

Le Plateau des Poètes¹

She was accustomed to taking refuge in what seemed to her like an enchanted kingdom: the “Plateau des Poètes” in Béziers.

Sitting near the Titan fountain where the god Pan spits water, she dreamed of turning into a queen, wandering the steep and winding trail made more prominent by being lined with exotic species of trees. Further down, she became “Child holding a fish”, the famous and exquisite statue by Injalbert, and she imagined herself swimming in the centre of this vast pool of water. And then she spoke to Victor Hugo, or rather to his bust, reciting what she had never forgotten:

“Tomorrow at dawn, at a time when the countryside whitens,

I shall leave. You see, I know you expect me.

I shall go through the forest; I shall cross the mountain.

I cannot stay away from you any longer.”

¹ The Plateau of Poets is a beautiful park located in the city centre of Béziers

Yes, the love of her life had gone forever and she did not know how to live this absence. So she stayed for long hours near the lake where she could feel herself delivered in the company of her only family, her brothers, and her friends: fish, turtles and waterfowl living freely. Sometimes she breathed deeply and got drunk from the perfume coming from floral compositions that were jealously maintained by the park gardeners. Lying in a flower bed, she closed her eyes. And then, a slow shiver running through her body, her smile vibrated as if she had heard a harp or a Handel sonata. She was the great princess of this Theatre of Greenery.

Later, when it was closing time for the Park, the guards panicked. She no longer moved. The doctor who came diagnosed a comatose state and ordered an immediate transfer to the hospital's A&E department.

As for her, she no longer inhabited her own body. The stretcher-bearers were carrying its chrysalis. The princess revealed herself to be an emaciated human being, dressed in rags, dirty, toothless, with a greenish-gray complexion and failing eyesight. A woman maybe. Surely a poor woman, homeless, with no family and no work.

She awoke in the geriatrics unit, where they had been able to find an available bed. No one could give her a specific age or identity. She still did not speak, but frowned or moved a leg when spoken to. And the various tests carried out all came up with the same familiar term: “Critical”. However, the medical team could not identify her illness. Thus she remained under observation for several days, on a drip. The only condition that she, frowning, had really understood was what she had been told by the neuropsychiatric doctor, Dr Georges Antoine Viallard. He had said to her in a low, calm, slow warm voice: “If the medical team make a diagnosis then we will probably be able to treat you!” He looked at her with genuine feeling, attentive and smiling. This flash of hope had calmed and touched her, and had made her happy.

Her fate changed the day a team of Romanian doctors came to Béziers hospital as part of a European Community exchange. She was told that her case would be presented to a famous professor, Boris Watzalacescou, a specialist in rare conditions, in the hope that he would be able to identify her illness. Some days later, the esteemed professor arrived at the hospital with a team of Romanian doctors and visited some of the patients. At our patient’s bedside, Boris Watzalacescou barely looked at her and whispered in broken English: “Palliative

care²”, repeating “palliative care! Only!” whereupon he sped off, followed by his retinue, to assess other patients.

A few months later, Brasov Hospital in Romania received a phone call from France. It was from our patient and “Plateau des Poètes” princess who, now cured, had managed with great tenacity to obtain Professor Boris Watzalacescou’s telephone number. She read to him with her Béziers accent the message written in large print and prepared with the assistance of a humanitarian association:

“I wanted to thank you, Professor Vazalaassécou for your diagnosis. In Béziers, the team of doctors had made it clear to me that I could only get better if my illness could be identified...

And as soon as you said “Palliateeve care_on_lit³”, I knew I would recover”.

Translated by Christine Scott-Fox

² Palliative care only (care given at the end of life)

³ “Only” in English could be heard in French as “On lit” which means “They read”, so our lady believed the prediction: the diagnosis had been made and had saved her