



BIG LITTLE THINGS

1

It is a chaotic memory. Screeching as soft as a baby's restful breath made deafening by quantity and proximity.

"Oh, excuse me."

"Is that yours? Looks like mine."

"Hi! I'm Min."

"What's your name?"

"I'm hungry!"

"Je me suis égare."

"Excusez-moi."

"You're my brother!"

So many hard limbs and bony bodies, as to make their constant touch irritating and painful.

"Who hit me?"

"Was that your leg?"

"Ouch!"

"Tant pis."

Oh and the fetors! Never a breath without bombarding and overwhelming the senses.

It doesn't last long.

"Au revoir!"

"What's this way?"

"This way smells good."

"A tout à l'heure!"

Thinking back on it, it is but a heartbeat in time. And I miss it. Now as just a flash of a memory, a gallimaufry of snippets, I miss it dearly. If only I could have half of those halcyon seconds back.

The din of constant moving and doing continues. If it isn't the activity surrounding me it is noise from the world beyond. I hear 'excusez-moi' and 'hello' and other things as if carried by the whispering wind, but these are faceless phantoms of sounds, like silhouettes of shadows in the dark.

I am not alone. Like a grain of sand is not alone on a sandy beach. It's just that there are so many around me. They are just like me. They carry familiar smells. Their occasional whispered chirps carry no name on them. The intended recipient is never clear to me. Their purpose is much like mine, I imagine. They are me, but I don't know who they are.

"Who am I?" I wonder this a lot.

"What do I want?" This I can never answer. The thought is of that grain of sand in that sandy beach. Life, like a high-tide wave, grabs and hurls me. No time to ponder, only do.

'Who am I?' N'importe. 'Is that food?' 'Is that dangerous?' The things of the moment are the life.

"Avez-vous... ?" I start to ask. I was hoping it was Min. She looked like Min. Mostly. But no answer. I like to think she chirps back 'Je ne vous ai,' or something similar. Probably, what I hear is the continues din of life. Echoes of echoes, amplified by hard surfaces and muddled by soft, moving bodies.

"Bien sur. N'importe." I chirp this to no one. Many hear me, no one listens. Always having to do, no time to think why or what is my purpose. I run. I scurry. No marked finish line to the daily race.

At least those first few chaotic life becoming moments feel warm. I remember, 'live.' Around me it was a focused 'let's be,' 'let's do,' 'let's grow.'

2

Life moves very fast. That's how it goes, right? If you don't stop to look around, you, well, you will miss it. Everything is a scurry. The carefree of youth is all too soon the drudgery and chase for something; some things.

The memory flash of the chaotic scramble of bodies, bony limbs, and myriad of scents, and that at this second now are separated by a chasm. That chasm is a void of time. I am new, then I blink, and I am now.

The in-between time is a scurry. I don't remember the growing up part. I remember awkward limbs. I feel the ghost whisper of cold on my baby skin and now the warm of a fur coat that feels like it belongs to some stranger.

Life moves very fast. Most of us just tumble along with it's surging rush. What a rush it can be, right? So much new. Remember that road off to the right? You'd pass it by all the time. It was alluring, a harpy calling to you. It was just unknown, and possibly dangerous. That is, until you turn on to it.

The right turn becomes the new norm. It becomes another part of the routine. It is part of the daily drudgery. The rush of the moment is now another moment rushing by. Before my brain considers my existence, I am the grain of sand caught in a riptide. And once again I am just going with the flow, content with my place.

Content isn't happy; always, something inside craving more. I try.

"Unai, what's going on?"

"Tout de mime," he throws the words over his shoulder at me as he scurries out of sight.

He is just another face in the crowd. A familiar face, but not one to stop for me more than two seconds.

Erielle and Ben are friendly. Not sure if they qualify as friends, but friendly.

"Hi Alfie," Erielle is the uninhibited, unencumbered one.

"Hey you too, what are you up to?"

"Just heading out for some food."

"Come with us," Erielle calls to me as she scurries behind Ben

I scurry with them. If I'm going to let the tide direct my travels, it won't hurt to catch some nourishing sun and do a little mingling.

"You hear about Fred?" Erielle asks anyone within earshot.

"I heard he was crushed," Ben counters.

"Nah, silly. He got stuck in a trap. Went alone sans doute. Spent days stuck."

"Always looking for trouble, a l'abandon. He was a fool." Ben's words are distant and cold.

"Je me sens mal," Erielle is the kindhearted.

"His fault. Oh, and what about Rick?" Ben directs his question at Erielle. "Always eating whatever he finds."

Erielle giggles. An agreement to the characterization.

"They say he tried to eat some of that stuff they're always telling everyone to stay away from."

"They say it almost killed him," Erielle jumps in.

"Won't belong before something does, homme d'esprit," Ben says.

"What are we going to eat?" she asks Ben.

"Same place as yesterday?" Ben asks in response.

"Yeah, bien sur." Erielle's smile and lighthearted tone wasted on Ben's cold mien. Her scurry is her stronger drive, always on the move.

"A tout à l'heure," I call out to my friend's after image.

I beat the best zero to 60 times, as I go from a third wheel to zero in a flash.

"You're not like us." Imagine hearing this about you. Not as a statement of how unique you are. Something said as a rejection. Words spoken to push you away.

Not feeling like them, not being a part is my place in the world, my tranche de vie. I didn't feel rejected at first. 'You're not like us' was not said to me. I was in it.

"Going up. En plein air."

"Let's have some fun."

"A quelle heure, now?"

"Right now, en efeit."

I hear this. I follow. I even take part. There is some fun. The game is good. The thrills are high.

"This is fun. N'est-ce pas?"

"Oh yeah. Sans doute."

I interact. I laugh with their laughs. Then the scurry goes on.

"A tout à l'heure."

“A bien tot.”

Goodbye and see ya with maybe a whisper of ‘weird’ or ‘homme moyen sensuel.’

‘You’re too’ this. ‘Why don’t you try’ that. Sometimes I get more than sidelines inclusion.

“You could loosen up some,” Erielle has suggested. “Try to have fun, d’accord?”

“Yes,” I say, “have some fun.”

Their fun is fleeting, good at the moment, offering to come again, but like a sugar coating on a stick, gone after a few licks.

“That was great,” I reply. “Thanks.” I mean it.

“Au revoir,” they may reply.

Goodbye to you too.

Or...

“Just try it. You’ll like it.”

“Don’t worry. Au sérieux. We won’t get caught.”

“You too grand monde? Too righteous to have fun?”

Yeah, it’s me. I’m not like them.

3

“Stay out of colossus, open spaces.”

“Ca va sans dire, shoulder to a wall at all times.”

“Avoid top-siders.”

“Careful always. The acte gratuit will put you in the charnel house, to feed the roaches.”

“Never wander alone.”

These are some of the many rules to follow. There for the safety of all.

I do travel the familiar passages. I feel alone but can never seem to be alone for very long. And I have nostalgie de la bove. The old game-- vieux jey -of all restless youth: I want more than I have.

Maybe it is in my genes. I crave the world beyond these familiar passages, en plein air.

There is a small park just beyond one of our familiar passages. Green and browns shifting hues as the sun's rays travel from morning to gloaming. The dirt feeding the various plant life is confrere to my digger tendencies. I set my own path. I borrow where I will.

'A l'abandon' some will say I dig and forage.

"En effet," I respond. Indeed, my wandering are careless to many. I also think the wonders I see should be seen by others. I want to share them with others. I think somehow the greens, the browns, the trees, the ground, will all be greater if their greatness is shared.

Between her scampering and scurry, Erielle once said, "le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point." One of those special moments we have, often unnoticed. She was gone before I could ask. I have felt her words since. The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of. The thing is, my reasons feel simple. No afflatus for me. I yearn for more than I carry within.

That divine inspiration, the afflatus that I think brings us the bosky world, the sky beyond, and every living creature in between, deserves more than passing glances and wailful sighs. I stop and see, but the more I do the greater the void I feel within.

"Glorify in his grace. Rejoice, as his divine gifts can be yours."

Hard not to look around and not be in awe of the greatness of things of the world.

"Repent and praise your king, creator and savior."

Then the greatness and divine beauty is adumbrated by assertions that any who do not give in to faith for this divine entity will perish and burn in some eternal flame.

"Follow me. I will lead you to his grace."

Follow, pay for their efforts, but give no heed to improprieties of the self-professed devoted chosen.

The idea of this faith resonates. A hunger to praise and adore a creator credited for the world around me is as great as my hunger for relishing in all the world offers. I like the devotion. I crave the focus and discipline. But ...

"Join us. Follow me and I will lead you to redemption and salvation."

“Turn your life over to your Lord and savior.”

What’s not said outright is their view of ‘simple believers,’ the faithful as ‘average man,’ homme moyen sensuel, while they are grand monde -high society, with privileges, power, and wealth.

Je me suis égare. I’m lost but following others because they claim to be ‘of the faith’ and thus able to lead, c’est nutre chose. That faith I can’t pretend to have. It is going de mal en pis - from bad to worse.

I give praise my way. I take time to look around. I make it a point to pause my daily scurry to take note of the world, from little to great.

“If you don’t turn your life over, give praise, and live in faith, you are against.”

This I hear often, always leaving me wondering, ‘if the knowledge isn’t there and thus the faith not alive, the grace and bounty is an eternal flame?’ Not enough faith equals burning forever? Tant pis! A pretend faith and false or empty devotion seems worse to me.

4

“N’importe,” they say when I ask about a regular mate. I guess it doesn’t matter to me nearly as much either because I go along. I’d like to think my moral objections are debauched by their perspicacious will and adroit body.

“You’ll like it,” they explain, “and you want it.”

I did want it. Like my nostalgie de la bove took me to the forbidden soil, sex called to me.

At my every hesitation, my docent was ready with encouragement and justification.

“It is natural.” Sex is natural.

“We are not hurting anyone.” Just two consenting explorers of coital relations.

“We can stop any time you want.” I never say stop. I lap up all the fulsome flirting and laugh at the jeuxd’esprit.

“You are super hot and deserve to get all the attention you want, d’accord?” I agree, by giving into it. Only after I ask myself, ‘what’s missing?’

Well, one of the missing things is a name. That sexual exploration ends as quickly as I give in to it and only later realize their name was never a part of the commitment.

I can still smell them. I close my eyes and recall minute details of their body. I often hear their voice, the aggro laughter in the crowd, but no name comes to mind.

“Sex is like nibbling on a chip. It will only makes you want more.” My next sexual foray comes with that bit of wisdom. It is said with such chutzpah and levity, I keep at it while the hollow inside grows.

“I want more,” I say with fear.

“Any time you want,” is the reply.

“No, I mean more than just sex.”

“Sure,” they reply. “We can role play or bring in a third.”

“Au sérieux?” My voice reflects excitement. Two, three-somes later and my body proves it is capable and very receptive to the acts. But my heart, commodious and warm, echoes emptiness.

“C’est la vie,” is the wisdom offered by another. “Be glad there is sex.”

En effet. The sex is good. The physical of it is a bag of my new favorite chips. I have a voracious appetite for both. One chip is never enough.

“Want to go for a walk?” I ask after a session.

“Can’t.” At least there is no lie to follow, or some blithe bunkum.

“Maybe I’ll see you around,” they add.

“Maybe,” I say. What I mean is ‘au revoir.’

Erielle’s words come back to me. ‘Le coer a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point.’ Heard them again at her funeral: The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of.

Au revoir, Erielle.

5

“They are always telling us ‘no wondering alone.’” someone complains.

“Ooh, and ‘shoulder to a wall,’” a small voice adds.

"No open spaces!" The adult mimicry is flawless. The words, precise.

"My favorite is 'ventre à terre,'" another small voice says.

'What does it even mean?' I wonder outloud.

"Au sérieux! Grown-ups can be so uptight!" We all agree.

This is one of many such exchanges of my youth. All about rules: The oppression of youth.

"Stay in shadows."

I remember hearing 'don't go near tip-siders' more than 'want to come with us?' or even 's'il vous plait.' But youth is a shooting star racing up high, there one moment, gone the next. In a blink we are d'un certain age, old. Irony kicks us in the teeth as we are now the ones saying 'keep to shadows' and 'no acte gratuit.' All these rules are now sensible and necessary to tame that pernicious energy of youth.

First it is 'let's run across the field,' but faster than that scurry the thought becomes 'attenuate the reckless.' What happened?

Fred happened. Dead. Died in a trap. A l'abandon. Wondering alone. Rick too. Dead. Did what he shouldn't have. Ben is the latest.

"I miss Ben," Akanji reminisces.

"Ben was a careless fool," Soren replies.

Ben thought others careless fools, then he goes down a forbidden path.

'C'est la vie,' I think. I say "à bientôt, confrere."

"I've been down that way," Soren alights with glee. "Met someone. It was a rush."

"Ben was just looking for a quicker way to his place. Sad." Dolor tinges Akanji's voice.

"I would have gone with him," I say. "Never wandering alone and all that." Mr. Sensible. That's me.

"Come with." Soren offers. "Let you know next time," he adds just before scurrying away.

As I watch Soren fade into shadows and scurrying bodies, Akanji materializes at my shoulder, whispering "be careful with Sorens you chase after. Toujours perdrix."

Before I can process her words and ask what she means by "too much of a good thing," she too is shadows and blurred scurrying.

Akanji's 'beware' is soon shadows and scurry and of little substance in my mind.

"Let's go this way," Soren calls after me and Trevor.

"We were down this way already," Trevor says as we race after Soren.

"Yeah, at least four times," I say. No one cares.

First time or fiftieth, it doesn't matter. If it is fun, it is worth doing, even over and over. And the racing with Soren and Trevor is fun. They are insouciant like I wish I had been when I was their age.

"Have you ever gone there?" Trevor asks me.

"I tried once," I reply.

"What was it like?" Trevor inquires.

"Bet you were scared!" Soren interjects. "We should do it," he adds.

And we do do it. It is fun. It is liberating. Totally the acte gratuit adults warn youth about. Impulsive acts can be dangerous, but they can also lead to fun, a liberating of spirit, and rushes of excitement.

Seeking that rush, abandoning inhibition to gain a fun piece of tranche de vie, not the sensible and boring slice of life we accept but more, comes with consequences that call for au sérieux reckoning. Nothing like losing everything we think important in our lives to see what things really matter.

"I was tricked." Ca va sans dire.

"It wasn't my fault," many assert.

"This isn't fair!" What would be?

So many times the "I didn't do anything wrong" is used as a cover for choices made. Hmm, were those choices the right choices to make? Responsibility and consequences-- the vain of adulthood.

When the consequences come and we are made to take responsibility for our choices, the lucky or wise may refocus on what matters.

I can make bad choices. Getting trapped from some of them has giving me time to think.

"Are you trained in survival technics?" someone trapped with me asks.

"Survival technics?" I ask back.

"You seem so calm and comfortable." he shoots back.

"Not comfortable at all. I don't like any of this," I say.

"You been trapped before?" the inquisitor keeps on.

"No." I reply. I'm curt, hoping my discomfort at the interrogation comes across to them.

"You're so calm though," he comments as we part.

Lucky thing we are all uniquely different. What a boring world this would be if we were the same. There are extremes which can make differences scary. Forced into situations outside our norm can drive those prone to extremes to struggle, to get overwhelmed.

My middle of the road personality must look like calm and discipline in the trapped extreme. Others take note.

"I like how you deal with our circumstances." This is the beginning of a short exchange with a stranger. He goes on, "you stay in your lane and don't go stupid."

'Stupid enough to end up here,' I think. My reply is just a shrug.

"I wish I can be so focused. You like, don't let any of this get to you."

'Au contraire,' I think. I say "just making the best of the situation."

Another time, doing my thing of keeping to myself while using all the caged, empty time doing something productive, someone 'pulls up on me.'

"This sitting around with nothing to do sucks. Everyone is either looking for a fight or crying about how bad they have it." Never so much as a bon-jour or hello from them and all of the sudden they are baring their soul to me. "You sit back, not carrying on like the others. I wish I could just chill."

I reply with a nod and a smile.

"No BS chase for you. I don't know how you do it. I don't know if I can do it." A sigh ends the conversation. His retreating back disappears into the shadows, gone as quickly as he appeared.

I whisper 'au revoir' to the ghost of his presence.

Bad choices do not define a person. Bad situations can be made better. Little lessons we can learn, if we give them a chance.

"J'y suis, j'y reste." Some reticent stranger having a social, friendly moment said that to me. I had to look it up. It means 'here I am, here I remain.' His was not a cry but a reflection that as long as we are here, wherever here is, we have means to chose better and be better.

6

Il faut cultiver notre jardin, meaning we must cultivate our garden, is something else I've heard said. I take it to suggest we each have our life to live.

"I am going to be famous when I grow up."

"I want to be a great leader."

"Moving to the country and live on a farm."

The realms of youth can be as great as galaxies are vast. How many famous people can there be at once though? Grand monde, high society, is not going to seem so high if everyone is in it. Having time to think about choices and opportunities, not just rushing behind some dream or thrill, I am hearing things anew.

"Be great, a hero, a leader, a special person to just one other and sit with all the other heroes, leaders, and great people." I think on that now and see reaching too high, lusting over what is beyond will rob us of good things already in our lives.

The belly to the ground way, ventre à terre, is fun. Life is short though and can be over before we have time to fix mistakes or recover from bad choices. N'est-ce pas?

Nothing like losing what was to refocus us.

"I thought it sucked stumbling over and wrestling with my brothers and sisters. Now, how I wish I were back there. I miss that simple life." Words of another stranger.

I reply, "simple is great."