

RATIBA NASRI

COLLECTION OF FANTASTIC SHORT STORIES

Cocktail of 18 short stories:

13 fantastic short stories + 5 short stories

of various themes. 🌟






This collection of fantastic short stories is a work of fiction.
*Any similarities to actual person, living or dead, or actual
events, is purely coincidental.*

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Cover : Éthan Joe Pingault

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1 DOUNIA



I closed the door on my friends, my housewarming party successful. I had found the perfect place; a workshop located in Montmartre, birthplace of great names in painting. The place had a proven cachet: white walls, exposed brown beams, high ceilings, and was 100 square metres in size.

The area consisted of two separate spaces. A housing section, fitted out in a bohemian bourgeois style. A spacious workshop area with plenty of light from the huge windows. I had invested in quality equipment: easels, canvases, tubes of acrylic paint, brushes...

Having recently graduated from the Ecole des

Beaux-Arts in Paris, I dreamed of painting romantic canvases in order to achieve fame and recognition from my peers.

Eager to get to work, I got up at dawn to take advantage of the morning light. I was getting my equipment ready when an unusual object caught my eye. I stared at this thing that should not have been there. It was an antique door, masterfully crafted. Chocolate coloured, it clashed strangely with the freshly painted ivory wall, and seemed to belong to another era...

I was dying to find out what was behind it. However, a doubt assailed me. Was this a passage to a hostile world or to nothingness, with no hope of return? There was no way I was going to let this be a mystery! I grabbed the copper handle, said a short prayer and turned the knob.

The door opened in Montmartre at the place where I thought of starting my first painting. A little dizzy, I contemplated the landscape and then decided to go through it...

Carried away, I could not let go of my brushes. At

three o'clock I treated myself to a chicken and vegetable sandwich and a soft drink in a bakery. In the evening I was glad I didn't have to walk through the whole neighbourhood to get home.

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My painting came to life. I had finely reproduced the little square with its statue, its rustic benches, its colorful shops with their old-fashioned charm, the tourists who flocked to admire this welcoming district, full of history, the territory of painters, writers, confirmed or budding artists.

At night, the door would disappear around ten o'clock and reappear in the morning at daybreak. Anxious at the idea of its disappearance, I had searched the Internet for an article mentioning this phenomenon, and came up empty-handed. My curiosity was aroused. Had the previous owners enjoyed the same surprise, or was I the first? I contacted the estate agent who had initiated the transaction. I knew from his silence that he thought I was crazy. My impression was confirmed when he asked me if the main door was not enough for me! I

diverted the conversation by talking about the friendliness of the neighbours, then ended the call.

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I had painted several districts, dear to my heart. I was exhausted, but overwhelmed by the brilliance of my paintings. With each painting, the door had transported me to the desired place. Efficient, but disconcerting!

One Saturday I invited some friends to dinner. I enjoyed the fusion with my art, but I was equally fond of the friendly evenings, which were essential for my personal balance. I was eager to show my work and to present the door.

I had ordered from the usual Asian caterer and kept the drinks cool. The meal was going to be convivial, but unusual. They were going to be blown away by the door!

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A festive ringing of the doorbell brought me out of my thoughts. I glanced amusedly at "my assistante" who seemed to be spying on me out of the corner of my eye, and went to open the door.

My friends, happy to find me after my "painting hibernation", were six in number: Thomas, Leïla, Océane, Mathieu, Karim and Stéphanie.

After the preliminaries, I served them an aperitif, and then we spread out on the sofas around the coffee table where there were bowls containing an assortment of chips and snacks.

I spoke up. The joyful and nourished conversations ceased, and I saw looks of bewilderment as I told the story. I invited them into the workshop.

When I arrived, I was dismayed... for me. The door had disappeared and the wall stood lonely and pale under the light of the ceiling lamps.

My friends laughed at my wild imagination.

When they saw my canvases resplendent with colors, they were ecstatic. We were not allowed to leave such jewels out of sight.

The shower of compliments filled me with joy. Dinner was spent in good spirits, and my friends took their leave around two in the morning.

Annoyed by this door that had failed me, I went to bed. I was worried. Would she comeback? Had I

destroyed the magic by spreading the information to my loved ones?

I got up at the crack of dawn and ran to the workshop to find that she was back, beautiful and serene. A message appeared:

Don't ever mention me to anyone again. I exist only for you!

I stared at the words written in black letters as a sudden fear came over me. I felt that the door was alive; it had the power to reason and communicate. It seemed to know me and was insinuating itself into my life.

I turned my back on that vile object and went to lunch. Hunger had deserted me, but I forced myself to eat a little food in preparation for the long day. I spent the next hour cleaning up the living quarters that needed it.

In the workshop I was relieved to see that the door had returned to its normal appearance. At last, I think! Doubt was creeping into my mind. Had I not been the victim of a hallucination that made me see phrases that existed only in my exhausted mind?

An inspiration came to me. I wanted to paint the door ajar on an atypical landscape. After reflection, I chose New York, where I had never had the opportunity to go, my financial situation having ruined this project.

I was blown away by the beauty of the landscape before my eyes; the skyscrapers, the sea as far as the eye could see and the statue of Liberty in the distance. I travelled without a plane, without a passport, without stress, with a saving of time. No transport costs, no pollution problems. The ecologists would be delighted to have such an opening.

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After painting most of the morning, I took a lunch break in a Manhattan restaurant. Some young people at the next table asked me to join them. I protested awkwardly - my knowledge of American being limited - but they insisted that they had observed my work...

The meal took place in a good-natured atmosphere, and I got to know Megan, a young woman who spoke a little French. She dreamed of visiting Paris, the

Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum and Montmartre. She loved French painters, writers and poets. We spent the afternoon chatting, sitting on a bench facing the sea. The others had gone off to do their own thing, and we were alone in the world. We discovered that we had a lot in common: Asian cuisine (again), reading... But above all the causes dear to our hearts, such as the eradication of famine, war and the preservation of the planet for future generations.

I was surprised to set foot in the mythical city so far from Paris. Megan's presence by my side was unreal. Her face came alive as she spoke and I could see the love she had for New York. I was irresistibly drawn to her blonde hair, her fine features, and her graceful figure. I felt that I was not indifferent to her.

After exchanging our contact details, we reluctantly parted at about seven o'clock, promising to meet again the next day. I walked happily to the door. I touched the knob and burned my fingers at the touch. I screamed and dropped the object. Amazing! I took a handkerchief from my pocket, wrapped my hand and turned the knob.

While I was tidying up, a message appeared:

This is the last time you will see this American woman. You tell her that you do not wish to continue the relationship. Besides, she's not pretty!

I stared at the words dancing before my eyes. The door couldn't stand me hanging out with Megan. This is the explanation of the hot pommel.

The phone rang. Karim was inviting me for coffee. I ran off to the shower while thinking about that loathsome door that writes such twisted messages. Certainly, Spielberg's next science fiction film. A big budget film with two famous American actors as the main characters. As for the door, it could play itself! Execrable, but convincing as desired.

Karim had arranged to meet me at the Café des Artistes, not far from my studio, and I walked to him. He sat on the terrace and simply typed my hand by way of a greeting. He looked as he did on good news days, and soon explained to me the reason for this surprise meeting. He had come across a gallery owner who was looking for new artists to exhibit and he had told him about me... The art dealer was eager to meet

me.

I remained silent. Karim asked if I was not offended by his initiative and I had to reassure him. I was happy, but was afraid of being disappointed. As a neophyte painter, I found my paintings surprising, but I doubted that my work would be up to the task... That said, a meeting with the gallery owner did not mean an exhibition, or guaranteed sales. Nevertheless, it was an enthusiastic yes that I gave Karim. The conversation turned to his job. A graphic designer, he had just landed a golden contract to promote a new perfume. He was my best friend, and I was happy for him. I left him with the promise to come over for dinner some night.

I had been close to telling him about the door, my travels, Megan, but had refrained. Who could swallow something like that? Even I didn't believe it. Only my paintings attested to its existence. I might have thought I was crazy otherwise!

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I saw Megan again. It wasn't up to the door to tell me what to do. Who did she think she was? She was

like a jealous wife. We spent hours chatting over a drink, a good meal... Thanks to her, I had discovered another facet of New York; the city of idleness, of pleasure, which had become for me the capital of love. I was happy, in love and distressed. The woman of my life was going to Los Angeles for a month. Megan, a sales manager for a large luxury fashion company, had to select the collection for the next season.

Affected by the separation, the time would seem long. I took her in my arms to soak up her smell and warmth. She hid her face so as not to show that she was sad. I held her close and whispered to her that she meant a lot. She lifted her head and stared at me with her wet, azure eyes. I nodded and she smiled at me.

In the following weeks I made painting stops in the most beautiful cities of the world. I returned home every evening. I regretted that I was alone in the secret and could not discuss it. I would not be believed as I had no physical evidence. I had tried to film or take pictures, but the result was disappointing. Only the wall was visible!

The director of the art gallery was to come the next

day to look at my work, and I couldn't wait. My night was tormented: I got up several times to study my paintings or to arrange my workshop. I was nervous that he would find my work insignificant or totally out of step with the expectations of his chic clientele.

I had told Megan about this crucial visit and she had encouraged me. She thought I was talented and precursor.

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I was roused from my dreams by an impetuous ringing of the doorbell and jumped out of bed in a rush. The alarm on my mobile phone was not to blame, I had turned it off and gone back to sleep. What a jerk! *I used to get up at the crack of dawn every day and I missed the boat on a very important professional meeting.* I put on a pair of trousers and a clean shirt (so much for the shower), washed my face in an instant and ran my fingers through my short hair before going to open up.

The man could not suppress a smile when he saw my crumpled face. He introduced himself as Roger Paludier and gave me a firm handshake. He was in his

fifties, with curious eyes and an olive complexion. I offered him a cup of coffee and we went into the workshop. The gallery owner stopped in front of each painting; he scrutinised the details, the colours... He came closer, stepped back, brushed his beard dotted salt and pepper threads, but said nothing. His closed expression did not allow me to grasp his thoughts. Stress had overtaken me and I pretended to arrange my brushes and tubes of gouache to calm my anxiety.

Roger Paludier approached me, looking worried. I understood that my paintings had not been as successful as I had hoped. I was about to tell him that I was a beginner artist when he asked me:

— When will you be ready?

I was speechless. What was he talking about? Was he asking me when I was ready to paint seriously? Like a real painter?

The man, amused by my disturbed silence, spoke again:

— Romain, I am overwhelmed by your talent. For years, I have been looking for an artist who is capable of depicting on his canvases such intense scenes of life

in colour and emotion. Your paintings are authentic, warm, explosive and give off a little something that I like. I am ready to exhibit as soon as you decide. Your friend Karim was enthusiastic about your work, and I mistakenly thought that he was just getting excited for nothing. I agree with him completely. Your impressively realistic brushstrokes have captured the soul of each landscape immortalised on your canvases. If you exhibit with us, expect a tsunami in sales. I have rarely seen such innovative painting!

I stammered a few words of thanks as the gallery owner slipped his card into my hand and asked me to call him on his mobile at any time.

After he left, I sat on the couch, staring at the luxurious card that said "Galeries du futur", in the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris. Happy, I dialled Karim's number and thanked him.

Megan was coming home that evening, and I couldn't wait to tell her the news in person. I planned to invite her to dinner in Paris and ask her to be my girlfriend. Our separation had confirmed what I already knew: I could not live without her. She was