

The Angelsverses

first edition



The Angelsverses

Translated from Dutch

based on philosophical experiences

Les observations du Roi des Damnés
et ses Princes des Morts

In loving memory of

Uncle Gilbert

1936 - 2022

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We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.

Oscar Wilde, 1892

1. He kisses himself in the mirror and says, “I like you.”

“To say that I am staying in one of the richest and most beautiful cities in Northern Europe, whose inhabitants speak like toddlers,” said his friend from Apeldoorn, a psychiatrist no less, with whom he was crossing Bruges’ historic market square. “You hear nothing but continuous sounds that contain words. Like ‘kèrekiwére’, ‘tisdadde’, ‘kèjet’, ‘dogi’, etc.” “You can get the entire Bruges vocabulary from a toddler’s playground,” he added to reinforce his point. He was right. Things must move forward, they must go fast. The language too. Short and powerful. Communication as caricature. Whoever understands, has it. That is the logical mind of a Bruges native.

He, his Dutch friend, is a psychiatrist. He just hopes his patients are not more brilliant or crazier than he is. Because then. Then he suspects humanity is in greater danger than it already is. And that is bad. Very bad. Could Narcissus live with himself, knowing, as the ultra-perfectionist he is, his own imperfections? Madness would take hold of his genius. Madness, always relying on its steadfast hope in the belief that genius is born from madness. Nevertheless, he knows that hope is only a hypocritical and deceptive unreality that parasitizes the harsh reality. The now, and all the rest is hope. Right?

But now he is alone. The evening sun casts a golden glow over the Provincial Court. Thus the Court, built in white stone, literally becomes the splendid crown of neo-Gothic architecture. Against an azure evening sky, it shines in all its glory. The sight is breathtaking. Breathtaking! He lights a cigarette. Somewhere in his inner pocket, a sense of time is dozing. The clocks strike eight. And he, the Bruges man with clock trauma, thinks: eight o’clock does not exist.

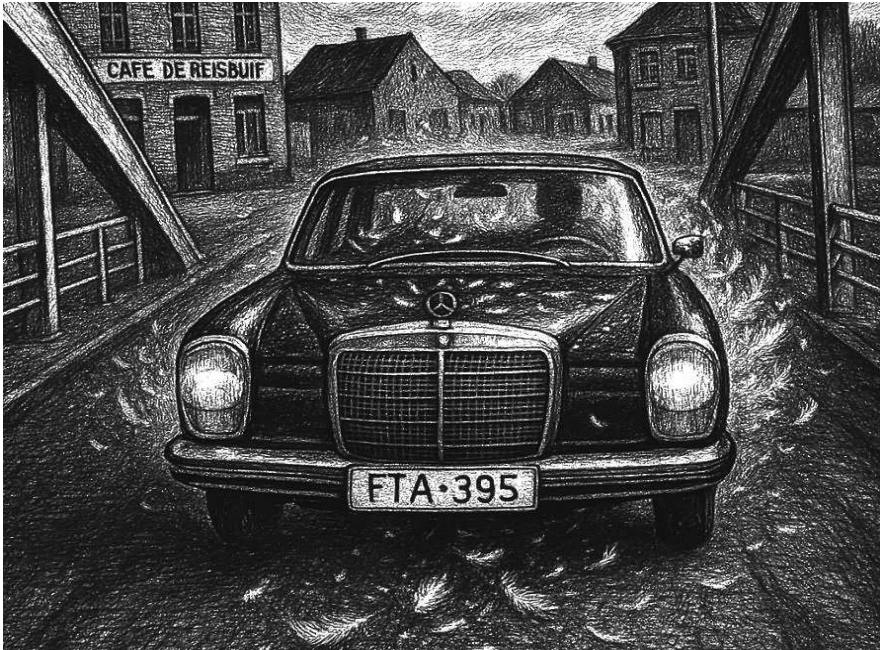
What a thought. At the moment of writing, we have arrived at the never-to-be-experienced-again moment of Friday, July 25, 2025, and everything in the future that will refer to a memory of an event committed on this day, in whose life, in which place, and for whatever purpose. July 25, 2025 will always demand a mo-nu-ment, or at least be recorded somewhere in the minutes. Simple souls then fall back on an

old proverb that says: Yesterday is gone, tomorrow a mystery, and today, or rather now, is a gift. Whatever the case, there will never again be a July 25, 2025 as unique as it is in its kind. Just as the Belfry strikes eight o'clock with twelve resting pigeons on the roof and at the eighth stroke, at eight hours and nineteen seconds, there is still one pigeon left on the roof. A dead pigeon. The pigeon was so old. Poor thing. That first strike of the carillon gave the pigeon a cise cardiaque, a fatal surge of blood circulation. We cannot ignore that even the summer sun, in which the pigeon was taking a nap at a refreshing height of eighty-three meters, startled it terribly when the clapper struck the bronze and poured its thunderous sounds over the medieval city. The pigeon also belonged to the kind that we, humans, could call the weeds of the sky. Thus the life of this simple pigeon, which had enjoyed a long pigeon life, came to a dignified end. This pigeon did not suffer its end.

Other pigeons, for example, meet different ends. There are those run over by cars. That happened to him once. When he went to visit a friend near Maria-Aalter, he crossed a bridge. He sped across the bridge at full speed. Over the canal. Right by, not coincidentally, café De Reisduif (The Homing Pigeon). In the middle of the bridge deck sat a pigeon. That pigeon hadn't found the time to take flight and ended up unlucky under the chassis of his 1969 Mercedes 250C/8 coupé, and as he drove over it, he saw a flurry of white feathers and down, like snowflakes, fluttering in the wind behind his car. It reminded him of the fairy tale of Mother Hulda.

He firmly believed that the pigeon in question had instantly entered pigeon paradise. "Women and pigeons make money fly," as they say in Bruges vernacular. The vernacular. Yes, the vernacular. Precisely because, where one follows the path toward a refined way of blending man and woman together by injecting etiquette, the vernacular takes on a proletarian meaning. Behind every strong man stands an even stronger woman. Soit. The vernacular says a lot, right? The vernacular even rules.

Another pigeon memory is when his brother, who calls himself an animal lover, used to breed pigeons at their home. They were still children. From the egg had hatched a pigeon with a slight deformity.



A pigeon was run over while crossing the canal.

Somehow, when it had grown a bit beyond its down and learned to fly, it needed to take a short, let's say running start before it could take to the air. But they also had a dog, Boris was his name. Борис in Russian. Uncle pronounced it Baris. Boris was a playful boxer who got along well with the three children in their home. Boris was energetic, and that was not without counting the pigeon, who suddenly ended up between Boris's teeth. The pigeon, apparently struggling for its life against Boris's will, held on until the three brothers came home from school. Mother screamed, Boris was startled, dropped the pigeon abruptly from his mouth onto the ground. The pigeon gave a few last convulsions. His brother consoled himself with the words, "That is the law of nature, the will of God."

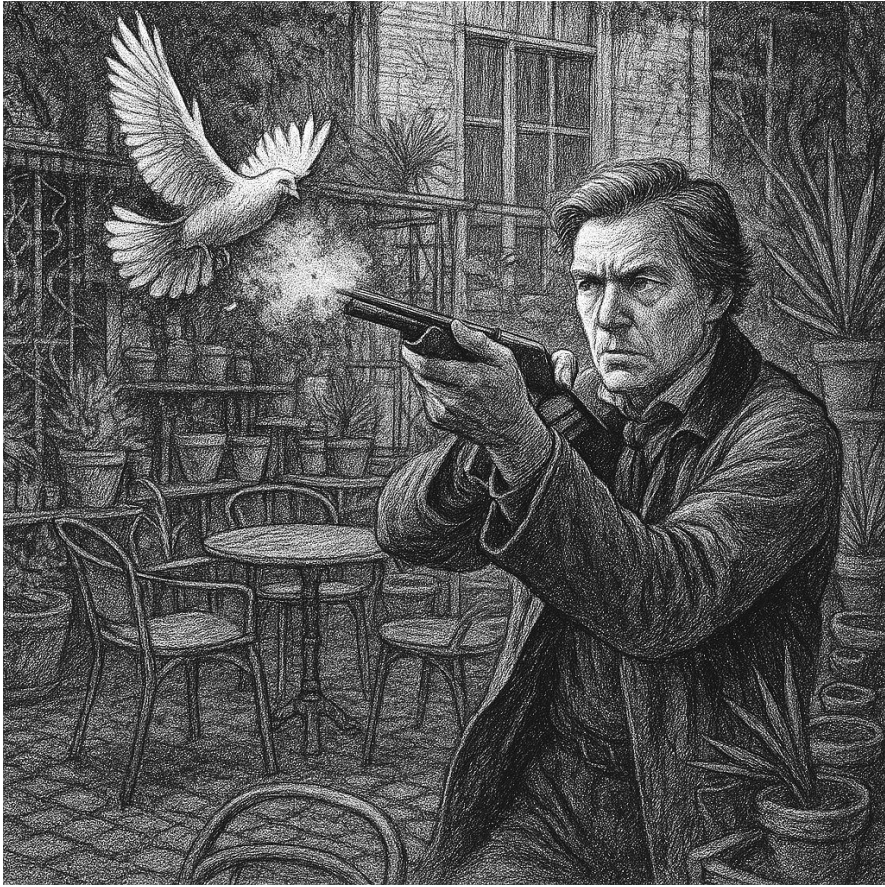
A third pigeon episode he experienced in the year, it must have been around 2017, when he visited the Lucifernum. The Lucifernum is an old city castle from 1756, located in the Twijnstraat of Bruges. It is the home of his good friend Dr. Retsin, whom he found in his city garden with a hunting rifle, a carbine as it's called in the vernacular. He saw him aim, take sight, and bang! The recoil of the shot was absorbed by

the doctor's shoulder through the rifle's stock. He heard a weight tumble down through the branches and leaves of the trees and hit the ground with a thud. Dr. Retsin turned toward him and said, "They crap all over my gutters! Pigeons! They are the rats of the sky! It's not the shooting them out of the trees, it's the cleaning up of the carcasses that I hate so much."

He remembers the familiar scene he cherishes at the restaurant De Witte Poorte near Jan van Eyck Square. The moment after the dishes were served, when the silver cloches were lifted, there lay, as if by surprise, a plucked pigeon, oven-browned and glistening in its natural fat, with its featherless wings neatly tied along its body with a string, ready to be enjoyed. Pigeon, when properly prepared, is delicious, healthy, and particularly strong. Excessive pigeon consumption can cause cardiovascular disease. Excess is not for him. But back to July 25, 2025. Not to the grief of the eleven other pigeons on the belfry, who literally took flight at the first boom of the clock. Their minuscule pigeon brains also do not contain the slightest awareness to further concern themselves with their deceased comrade. The late pigeon is not escorted at daybreak in a pigeon ceremony to the afterlife, but is neatly picked up by a human wearing plastic gloves and, according to the prevailing protocol prescribed by these turbulent and questionable times, properly wrapped in a yellow plastic garbage bag that also contains other dusty remains. One pigeon is not the same as another.

Some people claim they live only once. But not him. He lives every day and dies only once, per life. Right? There are all kinds of people. Tall, short, sturdy, fragile, handsome, and people who seem to resemble only interior design. In primary school you can already tell them apart. When the first grades are handed out, you see it: the joy-children, the weeping willows, and the indifferent ones. The latter don't know what grades are. Maybe that's the purest of all.

But grades are grades. However you look at them. Even if you wrap them in pedagogical wool. They are what they are: confirmation. Grandmother knew it, and so does the teacher now. "You are a child of God," grandmother said. You believed it, until the opposite was expressed in decimals.



Dr. Retsin is hunting pigeons, the rats of the sky.

Good grades are like applause for your existence. Bad grades confirm nothing. But today we no longer call it 'bad'. No, it's 'less good'. Because honesty has now become a gross scandal. We no longer say what we mean, we say what is expected. Even that, with some restraint.

Children who are critical from an early age, who don't accept everything blindly from teachers or parents, are early on seen as troublesome. But that doesn't mean they can't get good grades. Their natural rebellion leads to a snowball effect that mortgages their future. They don't fit into the picture the system has in mind, score worse as a result, lose courage, and waste their energy defending their controversy. They are preselected or canceled in advance.

Thus we lie to God. Or we keep silent about the Devil. Which comes down to the same thing. 'God' and 'Devil' are by now words that only appear in fiction and expressions. They have been driven out of Belgium, a country that likes to call itself secular, though in essence it is cautiously atheistic and latently Catholic. Sober and businesslike. Price is now valued more highly than worth.

Imagine the Belgian king ending his address to the nation with, "And God bless Belgium." The country would explode. We would speak of inappropriate interference, archaic symbolism, undesirable theocracy. Whereas an American president can say that same phrase without any problem, and no one blinks. Hohoho. It's all about what we are used to hearing. And therefore also: what we are willing to accept. Good and bad have by now been banished to the hell of language. We are no longer allowed to call anything 'bad'. We say: less good. As if we placed a child before a ravine and then whispered, "It was a suboptimal jump." It's always those who have never truly been hurt who shout the loudest that no one should be hurt.

His thoughts drift away, his Dutch friend's remark about the Flemish language evaporates like morning mist. It's a quarter past eight. The carillon of the Bruges Belfry begins. Tulips from Amsterdam. He recognizes it immediately. It does something. Not intellectual. Not political. Just: something, something warm, something real. Something that rises from the chest and appears on the lips in a whistle he isn't even aware of. The melody is simplicity. The song is what it is: a song. No manifesto, no pamphlet, no metaphorical depth. Just a chase after a dream, shot through a bunch of tulips. According to the lyrics, there are three ways to give those tulips: You send them. You pick them. You bring them.

The first two options are passive, distant. Love with a postage stamp. But in the third, "When I return, I'll bring you tulips from Amsterdam," you have to be there yourself. With your body. With your hands. With your breath.

Hmmm, he thinks, that's the whole difference.

The carillon.

On this sultry summer evening, he strolls through the city that smells of the past. Bruges, in its medieval attire, with its cobblestones as wrinkles and its facades as silent witnesses. He doesn't walk, no, he strolls. Walking is functional. Strolling is an identity.

Just as he turns the corner of a street smelling of damp stone and forgotten legends, it rings out over the rooftops. From the eight sound holes of the belfry, a melody drifts down like fragrant steam from a teapot: Tulips from Amsterdam.

His heart smiles. His lips too. Instinctively he thinks: Of course I would want to bring you tulips from Amsterdam. He's that gallant. Poetic too. Only, do tulips actually come from Amsterdam? He has been to Amsterdam several times, but never has he seen tulip fields there. He has sailed its canals, walked its alleys, crossed its little bridges, and sniffed past its fragrant coffee shops, yes. But tulip fields? Not one! Even in the heart of Amsterdam, no tulip fields. But there are beautiful old houses leaning against each other, seemingly built on stilts. The Rijksmuseum, Rembrandt Square, the Royal Palace on Dam Square, the Red Light District, and even the Jordaan. That is all Amsterdam. But no tulip grower in sight.

However, near Andijk, Enkhuizen, and Bovenkarspel there are many tulip fields, and near Hoorn you can feast your eyes on endless acres of color. And in the Kop van Noord-Holland you find the largest continuous bulb fields in the world. Even traveling between Petten, Den Helder, and Wieringerwerf, you see endless tulip fields. The fields color the region between the North Sea and the IJsselmeer. But not in Amsterdam. Let that be clear. Not in Amsterdam. Tulips do not come from Amsterdam at all.

High in his tower sits the carillonneur. In his brick vault, isolated like a hermit with a passion for scales. He hammers, he stomps, he drags music out of the carillon the way a priest draws truth from Scripture. Not for money, not for glory, but to give the people of the city a concert no one ordered, but everyone seems to need. Beethoven. Debussy. A touch of Raymond van het Groenewoud. Two girls, echoing above the

canals. Sometimes also Bach. Sometimes Brel. Now: Tulips from Amsterdam.

Isn't that beautiful? A man who fills the city with bells. The city that, depending on the weather and the wind, is alternately grateful or deaf. Sometimes you hear it everywhere. Sometimes not. That's Bruges.

He strolls on. The song in his ears. A smile on his lips, with somewhere in the back of his mind the absurd, tender realization: Sometimes the tulip doesn't come from Amsterdam. But the dream does.

The rock band.

He roams. No other verb fits better for what he's doing at this hour. Roaming. As only a man with a past in his legs and thoughts in the shadows can, through medieval alleys that smell of stone and soot and old wind instruments. Right, left, into an alley, around a bend, and then... a thud. A deep bass. Not a sound, but an assault. Windowpanes of centuries-old glass tremble in their lead frames, as if the city itself is momentarily unsure. So is he. Because barely a few meters earlier, he heard nothing. Only a carillon, and now this. A battlefield of sound, a sonic duel, the heavenly chime of the belfry colliding with the gut-punch of Bruges' underworld.

On the Kraanplein stands a small stage that justifies its existence by its modesty. Just big enough for two guitarists and a percussionist with a drum kit, yet too cramped for the singer, who therefore roars at the audience from the foreground. The microphone trembles with his despair.

What's he shouting? No one understands. No one. Nor does he.

He's probably protesting the fact that he's not on the stage. But on closer listening, it sounds like "check!" English, of course. Because English sounds tougher. English hides insecurity. English sounds professional, even when it comes from a Bruges native who once took Latin classes at Sint-Leocollege.

The guitars are tuned. The drums take a beating. The sound is less a



The rock band at Café: 't Verdriet van België.

prelude than a warning. Fragments of something that could have been music, or masquerades as such, pound through the square, while high above them the cultural carillon continues to persevere elegantly in music.

The frontman he knows him from somewhere, must be from Bruges. The accent gives it away. Bruges may be international in allure, but it remains a goose pond. People always run into each other. In truth, he doesn't care. Because recognition is not connection. Especially not in singlets. They all wear them, those faded, black, sleeveless undershirts with unreadable prints. Not fashion, but a statement. Originating in the mid-nineteenth century as workwear for farmers and soldiers, now reborn as a sort of social calling card: "I am the type that doesn't get washed." The muscle mass is average, the body fat percentage disappointing, and then the hair? Long. Greasy. Unwashed. Shampoo here is considered a form of oppression.

He recognizes it. These kinds of bands have always been around. He was twelve when the Cactus phenomenon settled on Sint-Amandsplein. His father had a business there at the time. He remembers how his curious glance toward the gaunt figures strapped with belts, empty bullet casings, and chains was noticed by his grandmother. Her verdict was firm, house arrest. "That's not our kind of people," she had said. In her eyes sparkled the same curiosity as in his own. Only she had learned to neatly camouflage it under moral disapproval. Now he is an adult, on paper at least, and he must admit, he has taken over much of her technique. His uncle, whom he admired without question and whom he calls "nonkel," sided with her.

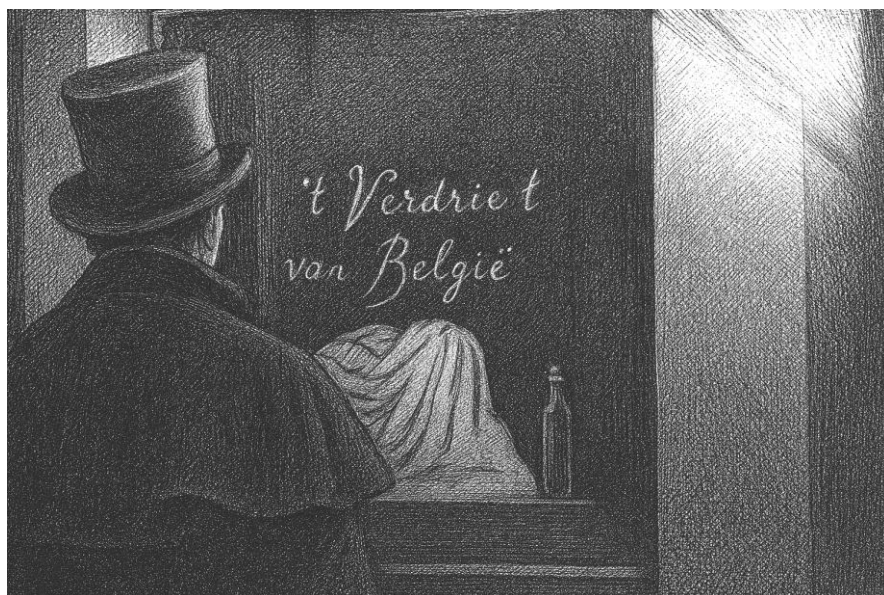
Soit, we digress.

't Verdriet van België. (*The Sorrow of Belgium*)

The stage equipment has been set up. Inside, in the café with the fitting name "'t Verdriet van België," people nod to each other. Everything is ready. The show can begin.

And it does. Though no one can say exactly when. A flicker, a pulse, then fiercely it begins. The violence bursts loose: screams, riffs, distortion twisting like hot wire through the air. The singer, still under, in front of, against, but not on the stage, rages as if he must save the world from his

own vocal cords, as if redemption itself depended on how far his throat can tear. His carotid artery pumps like a hydraulic system ready to burst. His singlet clings to his chest like a wet flag at half-mast. His stomach, flat and hollow, seems fused to his spine, carved from the same stubborn hunger that once moved saints to fast and prophets to speak.



't Verdriet van België at the Kraanplein.

Yes, that's good. That's what they want. More of that, please. The crowd stirs, bodies swaying in primitive rhythm. The light cuts across the room like broken glass. He's wearing white Tommy Hilfiger briefs. The brand glows against the pallor of his skin, absurd in its cleanliness, like a prayer whispered in the middle of a riot. He moves without grace, but with conviction, his gestures are half crucifixion, half birth.

The vampire in him watches. It stirs not in shadow but in light, that cold, inner light that feeds on warmth. He takes another look, longer this time. Desire is not what moves him but the gravity of blood, the magnetic pull of life contained within flesh. His gaze glides over the body unknowingly on display, over the sweat and trembling muscle, the pale throat pulsing with effort, the forearms mapped with thick veins.

Each vein is a thread of time, each pulse a reminder of everything he no longer is.

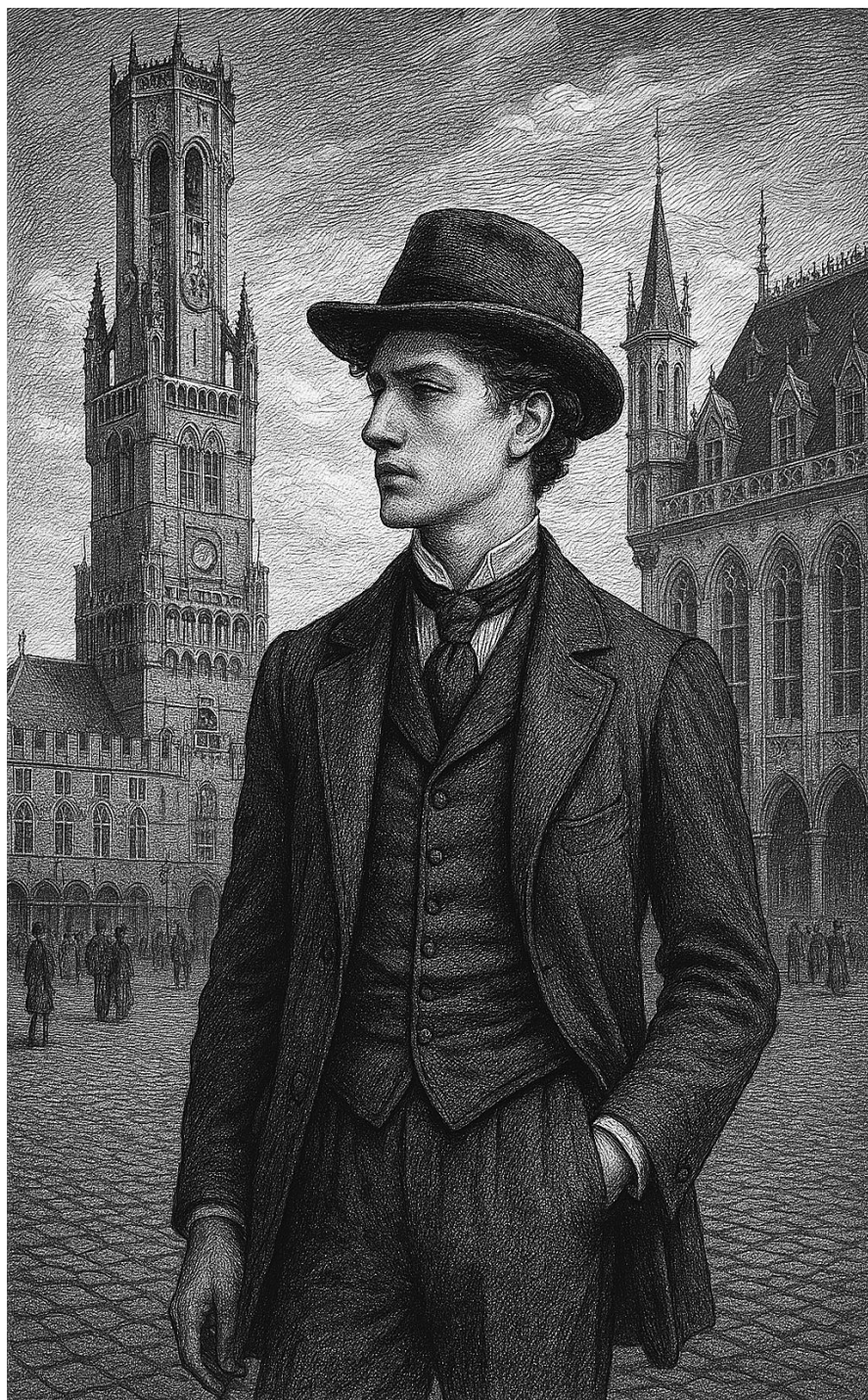
He feels the old thirst stretching under his ribs, ancient and patient. It is not the thirst for blood alone no, blood is merely memory made liquid. What he wants is presence. To inhabit for a breath the living heat of another being, to feel the tide that moves through them, to borrow it for an instant before it slips away. He does not smile. He does not judge. His hunger is too solemn for that.

There is something almost sacred in the nonchalance of those young men in their twenties, radiant in their skin, unknowing of their own radiance. They move as if immortality were still theirs, unaware that every gesture is already fading into history. Their beauty is careless, like sunlight on water: fleeting, dazzling, gone.

And he, the vampire, knows this better than anyone. He knows that beauty is a wound that refuses to heal, that every heartbeat is a promise of decay. He does not envy them; he venerates them. He admires the arrogance of their flesh, the simple ignorance of those who still believe the night will always end. His thirst is not for their bodies but for what burns inside them for the pulse that says *I am now, I am alive*.

In their sweat he smells the sweetness of time itself. In their veins he hears rhythm, music, heartbeat and hymn. Their laughter would taste of iron and innocence if he dared. But he will not. The vampire in him feeds on distance, not closeness. He lives in the interval between admiration and hunger, between restraint and revelation. No smile, no judgment. Only the slow, deep thirst.

They seem unaware they will never again be more beautiful in their lives than in that moment. It lies in the careless beauty of it, the sweating skin, the pulsing neck, the taut lines of a body that assumes itself. The blood rushing underneath is no longer an abstraction. It has color. It has temperature, scent, and rhythm. He feels the old desire stretching, slowly, under his ribs. Not to tear apart, no, not that. To admire. To come closer. To observe. To taste, even if only with the eyes. With the eyes. He does not smile. He does not judge. He observes. Listen, somewhere, in the background, the belfry softly plays a Bach fugue.



Bruges, the dandy.

The clash is complete.

It's printed in white capitals on the waistband hugging a stomach: Hilfiger. Tommy Hilfiger is for the ideal son-in-law, for the man who joins his girlfriend's parents for Sunday dinner, shakes hands with appropriate firmness, and answers the question about his future plans neatly: "Engineer." But not for this boy. Not for someone who roars into a microphone as if he's simultaneously in labor and evicted from his home. Not for someone who wears greasy hair as a crown. What a stylistic break, what a softie.

Around him? A messy, yes, messy, dozen followers. Kindred spirits, you can tell right away. A small herd of men you'd recognize anywhere. Well, yes, black T-shirt, faded jeans, shoes that were once boots and now mostly carry scent. Their hair? Greasier than a well-used deep fryer. The uniformity is endearing, a kind of rebellion-in-uniform. Who is that man even shouting at? He looks, he listens, he feels, but not a fiber in his body feels addressed. What's happening here is not a concert, not a performance. This is masturbation on stage with an orgasm in decibels. Only, not on stage, no, in front of it. In the middle of the crowd, at eye level with the terrace. Without filter, without context, without reason.

The singer, pardon, the vocalist, because "singer" would be sacrilege, just keeps going. Then suddenly: silence. The noise dies away, like a dog that suddenly decides to stop barking. Horny, almost frenzied, he strides into the café. 't Verdriet van België. A fitting place, because if this is Belgium, then the sorrow is justified. The audience murmurs a bit, a leisurely chatter. No cheering, no discontent. Just a collective resignation, like the water of the Reie that, disturbed by a swan taking flight, softly splashes against the quays covered with petty spurge. The city breathes again. He sighs. Where is Liberace when you need him?

What he would give for a grand piano in mirror mosaic, for candlelight trembling on polished keys, for diamond cufflinks scattering light like tiny constellations. For theatrical excess with a wink, for beauty so deliberate it turns still again. He imagines a stage that worships form instead of noise, where the performer bows not to the crowd but to beauty itself, where the act of creation still carries ritual, still believes

in grace. But no, no Liberace here. Here, only grease and counterfeit rage. Guitar noise wrapped in existential cry, rebellion without poetry. White underwear above ripped jeans, the brand blazing like a confession. He straightens his back, slips one hand into his pocket, the other on his cane. The veins on his wrist gleam faintly, like veins of marble beneath pale skin. In his stillness there is both irony and longing, the poise of a man who has seen every gesture before, and loves it nonetheless. He stands amid the noise, untouched, preserved by distance, sustained by disdain, held together by the only thing left to him: the grace of the dandy.



The Serenade of the Shadow.
Private Collection – Lucifernum.

“And the dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority.”

Revelation 13:2

2. Two-Headed Dragon, Cancer-Leo, and Manifestor. Him.

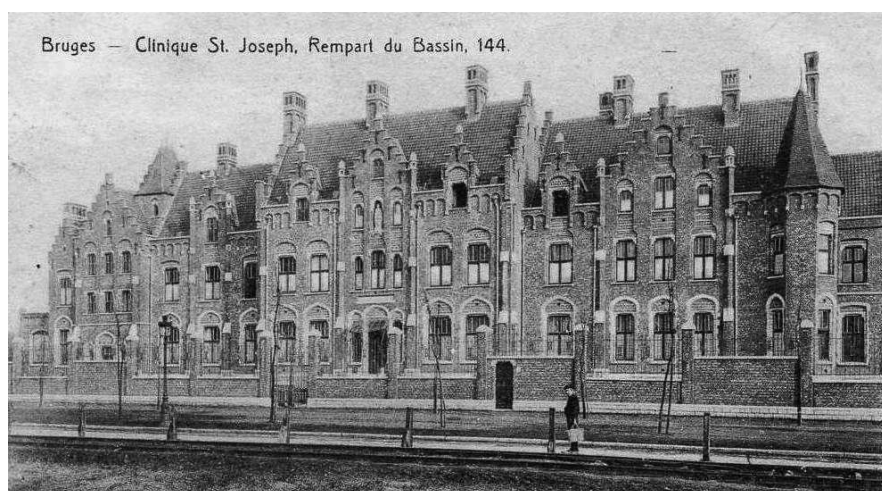
He arrives on a Wednesday, early. The thirtieth of June. Not by coincidence. Not at all by coincidence. His mother's water breaks while the city is still asleep and the air is already shimmering with a scorching heat no one can bear any longer. At exactly seven fifty he is born. In Bruges. Not in the working-class Sint-Jansmaternity home near the Church of Our Lady where the calling voices of children sound like echoes from the past, but on the edge of the city. The Hôpital des Sœurs Augustines de Meaux. In the vernacular, the Sint-Jozef Clinic. A fairytale neo-Gothic refuge with stepped gables, arches, and turrets that nod like modest courtiers. It is a place where the walls know what romance means.

He leaves his mother's womb under the crown of the waxing moon, born under the sign of Cancer, with the gaze of Leo on the horizon, Ascendant, they call it, the shadow that runs ahead of your astrological sign. China celebrates the Year of the Dragon, and the sky chart of that hour, in that place, writes it twice: he is Dragon, with the Dragon as his traveling companion. He is, though it is not yet known, a Manifestor. Few are given that fate. Eight percent, if you want the number. Eight out of a hundred. Exactly! The rest wait. Not him. He moves. His energy is not response, but initiation. Others must push, pull, ask. He opens. Without permission. Without deliberation. Not from courage, but from essence. He is, simply, someone the world knows of before he speaks.

It is hot that day. Not just hot. Not a glow, not sultriness. No, a summer that presses in, consumes, thickens. A heat wave that has been shimmering for weeks like a fire nesting under Europe's skin. Days on end above thirty. Sweat lies like a glistening film on his newborn skin. Everything creaks. Even the trees are tired. But then, while the city still breathes in its morning mist, a weak sunbeam reflects off a solitary dewdrop dangling from the tip of a leaf. The leaf trembles, lightly, barely noticeably. A bird flutters up. Its flight stirs the air. The dewdrop falls. There, on the street, it splashes onto the bald head of a solitary cyclist. He wipes his scalp, stretches. A pebble, a loose cobblestone, God knows what exactly, sets the front wheel swerving. He falls. A truck

approaches, blinded by the sun, and can no longer delay. A life ends. A family falls apart. Mourning. Commotion. Testament.

The only thing that matters is that it happens. And how. That it was written, not on a printed card, but drawn in stardust. Because every beginning pulls threads. Every birth is a shift. This birth, on that morning, in that hôpital, under that sky. It sets something in motion. He was born, yes. But what truly began was movement. As Dragon under Dragon, Cancer under Leo. He is unique, just as everyone is unique. You too, dear reader. You are unique! Not as a word, but as a fact. For no one else was born at exactly that place, at precisely that moment, under that constellation, as you were.



Brugge, Hôpital des Sœurs Augustines de Meaux. 1904

He is here. Without sound, without haste, without intention. As if he emerges from a tear in the air. People often don't know what to say when he walks in. They sit up straight. They rephrase their thoughts. Some feel inexplicably caught. He notices, but says nothing. He lives with this effect the way you live with the scent of your skin. It is simply there.

He is not made to adapt. To anyone. Not out of defiance, but by nature. He doesn't fit into something. He sets something in motion. Always. It is not a choice. He is the first hinge. The hand that opens something without pulling. He needs no permission. He rarely asks for it. He knows