell you? Amazing thin and elegant silhouette, blue eyes, often made up, thick blond hair, high cheekbones, Russian face kind of, gorgeous. So they passed by Cannes at some point. She was there with her friend, in the street, waiting for a green light to change to red, when a car stopped beside them and the driver started to flirt with her. The man was maybe fifty, still handsome, talkative. He did not recognize her.

DAWN

Who?

DUSK

Her father!

DAWN

Her father??





DUSK

Her father, yes.

DAWN

Oh dear!

DUSK

He had moved to a little-known suburb of Cannes a few years before, called Le Cannet. Nobody knew.

DAWN

That's disgusting! What a sick joke!

DUSK

A sick joke, yes. Talk to you later.

DAWN

Yes.

DUSK

Are you okay? I'm so sorry.

About an hour later. Lights off. It's dark.

Dawn – Will it hurt?

Dusk – Not for you. I hope so. Of course not.
Oh my...


Dawn – For you?

Dusk – Oh, so much, yes.

Dawn – Don't be dramatic.

Dusk – I'm not.

Dawn – Get a tissue and stop shaking like this.





Several days have passed. Morning.

DAWN

Do you want to talk about it now?

DUSK

No, I'm fine. I'm tired of thinking about it.

DAWN

But you can't not think about it.

DUSK

I especially didn't want to talk about it with you,
I mean you get it... And now you're gone!

DAWN

Not really.

DUSK

What do you mean, 'not really'? I
hope you're really gone!

DAWN

Yes and no. Do you get it?

DUSK

I don't want to talk about it with you!

DAWN

OK, then I'm the one that has to
tell you how it happened.

DUSK

Don't do that.

DAWN

It was fast. It didn't hurt, at least not
physically, not even when they put those
shots in your cervix to numb it.

DUSK

Yeah but...

DAWN

It was weird but it didn't really hurt, that's what
you told the woman who was talking to you
and who had just noticed the two fat tears
that had dripped down your cheeks, into your
ears. And that seemed to stress her out.



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DUSK

Thank God, after that I couldn't hear anything anymore.

DAWN

Not even the sinister and rhythmic noise of the vacuum?

DUSK

Yeah.

DAWN

She left right away to get you some Kleenex to wipe all that up, and when she got back she tried to convince you that it was especially important not to hold it all in, and she stuffed too many tissues into your hand.

DUSK

I wasn't holding anything in, it all came out on its own!

DAWN

A little bit earlier, you would have liked it better if you didn't hear her surprise, am I right? You know, when she made fun of your stomach rising and

falling, jumping along with the hose. The hose that was coming for me, do you remember it?

DUSK

Stop.

DAWN

Everything is fine, she said! Those words, they also came out all on their own, right?

DUSK

It was just before I cried. When it was "almost finished," like she kept saying, as if that would make me feel better.

DAWN

I know, yes.

DUSK

It was terrible. The reaction just came, those two fat tears that were so hot and slow and crawled out of me, like they were coming from far away.

DAWN

With all that Lexomil that they gave you before

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the procedure, it took a lot to feel anything. You were in a crazy place, Mom, you were definitely floating above your own body.

DUSK

That's morbid.

DAWN

In such times, who knows if it's better or worse to be so relaxed.

DUSK

Anyway, they were definitely all adorable at the clinic, and yes, we can say that overall it went really well.

DAWN

Obviously. Then Barbara, who came with you, read you some pages from *la vie de Marie-Antoinette* by Stefan Zweig. She had it in her bag. She read it right before she went to get you some M&Ms, and an applesauce too, because your blood pressure was so low. They didn't want to let you leave until it went back up.

DUSK

She read me the funniest part, the one about the move to the Petit Trianon, which Marie-Antoinette never left from the time she was 19, until the Revolution.

DAWN

Yeah, it was so funny to imagine the cow in its satin-upholstered stable, and how she would come and milk it without taking off her gloves, while waiting for her husband to finally get it up. How long did that take?

DUSK

6 years! And her famous herd of sheep and courtiers...

DAWN

That definitely put you to sleep.

DUSK

Haha, yes, or at least until the next girl came into the room, where there were three beds, and started crying so loudly in the arms of her friend, and I could hardly hear Barbara read





anymore. And then the girl started calling all of her friends to meet her for drinks.

DAWN

I remember, that's when your blood pressure shot up again, and we left!

DUSK

It's ridiculous, I want us to talk about it a little, but for Christ's sake stop with all your "I remember"s, like you were there... Right at that minute you were in an envelope or something, somewhere, floating around with all the other placentas or I don't even know what...

DAWN

Thanks for reminding me.

DUSK

I didn't flush you down the toilet, at least there's that.

DAWN

Charming.

At the end of the same day, night comes back.

DUSK

I won't be sad! I can't be sad!

DAWN

Why shouldn't you be? Are you talking about me?

DUSK

No dear. Other stuff.

DAWN

Yak! I will not be part of a band of "stuff."

DUSK

Ha! No, Beany!

DAWN

Beany!!!

Dusk – No, no, sorry! I'm thinking about fear! The heavy mirror that people drag up to your face. "Look at you! You should feel fear right now! Fear is your face," "I don't! It's not!" "You think you don't but you do! Look at you! Fear-face. You're waiting for way too much from us, Fear-face."





DAWN

No.

DUSK

Am I talking to my conscience? I'm definitely talking to a fetus, a gone fetus!

DAWN

Hey! Don't be unpleasant! I was and always will be a part of you. As children are, until they grow up. As pain is, until it calms down.

DUSK

Come on! Don't push me in the "pro-life" zone.

DAWN

I'm not. I'm just saying I'm a pain and you should tame me. I'm a sort of combination of what you are as a woman. I am joy, I'm sadness, perhaps, sometimes...not fear. You weren't afraid of me.

DUSK

No, I wasn't. Though people, the same ones that are carrying the heavy mirror, decide for you what you should feel at some points in your

woman-life. Cry! Don't cry! You should feel fear! Or, you shouldn't feel fear! You're gonna HAVE this baby! That's what you should do. Or, you're NOT gonna have this baby! That's the best for you. Have you thought about a method of contraception? Many IUDs are implanted at the time of termination of pregnancy. I couldn't. Not at that moment. I felt it was so inappropriate – and I didn't have any fuck waiting for me at home or whatever shitty bar – while they were really trying hard to make me feel comfortable and guiltless. But at the moment that you pass the clinic door going out, after signing the paper like "the patient declines the IUD," I definitely WAS an irresponsible person gambling with "life."

DAWN


You're strong.

DUSK

No, I'm not that strong.

DAWN

You're not strong.





DUSK

Yes I am! No! Ha, don't confuse me.

DAWN

I got that, but do you think you can really go through everything – alone?

DUSK

I see where you want to go with this! Not very nice of you. THE LONELY FEAR-FACE WHO THOUGHT SHE WASN'T A FEAR-FACE AND ENDED UP ALONE WITH THE WORST FEAR-FACE ANYBODY HAD EVER SEEN!

DAWN

I'm here for you.

DUSK

Oh god, what a nightmare.

DAWN

Nightmare is here for you too, pain is here for you, joy as well, don't forget it. Be kind to them. They can bring more good than you think.

DUSK

Really?

DAWN

Well... I'm just reading my lines, mommy.

DUSK

What a rude soul you are!

DAWN

One can say also it's about gambling with life and you should give yourself that, at the very least.

DUSK

Yeah. I guess you're right.

DAWN

What are you thinking about?

DUSK

I'm thinking about the number of times a woman dies and is reborn.

DAWN

Why are you looking so intensely at the window?





DUSK

Ho, I saw this mommy cat again, walking down the street alone. Always the same way. Always the same attitude.

DAWN

What attitude?

DUSK

I don't know. It's just that she never stops. It seems that she does what she has to do. Once I saw her, like I've seen her so many times before. Me smoking at the kitchen window, her walking her way. One day a very little kitten was following her. She crossed the street at the level of my window, but the kitten got scared and stayed behind. He didn't cross the road. The cat mum, still walking, disappeared, without changing her rhythm, into the next street. The little kitten was under a car meowing enough to break anyone's heart. In the window just above, mine was already mashed.

DAWN

As it is now?

DUSK

Not far.

DAWN

What happened to the kitten?

DUSK

I went down the street with some kitten food, because I had one recently who was only 2 months old and so sadly tried to nurse every single night in my neck. It died few weeks after we got it.

DAWN

Is this the moment where everyone cries?

DUSK

Nah. So a few minutes later, I was on all fours next to the car, my ass in the air, throwing handfuls of food at the kitten and trying to talk to it and meow at it just like a mommy cat. It looked terrified. I didn't know what to do. It ate a little. It was about to come out when a guy came over and started talking and talking to me. I had to get up and leave the kitten under the car. Back at my window, the guy asked me if he could see me again.





DAWN

What idiots.

DUSK

I kept looking out the window from time to time. Much later, with exactly the same rhythm, the mommy cat appeared at the end of the street, she'd come back, but she hadn't changed her speed one little bit. I went to bed feeling better.

DAWN

And your mom, no one ever caught her for all those fake checks that she wrote on the Riviera?

DUSK

Oh definitely, but not right away. It's another weird story.

DAWN

Tell it to me!

DUSK

OK then. So, it's some years later. My mom had gone out with a guy who was crazy in love with her, but she had dumped him. She

didn't keep anything about him, except for a vague memory and a tiny television. Neither was worth very much. The guy's heart was broken, so to get his revenge, he went to the police, and reported her for theft.

DAWN

Oh I see.

DUSK


That was when the cops figured out about the stolen checks. She did 6 months at the women's prison that used to be on the Rue de la Roquette. Her aunt could have gotten her out of it, but she thought it was better not to intervene, to teach my mom a lesson, and to get rid of the problem, for once and for all, in all the proper and legal ways.


DAWN

Nice.

DUSK

The prison isn't there anymore. At the beginning, there were two of them: The Big Roquette and The Little Roquette. The little one became a prison for





minors. That's where they'd lock up kids as soon as they got to be 7 years old. Jean Genet did some time there, when he was 15. He talks about it in *Le Miracle de la Rose*. The prison was special, it was constructed like an old fortress, made up of solitary cells meant to isolate the prisoners, the hallways were built so narrow that you could only get one person through at a time, at the end there was a little faucet for a quick wash, no common cafeteria, no communication possible, even in the chapel, where the kids were all stacked together in a wall made up of 276 individual cubbyholes. "A city made from a mob of little lonelinesses" is how Victor Hugo described it.

DAWN

That's crazy.

DUSK

After the Saint Lazare Women's Prison shut down in the twenties, they they transferred all those ladies, the petty criminals, to the Little Roquette. Up through the forties they even guillotined some of them, like in the case of Georgette Monneron, convicted of infanticide, or that of Marie-Louise Giraud, who gave abortions.

Those were in '42 and '43. The prison conditions eventually got less strict, and become more communal. My mom would talk about it, laughing about how the head matron said to her once, "You, Paviani, you're the type who'll be back!"

DAWN

Is that true?

DUSK

Who knows. Whatever happened, the neighborhood rapidly gentrified, and that weird fortress that looked like it came straight from the past bothered the new occupants. La Roquette was knocked down in '74. I was born two years later.

DAWN


Her first child?

DUSK

Not really... But let's just say I was kind of a miracle. But it's late, no?

DAWN

I have nothing but time, now...





DUSK

Oh, Jesus. OK. But I don't think that you'll want to hear this.

DAWN

I don't really want anything, and what's more it's not like I have ears anyway, remember?

DUSK

All right. Too bad for you. My mom got married when she was 20, and she got pregnant right away, but they felt like they were too young to have kids, they were scared, or what do I know, but in any case she tried to get an abortion with a back-alley midwife, "the old way."

DAWN

Which means??

DUSK

With a knitting needle.

DAWN

What?? How does that even work?

DUSK

You don't want to know. Well, there were complications, a hemorrhage, and my mom found herself in the emergency room. At that time, abortion was illegal and any doctor that practiced it was considered a criminal...

DAWN


I'm having a hard time believing you.

DUSK

At this point, the termination of the pregnancy was already well under way, they just needed to finish the job and let the patient go on with her life. But as it turned out, a doctor who was particularly zealous and virtuous decided to "save the day." The fetus was "reattached." My mother had to carry her pregnancy to term. The child – it was a girl – was stillborn. They quickly took care of it, throwing the body into a shoebox. My mom didn't get over it, she left her young husband, who recovered by running off with her best friend.

DAWN

I want to throw up.





DUSK

I told you!

DAWN

But at the same time, if she had lived then you wouldn't be here, so I don't really get the miracle. It is totally morbid though, I'll give you that.

DUSK

After all that, my mom had miscarriage after miscarriage, until they told her once and for all that she would never be able to have children.

DAWN

Obviously not a very solid diagnosis, since you're here...

DUSK

Exactly, but something strange happened, too.

DAWN

What now?

DUSK

Well, my mom was still under close surveillance by her gynecologists, because of pain she was

having, and because her uterus and ovaries were so messed up. At the same time, she started living a more free sex life, since she didn't have to worry about getting pregnant anymore. She had just spent the night with a super good-looking guy, a young skipper-photographer, ten years younger than her. They had ended up on the carpet of her studio, and a few Leonard Cohen songs later she got pregnant.

DAWN

Immediately?!

DUSK

Immediately! But wait, it just so happened that a little bit before that, she had started seeing a different doctor. He prescribed her a new treatment, something that obviously was pretty strong!

DAWN

No kidding!

DUSK

So she called the doctor's secretary to ask what





he had given her, and if there was any way that it was linked to her sudden surprise pregnancy and...

DAWN

And?

DUSK

And she said that the doctor couldn't say for sure, since he had just died in a car accident.

DAWN

No!!

DUSK

Yes.

DAWN

Do you mean that you're actually the reincarnation of an eccentric white cis male doctor who needed to find a body to house his wandering soul?...

Silence.

Revisions & translations by Claire Finch

