

PERPETUAL

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For JAMA

Der Unterschied zwischen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft ist für uns Wissenschaftler eine Illusion, wenn auch eine hartnäckige.

Albert EINSTEIN

Translation:

The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.

Chapter 1

Marie was just about to close her book when her sister barged in and startled her. She watched Alice closely as she moved swiftly from each corner of the room to the next, drumming her fingers together like a villain, a wide grin on her face. ‘Sis, you have got to see this,’ she said.

‘Page 256—page 256—page 256,’ Marie chanted softly. She knew it was a futile attempt to remember her book’s page number. This evening she would spend at least two minutes poring over sentences she’d already read, until she found the passage where the wife’s hostile co-worker walked into the cafeteria.

Marie picked up her favorite sweater—the one she got from their mom for her birthday—and hurried to catch up with the ball of energy that was her sister. ‘If this is another one of your horrible attempts to cheer me up, you might as well give up now,’ Marie muttered.

‘Oh no, you are coming with me. Some things are more important than drowning in misery.’

Visibly annoyed but without any spectators to witness it, Marie couldn’t help but be intrigued about what her sister had come up with this time. Had she seen another cobweb shaped like the guy from the bike store? A daisy that wasn’t

supposed to come out for a couple more weeks? Or was there a bird singing Metallica's Nothing Else Matters again? She had to admit that she had quite enjoyed that last one.

As they reached Alice's room, her sister brought her finger to her lips and told her, 'Okay, close your eyes and tell me what you think.'

Marie did as instructed and breathed in the familiar scent of Alice's room. She loved being in this room. She and Alice had spent countless days here, planning mischief and making up stories. The memories were so vivid. She could practically see a younger Alice with the bottom half of her body on the bed, and the top half bending unnaturally over the side. Her long hair touching the floor, her youthful face toward the center of the room where Marie was sitting and drawing a big map of what, to the best of her ten-year-old knowledge, represented their grandma's garden. Earlier that day their grandfather had told the young sisters that their grandma had lost her necklace. It was a beautiful necklace that Marie used to play with when she sat on her grandma's lap. Although their grandmother would never say so, she was upset about the loss. That's why young Alice and Marie had been captivated by their quest to track the piece of jewelry down for the better half of the day. Determined to get the burden off—and the necklace back on—their grandmother's chest.

While Marie was reminiscing about their elaborate plans to turn not only the garden but also their grandparents' highly organized house upside down, she felt her thoughts getting sucked away as if they were being abducted. She recognized this all too familiar sensation that she dreaded more than anything else in the world. Her mind was stuck in a tunnel, and she couldn't resist the tug toward its pitch black core.

‘Marie! Stay with me! Open your eyes! Look at me!’ she heard her sister exclaim, but no resistance was possible. Her mind went blank—again.

*

‘I told you I’m not ready!’ Marie muttered, her heart pounding in her chest as if she’d just run a marathon. Her head felt like it was exploding as she sucked air into her lungs and tried to regain her composure. She knew it was unfair to blame her sister for what had happened. But it was easier to put the blame on anyone or anything else than to acknowledge the fact that there was absolutely no reason for her mental blank other than Marie allowing her mind to wander. For how can you possibly stop your mind from wandering?

‘*Tu as les meilleurs de tous les amis**,’ Alice’s clamoring voice called from far away. Air filled Marie’s chest as she felt the nerves of her entire body prickling back to consciousness.

‘*N’importe quel jour est aujourd’hui*.’ Marie adored her sister, who helped her through this like no one else could, with the old nursery rhyme they both loved as children. She could get past this. It was nothing more than a small setback.

‘*Ton pote d’hier sera toujours là pour toi*.’ Why did it always need to happen to her though? Was there something wrong with her? No, don’t go there.

‘*Ton copain de demain t’attend déjà*.’ Alice’s words seemed closer now. Her limbs were regaining responsiveness. She was okay. It was over.

‘*Donne-leur donc tes petites mains*.’ Marie opened up her eyes and looked into their tear-filled mirrors in her sister’s worried face.

‘*Et ton futur se passera bien*.’ Alice’s hands were trembling.

‘It’s okay, it’s over,’ Marie soothed Alice. Their roles had now reversed.

‘No! This is not okay! Nothing about this is okay!’ Alice brought out. ‘We need to make this stop! If only I knew how’

To that Marie had no reply. They stayed there, on the floor of Alice’s room until their growling stomachs told them it was time to move.

* Loose translation of nursery rhyme:

*You know, you’ve got the very best of friends,
Today might be over but it never really ends.
Yesterday’s buddy will always have your back,
Tomorrow’s pal is waiting for you, right on track.
Take both of their hands before you say good night,
With them at your side, your future looks so bright.*

Chapter 2

In the next room, Alice was in full-blown brainstorming mode. ‘How can I make this stop?’ she asked herself as she thought back to the look on Marie’s face as her “blank”—that’s how they referred to it these days—had started. She had seen that look many times before. Marie had always been a dreamer, even as a kid. Easily lost in thought, leaning her chin on her pencil as her mind drifted, creating a tiny hole in her homework. ‘Marie’s my little dreamer,’ their mother liked to say, ‘and Alice is my little schemer!’ she would then add teasingly, looking at her eldest daughter.

It was true. As children, while Marie was dozing off, probably dreaming about flowers and rainbows, Alice was making plans. Plans to find Cleopatra’s lost tomb, plans to trick her Greek teacher Mr. Le Brun into not giving them homework over the weekend, or planning how much paper she would need in order to write their dad a letter in Morse code explaining where she hid his latest issue of *The Economist*. That last one was actually when she figured out that Morse code in French has more characters than the English version. Alice’s dad did not like it when she addressed him in anything other than French. She didn’t want to upset him, of course.

But that was then, just fun and games. Now she had bigger