

The Boy who Dreamed
of Flying in a Cadillac

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by

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*To Bruno Joly and Patrick Tandin,
Wherever you are, I hope you're still swinging along with me...
on the Flambée Montalbanaise.*

*“Comme on jette à l'eau du calme
Un caillou ricochet,
Par ondes d'ondes là
Passe-passe l'écho
Des papis d'au-delà du top.
Réveillez la mélodie,
la chanson des cafés,
Accroche au cœur
Thank you, Viseur.”*

*“As we throw calm into the waters
And a rock ricochets,
Wave upon wave
And the sleight of an echo
From grandfathers from beyond.
Wake up the melody,
As the song of cafés,
Touches the heart
Thank you, Viseur.”*

*Extract from the song,
La Flambée Montalbanaise...
Music by Gus Viseur
Lyrics by André Minvielle*

1 - Bloody Théo

Théo Malley also went by the name of Bloody Théo... because it turned out he'd killed a fair number of people... and the crime scenes he'd left in his wake were exactly that... bloody. He'd decided to end his career on a high, to go out with a bang - the bang of the century - and then disappear off to some tax haven in the middle of nowhere to live out the rest of his days.

That morning, at around 4.00 a.m., he'd left his sterile hotel room where he'd spent the night with a certain Wanda. Wanda was his way of letting loose before the main event.

What he liked about her was that she didn't speak a word of French. Russian, Chechen or Ukrainian. He hadn't bothered to find out. The reason he'd picked this particular girl was that, despite her layers of makeup, she didn't look like she could have been any older than sixteen. Just started out in the biz. Not in the slightest bit curious. She was so preoccupied by her own misery that every one of her clients looked the same to her.

And that's just what Bloody Théo needed. Anonymity. At 3 a.m., he kicked her out and started to prepare for what lay ahead of him in minute detail. He was going to follow the unmarked car as it made its way along its route. As planned. He has his gun all holstered up and ready, his bullet-proof vest, black balaclava, and a hoodie.

This was to be the crowning glory of his entire career. He'd meticulously worked out this hit, established exactly how much cash the car would be transporting on any given day, how much jewelry, the itinerary it would be following... even what the weather might be like.

Everything had been ready for two weeks, but he wanted to make sure it was raining on the big day. He'd realized that whenever it was bucketing down, people were so obsessed with trying to keep themselves dry, that they tended to lose all sense of reasoning.

On Saturdays, the car mainly dropped off and picked up from jewelry stores. The routes changed every day, which is why he'd have to wait for it outside the transport agency depot. He still wasn't sure if today would be the day. It all depended on where the car was heading and what it'd be picking up. If there were a couple of trips to banks as well as jewelers, which is what happened sometimes, then he'd know to act. He'd thought it all through.

Strike the drivers just before they put the bag in the back of the car, where it'd be inaccessible as soon as the doors were closed. It was the only possible time to do it. But it was also at that precise moment when everyone was on their guard. Someone was bound to press the panic button in the bank and he'd have to get the hell out of there before the cops showed. He'd timed it down to the last second. It'd be fine. He was certain of it. But still, luck would

have a role to play, of course.

The only slight hiccup was that Max had let him down. He'd called him up the night before explaining that he wouldn't be able to make it because he was laid up in bed with gastroenteritis.

What in the hell? Gastroenteritis? Why couldn't he just say he'd caught a bug? And since when do you decide to miss out on the heist of the century because you've got a bit of a tummy ache?

So, there was Bloody Théo, slipping his Carrera into first and discreetly following the unmarked car as the drivers set off on that day's scheduled drop-offs.

His gun was loaded and equipped with a silencer. Just in case...

2 - Emergency exit

Ranko lived in an institution where minors wind up when their parents can no longer take care of them. Child Welfare Services. Most people call these centers orphanages because that's what they were known as in the past and the name kind of stuck.

Whatever you call them, it all boils down to the same thing. The name might have changed, but everyone knows what these places are.

Ranko's mother couldn't bring him up because she was in prison. And as for the father... nobody ever knew who he was. So Ranko had been a welfare kid since almost forever, but he'd never quite managed to get used to it.

Ever since his mother had been sent down, they'd tried every trick in the book with Ranko. Care centers, foster families... he escaped from every place he went. It was a pretty good sign. A kid with fire in his belly. A sign that he wasn't the type of boy to give up. No surrender.

Whenever it rained, he loved to put his head up against a windowpane and daydream. He imagined himself in Réunion with his father, who he just *knew* would be a pirate out there.

And to get all the way to Réunion, he'd have to make his way through the clouds... all the way across the sky.

At nighttime, he often had the same recurring dream... sailing through the air in a huge pink car. An immense car. The size of a cruise liner!

Inside this absolutely incredible machine, everything was dazzling and shiny. Flickering glitter and tiny sparks lit up the entire interior. It was exactly how he envisaged heaven.

When he'd been really young, he'd never had much of an idea about where to run to when he went on one of his escape missions.

But now, where our story begins, he was thirteen already and old enough to know exactly what he wanted - and that was to find his daddy and go and live with him in Réunion and become a pirate too.

Ranko believed that Réunion had to be the most beautiful country in the world. There were coconut trees over there; banana trees; hot, sandy beaches and a turquoise blue sea with pink coral barrier reefs. Ranko loved the idea of the barrier reefs along the shores of Réunion. Barriers that were there not to separate one thing from another, but to protect.

For the last two weeks, Ranko had been in a new children's center and had actually managed to catch up with a friend there, Tarzan, who he'd met two years earlier when they'd both been with the same foster family. Tarzan was from the Antilles originally and Ranko considered

him to be his best friend ever.

Tarzan was the only one who knew the truth (the truth about his mother) because for some time now, Ranko had always preferred to tell anyone who asked that she was dead. He knew that it would be years before he got the chance to see her again. It was like he'd never really had a proper mother. Simple as that.

It's as difficult to break out of the lock-up as it is easy to hotfoot it away from the orphanage. So, he knew she'd be staying inside for a good few years.

His mother would send him a letter every now and again - at Christmas and on his birthday. She asked for his forgiveness.

But he couldn't have cared less about how sorry she was. All he wanted was that she'd never done anything in the first place and that they were all back together again - Ranko, his mother, and his pirate dad - in the big pink car in the clouds.

On this particular day, as it poured down buckets, he set his mind to thinking. He'd made his decision.

He had to get out of this place. He'd cobbled together a plan, of sorts, and was now combing through the tangle of details in his head as he lay on his bed, his eyes fixed on the sign above the door. "EMERGENCY EXIT"

He was in a tiny dorm room with a few bunk beds lined up next to each other. Most of the other kids in there were already out for the count, but he was too excited, too wound up to even think about getting any shuteye.

As he stretched out, facing the ceiling, he practiced making what he thought of as "hard-nut" faces, something he could use to frighten people. This was all part of his plan.

Marc, A.K.A. Tarzan, who had the bunk below him, shook Ranko's quilt violently to try to get his attention.

"Hey, Ranko! And what happens next? You didn't finish the story. What are you going to do when you get to Paris?"

The sudden interruption pulled Ranko out of his land of daydreams. He turned down towards Tarzan and exclaimed brightly:

"As soon as I hit Paris, I'm going to get hold of a whopping wad of cash, and then get a plane out of there."

"A plane? Where for?"

"Réunion! That's the whole reason I'm breaking out! I'm going to Réunion! My dad's a pirate out there!"

Tarzan looked up at him skeptically:

"A pirate? Pants on fire! You're a total twit! This is pure gold garbage! Pirates don't even exist in real life! Just in comic books! Like in Asterix!"

“It’s you who’s the twit! The nitwit twit! Of course they exist! They’re just more modern now, you see! Listen up and I’ll explain. As soon as a yacht docks some place - the real kind of thing you’d see rich folk in with people loaded up to the max, super cool and stylish... you know the types I mean... they have pools, private jets, movie theaters at home and they own soccer stadiums and have everything you could possibly need or imagine on their boats... Well, my dad, he goes on board these boats, he faces up to them with his James Bond Magnum Force guns, makes them all walk the plank (or he throws them all overboard), bags up everything he can find... like jewelry, stereos, cell phones, laptops and cash and then goes off and hides it all away in his secret cave before the cops catch up with him. It doesn’t matter if they do anyway, because he’s best buds with all the police officers. He pays them off, you see... Then he sells it all on the black market.”

“You mean there’s a special market for black people out there?”

“Get out of here! You haven’t got a clue, you! The black market is for selling illegal stuff, it’s not just for black people. You’re such a weird kid, Tarzan.”

Tarzan accepted his explanation, no questions asked, but something was still bothering him.

“And what about the people on the boat?”

You see, Tarzan was a nice kid and just couldn’t stand it when people died in stories. He was always waiting for the happy ending.

“Well, some of them manage to make it to safety, but a lot of them get eaten by sharks.”

A shiver ran down Tarzan’s spine. He stayed silent a moment and then continued the conversation with a dreamy tone to his young voice:

“And when are you going? Tomorrow?”

“Hope so, dopo! My bag’s all packed anyhow. It’s Saturday tomorrow. There’ll be folk scurrying off all over the place, going off on S.W.Os. I’ll make the most of the sitch and slip out of here unnoticed. I won’t be seen... I won’t be heard...”

“I heard that some people want to take me on a Special Weekend Out! I hope they like me!” said Tarzan suddenly, his voice shaking a little with anxiety. “An S.W.O.! Finally!”

Ranko did his best to reassure him.

“Don’t worry! It’ll all turn out just fine!”

Tarzan handed two Babybel cheese up to him.

“Here, I managed to sneak some grub again.”

Ranko bent over the top bunk to take the two individually wrapped cheeses and then squashed them into a little knapsack at the bottom of his bed. He already had about 2 lbs. of the stuff in there.

Everything he owned was in that bag. A black sharpie he used to write with, a plastic keyring with blue liquid that moved inside and was meant to look like the sea, a color photograph of

him in the arms of his mother taken back when he was just a toddler.

He also had an old newspaper clipping, yellowing and worn looking now, of an article about his mother's arrest. There was a picture of her being taken away by two cops.

She was holding out her cuffed hands towards him as he sat in the arms of a female police officer.

Ranko knew the clipping was there, but he never looked at it. It was all crumpled up at the bottom of the bag, and that's exactly where he liked it to stay.

Before slipping off into the land of nod, Tarzan, whispered up to him:

"Hey, Ranko!"

"Yes?"

"You'll take care of yourself, right?"

"Sure thing. Thanks, Tarzan."

He was thanking him for the Babybels... but not only that.

He was also thanking him for being such a great friend and for having always stayed the same person for what seemed like such a long time.

He lay back down:

"Listen up, Tarzan... I'm sorry, bud... can't talk any more right now. I'm focusing on stuff here, OK?" I haven't worked out all of my plan yet. I need to have a little think about how I'm going to get my hands on some serious cash.

3 – Cadillac

Like every day at around this time, *Boulevard Richard Lenoir* was busy with traffic. All cars looked the same in the dark. All cars except Jo Tourneur's car.

Jo's car looked like a flash of bright light approaching from a distance. It seemed fluorescent, almost radiant. Jo had bought his candy pink Cadillac a long time ago.

This particular night, his Cadillac slid along the sidewalk, shining as bright as a diamond, as it pulled to a stop. He'd had an agreement with Marilyn, the concierge of his building, for some years now. She would put garbage cans along the edge of the sidewalk in order to reserve him a parking space. A great parking space it was too!

Jo pulled into the spot clumsily and looked at his reflection in the passenger window before tucking his shirt into his trousers. He was wearing a red leather jacket which did not quite close over his protruding gut, two-tone loafers, and what little hair he had left was forced into a rocker's quiff. He knew that his outfit was far too young for him. It wasn't the look he should have been going for at his age... but in his head, he was nowhere even approaching 75! He didn't even want to have to think about it!

It would be an understatement to say that Jo had had an eventful life. Like Ranko, he'd spent a part of his childhood in care.

His mother had been on the game, his father had been an alcoholic and never given a damn about him and as for his aunt... well, she had owned the bordello in which her sister (his mother) had made her meager living. He learned to play the accordion with his Italian uncle, Marcello, but he didn't like to practice. He hated doing his scales... almost as much as he hated going to school.

Every once in a blue moon, social services would sit up and take note. They'd show concern for his wellbeing, especially when they found out he'd been pilfering here and there and then they'd send him to spend a few months in one of their centers.

When he got to the age of 14, his aunt decided to take it upon herself to deal with him.

"My little Joseph, it's time for you to make a choice here: either you go up to *Belleville* and take up a building apprenticeship with my friend Antonio, or you work a bit harder with that accordion of yours and you do the rounds with Marcello."

He was too scared of having to do scales all day, so he opted for building. He did a total of three weeks' work in *Belleville*, but felt homesick for his neighborhood, his *Bastille*, more than he could have ever thought possible... plus his hands were covered in blisters from

lugging piles of bricks around all day long. Enough was enough.

He said to his aunt:

“The accordion it is.”

And he never looked back. In just one day, playing in the courtyards of various buildings throughout Paris, he earned more than he would have earned in a week on the building site. On Saturdays and Sundays, he would play in the cat house his aunt owned. By the age of 17, he was a pretty well-respected player. He knew his stuff alright.

But all that was long over. Times had changed.

By the 1980s, everyone had grown to absolutely hate the accordion. It was frowned upon as being really *déclassé*. Then, out of nowhere, a couple of decades later, it was back with a vengeance when French alternative rock groups made it all cool and happening again.

But, Jo’s reaction to this revival was: “Kids these days strap on the squeeze-box and hammer it like a drum. Where’s the finesse?”

But he was proud all the same whenever a youngster stopped him in the street and asked him if he was Jo Tourneur!

Back in his prime, he had been adored by so many people, so many young couples who had fallen for each other dancing to his music at the BalaJo club¹. But then his style of music had become an object of ridicule as the new generations started coming in along with the younger musicians that followed them. The squeeze-box drummers. However, towards the end of his career, he had gained an aura of respect for being one of the originals.

But it didn’t make the bitter pill any easier to swallow. He was old. He was rusty. Sure, his talents might be respected in some ways but... he was a has been. An old timer. He was done. It had been some ride.

He missed it all. He missed the good old days when he could do just as he pleased, the crazy days when rules were there to be broken and his musical imagination led the way. The days when all your buddies had nicknames and people needed a real live musician to dance to. The days where you could mix up Swing and Jazz with *Bal-musette* and nobody cared! The days where you did as you pleased. The days where you did as you liked. The Belle Epoque!

He’d never been married, but he’d shacked up a while with a cute little songstress and they’d had a kid together, Solange, who did everything in her power to forget who she was and where she’d come from. Big time. The accordion, the bistros, the jamming sessions, the *bals-musettes*... she did not want to know. She married a *petit-bourgeois*, who did not have a musical bone in his body, but who was on track to becoming an executive something-or-other.

Thankfully, Mr. La-Di-Da decided that the piano was a chic instrument to have at home - this

¹ The *BalaJo* is really and still existing. The *BalaJo* is a dancing bar. Address: 9 rue de Lappe, 75011, Paris. It was opened in June 1936

meant Jo was then allowed to go visit with his granddaughter, Victoria, and give her music classes. Because, as a general rule, Jo wasn't all that welcome at his daughter's little suburban palace. One of his biggest fears was that dear daughter would have him locked up in a retirement home before his 80th birthday.

He slipped his bag onto his shoulder and the enormous accordion case onto his back and headed towards the main entrance of his building, just as Marilyn was stepping out:

"Oh! Is that you, Jo? Hi! I was just heading out to see if you'd arrived back. I was going to take the cans in."

"Here I am! Hi Marilyn! Still partying hard? Still not started your diet, I see? "You're such a wind-up merchant!"

Marilyn weighed well over 250 pounds. Jo too had a few extra inches around the waistline that he could have done with shifting. So, their shared weight problem was considered fair game.

Marilyn could always give as good as she got:

"Did you take a look in the mirror, you old fool? You know fine well that us curvy girls are seeeeeexxxxxxyyyy as! I'm just as cute as a button! Like that tummy of yours, Jo! I like something to hold onto tight of a night with all my might!"

"Quite the poet, aren't you?"

Jo headed through the entranceway to the inner courtyard, leaving the door open behind him, and started to open up his mail box.

Marilyn threw him a look over her shoulder:

"I dropped your mail off round at your place! It's on the piano!"

Jo had just started stomping off morosely towards Stairwell B when he spotted the shiniest, most souped up Golf GTI you could imagine double park next to his Cadillac. It was Solange's car.

Victoria was with her. He could not help but notice how she was the spitting image of her grandmother at that age as she came running in towards him. Jo bent down to greet her, and she jumped up into his arms. Her weight combined with the accordion box was a bit too much. He was chuckling so hard at how high this kid could jump that he got a stitch.

The screech of Solange's car horn brought him back down to earth.

She was still behind the wheel of her GTI, one leg out of the car door, calling Victoria back. She looked so hesitant, so shy in her almond green tailored jacket and her neat little highlighted bob and bangs.

"Victoria, you've left your sheet music in here! Come on! I have to go!"

Jo stepped back out onto the sidewalk and up closer to her car:

"So, have you had any more thoughts about this vacation?"

She seemed to be very ill at ease. Her mood looked to change suddenly.

“Well, yes... I mean... it’s not that... it’s just... You see...”

“OK! Out with it! Spit it out, my girl! It might be a gold watch!”

“Pierre doesn’t want... He’s signed her up for some intensive courses in...”

Jo raised his eyebrows and then looked heavenwards, as if calling upon the Gods themselves for help. Solange continued, somewhat disjointedly, to list the lessons Victoria had ahead of her:

“... tennis, I.T., English...”

She took a deep sigh and tried to wrap up:

“They’re new... all these courses... Oh my! Look at the time! I’m so late!”

Victoria trotted over to her grandfather, now holding on to a bag, a few of her school books... and her all-important sheet music.

As she revved the car, Solange shouted out:

“I’ll be by to pick her up on Sunday! Text me, OK? Enjoy your piano classes, my sweetie!”

And the car disappeared around the corner at the end of the street as quickly as it had shown up.

Jo and Victoria looked at each other regretfully. Jo just couldn’t stop himself from muttering under his breath whilst rubbing his stubbly chin:

“How in Christ’s name did I wind up with such a dafto of a daughter?!”

Victoria didn’t like it too much when her grandpops spoke about Solange like that... even though his remarks were more often right than not. She was still her mother after all.