

LES ANGES GARDIENS [*The Guardian Angels*] (A Fable)

[after La Fontaine's fable, "The Crow and the Fox"]

A Refugee in the camp imagined
(Since what is there to do in a camp but imagine)
How he might get out, and every night he dreamed
Of an excursion in which the confining horizons of the camp
Would suddenly expand.
To leave, to leave the camp of the orphans,
To wander here and there, to extravagantly spend at a single shot
An entire week's allowance of five francs.
To sit at a table in Lausanne in a chic cafe,
Enjoying a glass of Swiss or French beer!
But it was no more than a dream: There's the catch!
Sorrowfully the refugee relinquished all hope,
Giving up even dreaming about freedom.
When a rumor started going around: Yes, the authorities,
Organizing sensible diversions to cheer him up,
Offered to let him go outside for a walk.
At this incredible news the refugee couldn't believe his ears,
The dream was becoming reality!
A hundred projects immediately formed in his head:
He quickly composed a list of purchases,
Necessary or not, which he would make with no thought of the cost!
He would write letters and cards to his family and friends,
Thrilled to be able to avoid the always-vigilant censor.
Who could prevent him, once outside, from wandering off on his own,
Quietly and nonchalantly,
To drop into a Swiss mailbox, with his own hands,
A sealed envelope
With a message which was nobody's business but his own?
No doubt the day of freedom has arrived.

"It's time: everyone gather here!
Listen up! At attention! Get in line!
Count off by fours, and make it snappy!"
Now's the time for fun.
About to go through the gate
Our refugee is overcome with impatience and excitement,
But the sight of the guard
Quickly – too quickly –
Drags him back
To a healthy respect for the regulations.

The party begins
Under the watchful eyes of – a mere trifle! –
Five or six guardian angels
Duly equipped with bayonets.
The more the merrier! The bigger the better!
There are fifty companions in the group,
Young and old, men and women.
A cheerful lad is at the head, marching with long strides:
However...! The guardian angel at the head is in charge of souls!
"Stay with the group! Not so fast over there!"
Off on the left, with a quick but clumsy move,
A couple tries vainly to go off by themselves:
Another guardian angel in his turn intervenes:
"Cross over", he says, "to the right side of the street;
That's an order: everyone else is there."

Even so, a woman at the end of the line,
Weary and unable to keep up with the group,
Trails behind.
The guardian angel 'requests' that she rejoin the group;
"You have to stay together: a little faster over there!"

The refugee, long deprived of sweets,
Just about faints in front of the Patisserie,
And, believing he's avoided the watchful eyes of the angels,
Enters, and unhindered begins selecting
Succulent cakes offered in exchange for coupons.
Bravo! But as he leaves, trying to conceal his parcel,
Another guardian angel, no doubt in charge of the
Stomach Police, making certain nothing slips by,
Quickly pops his balloon,
And obliges him, pitious and shamefaced,
To return to their proper places
All the babas, brioches, tartes and flans.

Nonetheless the group advances, climbs down, climbs back up,
Climbs up again, stops, starts up again,
With dry mouths and wooly tongues: the sun beats down on them.
Then very quietly someone says that
Just over there, near a lake surrounded by green trees,
A lovely outdoor café is open
Where one might have a drink.
Alas! Just then the circle closes:
The six guardian angels, blocking all escape,
Protect the café from this invasion,
And, themselves also sorely tempted,
Recite: "We must obey our orders."

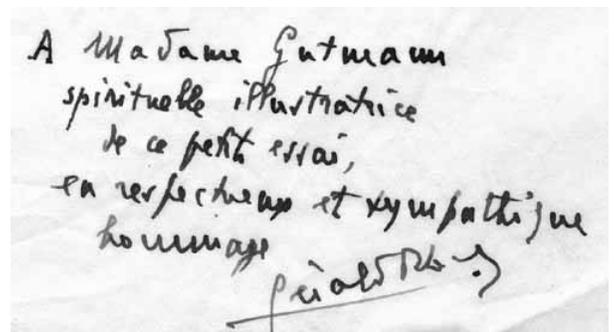
On the way back, the refugee, nervous, trembling, sweaty,
Takes out his letters and tries to drop them into a mailbox,
When the angel, seeing this, quickly and firmly
Slaps him on the wrist, saying: "Forbidden..."

The poor man gives up and rejoins the group, by now quite content
To return to the restrictions of the camp,
Having had the opportunity to experience for himself
The delights of supervised freedom.

Thus, the refugee, disappointed, angry, embarrassed,
Vowed, but a bit late, that he would not be fooled again.

LAUSANNE, le 30 mai 1944
Camp de l'Orphelinat

*[To Madame Gutmann
clever illustrator
of this little work,
in respectful and friendly
admiration.
Gèrald Bloy??]*



A Madame Gutmann
spirituelle illustratrice
de ce petit essai,
en respectueux et sympathique
hommage
Gèrald Bloy →