

## One

## A Light Between the Trees

Somewhere in the middle of summer in Maine, the sun has just appeared behind the trees, and the rain of the previous night still lingers in the air. It is a perfect morning to wake up and feel rejuvenated, to stretch and do some exercise. Jogging could also be a tempting option, but then the moment would disappear too quickly in the concentration of the pace to follow. So take time to look at the light, you know that in a few minutes, everything will be different. Jogging will come later, when everybody has started to wake up and make noise. Just for another few instants, everything is silent. One can even hear the sound of the dew. Or imagine it. Night birds are gone; day birds pause after their raucous welcome of the dawn. It could be that you are alone in the world, yet there is no sadness in this thought. It only means you know everything is possible, everything can be new, and everything can begin again. You are alone in the sense that all options seem open, nobody can tell you what to do. It is as if suddenly you had realized the light was shining, and today is the day, your mistakes are forgotten. You are allowed to start anew with all that you have learned. Is it not wonderful? And there is more, you do not even have to wait for a nice summer morning to do it, any morning will do for that matter. Simply decide it has to be a new beginning instead of more of the same. It is as easy as switching your perspective on the world. Sometimes, a light between the trees is all you need to get started. If you feel like it, of course, for if you are already happy with the way things are, why would you want to change? Just enjoy this morning and rejoice. Whatever your decision, it is a very good way to start the day.



**Après la pluie**

**Near Boothbay Harbor, Maine, USA**

Sometimes, the unexpected is just above your head; look up and you will see it. But at the same time, do not forget to stop walking, it will be safer. Also, choose a day when it is not raining or snowing, the results would be interesting, yet different. Your head turned toward the sky, you start to realize that you often limit your sight to what comes in front of you, when in fact there are worlds of discoveries above and beyond. The lines are different, the perspective changes. What was useful, common, bland, suddenly becomes strange, unexpected, beautiful. If you are a good gymnast, you can even try to stand on your hands and look upside down, but it soon becomes tiring so you will only have a quick glance of this new world before falling down. In any case, the goal is to change your field of vision in order to change your take on things. As soon as you do it, your thoughts go in a new direction; you forget what you were thinking in the usual position, you find new ideas, you come to understand how objects or people appear. Everything turns into a work of art, granted that art is the revelation of the unusual within the mundane. The best of it is that the exercise costs nothing and is easy to achieve: no plane to take, no travel to organize, no arrangements to make. The worst you can expect is the suspicious glances you will get from people around you, but you will not even notice them since you will be looking somewhere else. In fact, you are utterly free to admire the architecture of suspended bridges, the falling of leaves, the stars in the sky, the flight of birds, the nature of clouds. To go even further, do it in the middle of a crowd when there is absolutely nothing to see. One by one your neighbors will look up and try to figure out what you have seen. Verbal exchanges will most likely take place, then after a while, some will shrug and realize you tricked them. Do not worry, they will not be angry at you if you look like a dreamer. And who knows, it could be that some will see something that you had not seen, and turn the joke on you. Would that not be ironic?



**Bunker Hill Bridge 2**

**Boston, Massachusetts, USA**

## Twenty-One

## Is Curiosity Just a Sin?

It must be Maine. Where else would you see red buoys and weather worn plank walls? Still, it looks like a perfect setting for a postcard, so how can you decide? You have been fooled before into thinking you were somewhere else, in theme parks for example, or even casinos for that matter. You could in fact be in Florida or Nevada, visiting a bogus Maine village. However, there has to be an actual place somewhere to be copied, and you must have an idea of what it looks like for the illusion to function. But let us say that you are really in Maine: is it possible that the owner of this barn put the buoys precisely in front of the window to create a photogenic setting? Had he seen it before in a fake reconstitution, with such a beautiful atmosphere that it gave him ideas for decorating the barn? Well, again, you cannot decide. Images and reality are so interrelated that it is difficult to know which one influences the other. If you came from Mongolia and had never seen such a scene before, would it work for you? You might not be able to put a name on it, nor find its location on a map, but you would see that it is man made for a purpose, even if its exact purpose escapes you. You could imagine human beings using these red things for something. Would you then try to figure it out? Wherever you are, you look at your surroundings to find clues. That seems to be the right thing to do. Human artifacts do not leave you indifferent, you have to understand what they are for. You feel there is something to be gained by knowing who made them, what for, when, where? Most of the time, once your curiosity is satisfied, you forget about the whole thing because you have no use for it. And yet, this will not deter you from inquiring the next time you come across a feat of your fellows' inventions you are not familiar with. Is this the reason why you travel, either to fictitious or real places?



**Bouées**

**New Harbor, Maine, USA**

## Thirty-One

## A Troubling Treasure

Imagine what a sight and what a relief it would have been to find an oasis when you were a settler coming from the East through the desert. Water, shade, company, it was always the promise of survival. Fortunately, palm trees loom high in the sky so it was easy to spot them, but nevertheless, when you were seeing them from a distance, you were never sure at first that they were real. You knew they were supposed to be there, someone had told you so and vaguely indicated where you would find them, but the desert is so vast and so overwhelming that you were starting to doubt that your informant was right. Or you had perhaps taken a wrong path along the way and gotten lost. So your worries could disappear only when you were sure that they were not a mirage, and that there would possibly be other pilgrims like you with whom you would be able to exchange news, and get valuable information about the trail ahead. If you needed to repair your wagon, someone would hopefully have better tools than you, or could give you a hand. And as it was one of the last oasis before the green pastures of the coast, also one of the most difficult ones to reach, situated as it was after nearly two hundreds miles of desert, you also knew that you were on the right track, and that the worst was behind you. Even if, after all, the trail had been well marked, it is only when you could see that it effectively led you where you intended to go that you could be sure of it. Then you would stop by the side of the trees and be able to hear the unforgettable sound that the wind makes when it goes through dry leaves, a kind of crunch, crunch that echoes the songs of the little birds flying around the trunk, and nearly silences the buzz-buzz of all the bees and flies basking in the heat and the tranquility of the place. And you could at last afford a smile on your wrinkled face. As a matter of fact, an oasis is still a magnet for voyagers nowadays. It still speaks to the inner self, even if you may be disappointed once you are near the water and do not know what to do next. The treasure you were expecting is right in front of you, yet you do not recognize it as such, you do not need it anymore. Be that as it may, would you go back to the Wild West era to feel its value?



**Oasis**

**Joshua Tree National Park, California, USA**

A trail in the countryside is like an invitation to travel. You know you will not go really far as you are on foot today, yet it is still worth following it. You can, after all, find adventures anywhere if you are ready for them. You have never walked on this trail, it could be disappointing, but from where you are now, it looks inviting. In your stomach you already feel the expectations of all there is to come. You see a grove not far away, and you wonder what will lay there: a pleasant place to read a book hidden in wild grasses, a tree with fruit nobody will claim except you, or a hare that will jump in front of you and make your day? Most likely, the trail will just go further without anything special to remember, but at that point, it will be too late to turn back. Your legs will have warmed up and told you they are ready to go further and further until you know that you have had a really good walk. Even if you saw nothing in particular, you will realize that you just enjoyed being outside. You enjoyed feeling the alternatives of sun and shade on your skin as the clouds passed quietly in the sky. You enjoyed feeling your body relax and your mind forget what was bothering it. It is quite possible that there was a nice place to lie down and read a good book, yet you did not see it. You even forgot to look for it after a while. It was enough to walk and daydream. The quest was just an excuse to get you started. If you want to read, there are plenty of places where you already know you can go. The problem is, you do not have that much time to do it anyway, and when you are outside, you prefer walking and seeing what there is to see. The hare, oh yes, you saw one which was fun, you also soon forgot about it. There were no fruit trees, but you do not eat that much fruit to begin with, so it does not matter after all. In fact the reasons you may have to do something will not always be the reasons that will make you finish it. There is a magic at play in daily endeavors that will sometimes transform the way they are perceived. It is surely why life is good, and full of uncertainties waiting to be discovered.



**Le chemin**

**Near Charmes, Vosges, FRANCE**

Alpiste, you liked the name but you had no idea what it stood for. You also liked the presentation, the colors of the surrounding grains, the shapes of the buckets, the mix of different spices and herbs, the directness of the transaction. It spoke of another time and another world, it made you crave for it actually. Alpiste was obviously a kind of cereal, but what could it be used for: pancakes, purée, unknown tortillas? Was it used by humans, animals, others –but who? As you did not speak the language, you had no way to ask, and in any case, it is not sure you would have asked. You stayed there a good part of the morning going from stand to stand and inhaling the odors, the sounds, the atmosphere. Later, you looked in a dictionary and found that alpiste stands for millet. It did not help you much as you do not know what millet is good for: birds, perhaps, although you doubt these grains were on sale for birds; not in this place, not in this country. You tried to look on your box of cereal to see if there were some in it, but it did not seem to be so. That is when you realized how far you were from the source of your meals, how ignorant you could be about what nourishes you day after day. It surely explains why you liked this market place in Mexico, you sensed that producers and customers were in direct relation, could talk together, discuss the value of what was on hand. As you go shopping in a supermarket, the fresh produce section looks inviting and tantalizing, yet it is artificial. There are also many grains in plastic bins that you can buy like if you were in an open-air market, yet it has nothing to do with the feel of an open-air market. It is convenient, for sure, and it allows you to find strawberries in winter, but something is missing. Here, in this humble place, you find only what is produced locally and in season. What it lacks in variety, it compensates for in authenticity. Of course, between alpiste and strawberries, you would rather have strawberries, yet you can dream that you could live differently, even for a few days, and experience something else. In the end, you did not buy anything, thus missing entirely the purpose of the market, yet you had a great time. Is there something wrong here?



Alpiste

Mérida, Yucatan, MEXICO