

L'ARCHANGE OPER'INSTALLATION

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+ THE JUDGE

On this [28th] day of the month [of April], in the year of grace and terror [2005], I declare the court session open.

I, qualified and sworn judge, under my own authority, in my own name and in the name of humanity, a mass of more or less hairy, more or less intelligent bipeds, have summoned before my court the defendant answering to the name of: *Archangel of Evil*.

In his absence, despite my numerous notices of convocation, I shall maintain the penal procedure and judge him in contumacy. The charges are the following: headache, toothache, backache, plague, cancer and cholera, hurricane, cyclone and tsunami, starvation, slavery and deportation, homicide, parricide and genocide as well as all other catastrophes, cataclysms and calamities endured by humanity over the course of its existence.

I call the first prosecution witness to the stand.

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+ FIRST TESTIMONY

In the cellar, there was a very old couch. Red. No wait: plaid, red and black. With wings on the side. All beat up and torn everywhere. The stuffing came out in places. In the cellar, there was the workbench, with his tools. Screwdrivers, pliers, hammers. And Jaws. A big black vice. Jaws. That's what he would call it. To scare me.

It was Granny's couch. She would sit in it for hours, watching movies on television. She would give me candy. She smelled like cologne. She had white hair, it was so soft.

On the workbench, there were lots of little boxes with nails in them. All different sizes. Small ones, big ones, and really tiny ones. And bolts, and screws. You weren't supposed to touch the boxes or move them. He didn't like it.

Granny's name was Amelie. She was old, so old. I didn't know that a person could be so old. Sometimes she cried. Just like that, for no reason. And sometimes she laughed too. Also for no reason.

You couldn't see very well in the cellar. There was only a lightbulb hanging from a string. When he turned off the light, you couldn't see anything. Sometimes he lit a cigarette in the dark. Granny only got up from her couch to eat. And to go to bed in the evening. She went to bed early, right after supper. As if she didn't like to stay up with us.

When everything was dark, I could hear him breathe. That's all I would hear. He breathed very loudly. He made little sounds, as if he was hurting.

She sang songs to me. She had a very small voice, like a little girl. But she sang well. I didn't understand the words, but it didn't matter. It was nice. Wait, I remember a song.

He made me go down to the cellar with him. He said it was important. But I couldn't tell anybody. It had to stay between the two of us because I was the one he loved the most, in the entire family. I was his little sweetheart.

One afternoon, it was cold, it must have been in January or February, I was only a little girl, I came home from school, Granny wasn't in her couch anymore. She got taken to the hospital, they told me. Because she was sick. She would be coming back soon. It stank in the cellar. It smelled rotten. The ground was all soft, like soil. The smell was very strong. The ground was soft but it hurt when I got down on my knees.

I waited, I waited. Granny, she never came back. They told me she was in Heaven, in the sky up there, and that she was looking at us and that I always had to be a good girl because she was watching me. That she would be mad if I wasn't a nice little girl.

No one wanted to sit in the couch anymore. So one day, they brought it down to the cellar. It took up too much space upstairs, and it was ugly. I didn't want them to take it down, but they didn't listen to me. He made me go downstairs, he turned off the light and he sat down in Granny's couch.

It isn't true that Granny could see everything. I waited. But it's not true that she could see everything. I took the hammer on the workbench, the biggest one. I knew where it was, even in the dark. He didn't breathe anymore. He didn't make anymore little sounds. I stayed in the dark and went back upstairs. I'm cold here. I'm always cold. Like in the cellar. It's smaller than the cellar, but it's still cold. Nobody comes to see me. I think about Granny. They moved. I wonder what they did with the couch. The guard, she's nice. She has white hair. I would like to touch it, to see if it's soft.

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+ THE JUDGE

Thank you for your deposition. Order in the court. Since the *Archangel* is not here, he cannot defend himself. Yes, he has a right to. Justice must be served according to the rules. Evil does not acknowledge rules, but I do. Justice does. Rules would instruct to proceed with a cross-examination. There is no one here to conduct it. However, the *Archangel*, even absent, has the right to a lawyer. But who would be willing to take his defence? How does one defend evil? To defend it is to understand it, and to understand it is to accept it. The *Archangel* has one ally, only one, and I cannot take it away from him: the Artist. Painters, musicians and poets, the *Archangel* has inspired them. They created from evil; from evil, they created beauty. We cannot ignore it. Is there an artist in the room? No one. Of course, artists are like cops: whenever you need them ... incorrigibly selfish individuals.

I came prepared, though. I did my research. There is no lack of trials against artists. I would even venture that it starts with the likes of Socrates and Jesus.

As I was saying: here we are, writers, painters, Marot, Voltaire, Goya, Hugo, Manet, Joyce, Mandelstam, Picasso ... ah, this one will prove useful. I add a first precedent to this case.

In January 1857, Flaubert, Gustave, writer, is found guilty of "offending public morals and religion" for publishing the novel *Madame Bovary*. The hearing took place on January 29th. The public prosecution against Gustave Flaubert. An issue of mores. As with our first witness tonight. In his address, the government's lawyer, Mr. Ernest Pinard, said the following:

"The incrimination is based on two offences: insult to public morals, insult to religious morals. [...] Art without rules is not art; it is like a woman who would shed all of her clothing. To impose the sole rule of public decency on art is not enslaving it, it is honouring it. It is only with a rule that one can grow." Wham! But here is how the defence attorney, M. Sénard, responded in his closing address:

"One must not condemn [...] painters or sculptors who are not satisfied with only expressing all the beauty of the body, but who also convey all of its ardours, all of its passions. [...] In every line of his book (M. Flaubert) expresses disillusion, and instead of ending it with something graceful, he is intent on showing us this woman, who after experiencing contempt, abandonment and ruin of her house, faces the most horrible death."

Good speech, he won. Flaubert was acquitted. But not vice, on the contrary, since the book condemns it. It is therefore possible to create good works from evil. Is the argument valid for his defence? Is the *Archangel* cleared of his faults in any way? I am asking you, people in the room.

I now call the second prosecution witness to the stand.

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+ SECOND TESTIMONY

It is not true that truth is true. If truth were true, telling "the truth" would be enough. Saying "I am hurting" would be enough to be understood. But people don't understand. They never understand. Even "My teeth hurt," "I'm nauseous," they don't understand. "Demons are weaving my flesh with cold from the tomb and human feces," they don't understand either.

They understand stories, though. Stories are truer than the truth. They make the person who tells them feel good; they make him believe that he is in the right.

Greek books, Jewish books, are filled with stories to tell. To invent. Being unable to say "I'm hurting" hurts. What's more, evil prevents one from saying "I'm hurting." Evil's truth is to be untrue, to force individuals to tell lies, to tell stories. So many stories to tell, to invent, in order to eliminate the fear of being frozen, seized by the evil that immobilizes you, a shell of ice, an armour of cold.

Evil does not burn. It is ice cold. It imprisons the soul and the body in its vice of ice.

And then, the demon settles in and slowly begins devouring. Flesh, tendons, guts, the skeleton, teeth, vertebrae. Evil does not own you, you own it within you, it is yours. Evil is a possession. Jewish books, Greek books are filled with beautiful stories, *Lazarus, Electra, Cain, Medea*. Evil's most beautiful face is that of a woman because it cannot be a mask. Evil does not wear masks. It does not need them. Some baroque chapels are entirely covered with bones: skulls, jaws, femurs, tibias. This is not evil's scenery. Evil is stronger than death. Ask Emily, ask Virginia, ask Sylvia. Evil's scenery is frozen; it is white, immaculate, sterile. Hospital bedroom, cot. Voice cannot touch it, it is dissolved in silence.

The silence of Chirico's paintings: empty places, deserted avenues under an implacable sky.

A statue immobilized in the promise that will never be kept. Evil never keeps its promises. It promises to destroy, but it doesn't destroy because it is permanently destroying. It endures, it causes harm time and time again. The memory of evil is, in itself, evil.

The silence of voices that are frozen, paralyzed in a vice of ice. The demon devours dreams, silently, with meticulous care. Forces of evil do not exist. Evil is singular. Like cancer or insanity. So many ways to do good. Only one way for evil to be.

It claims that it doesn't exist. You forget the vampire because it is sucking your blood. Evil tattoos a bird on your right arm, a long bird with a pointed beak, and with gold and crimson wings. One day I will tell you the story of the bird with the golden wings. At night, it flies from one grave to another, searching for the fallen Eve, the only one who knows how to speak the truth.

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+ THE JUDGE

Books, books. I have plenty here, trials of writers. As a matter of fact, my second precedent will have to do with another writer, a poet, Baudelaire, Charles. The same year, 1857, as the trial of Flaubert, Gustave, with the same prosecutor, Ernest Pinard (it is obviously his specialty), in Paris once again, but in August, at the 6th Correctional Chamber. Incidentally, he had a tendency to repeat himself:

"Gentlemen, react, with a judgment, to these growing, yet certain trends, to this unhealthy fever that drives artists to paint anything, describe anything, say anything, as if the crime of insulting public morals were abrogated, and as if these morals did not exist."

And then, Baudelaire's counsel, M. Gustave Chaix D'Est-Ange — a predestined name if there ever was one! —, flings him back a quote from Balzac, Honoré de:

"Great works endure thanks to the passion that lies within them. That said, passion is excess, it is evil. The writer fulfilled his task nobly, when he took this essential element of all literary works and added a great lesson to it."

OK. Why did he have to throw a third writer in my face, this lawyer? I did not ask him for anything. And he confuses me, this Balzac: "Great works are excess, they are evil!" So now evil is justified! Note how the judge was not convinced: six of Baudelaire's poems were suppressed from *Les fleurs du mal*, and on top of that, he had to pay a fine of 300 francs; at the time, 300 francs was a lot for a penniless poet. There is no questioning it: it was a conviction and Balzac can go back where he came from.

I now call the third and last prosecution witness to the stand for today.

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+ THIRD TESTIMONY

My *timoun*, my little sweetie, my little cayman,

I know you don't like it when I call you by those names, but forgive me today. Happy birthday, my little cayman.

May your years be as numerous as the seeds of the pomegranate, as sweet as the flesh of the mango. Your twenty years have been twenty years of happiness for me. I am so proud of you, you are strong and straight like a *mapou*. But you are far away and I miss you. Paris is so far from New York.

When your father died, you are the one who consoled me. When I cried too much, you took me in your little arms and kissed me. You told me: "we'll make it mommy."

And we did.

It wasn't easy. *Dye mon, gen mon*, behind the mountain is another mountain. We were never lucky in Haiti. Two centuries of violence and struggling, sticks, machetes, guns. Corpses in the streets, shredded by

dogs, I have seen so many. Devils are not only white. There were the Tonton Macoutes, now the militia. Killing, killing, killing for power. Killing the children, the elderly. They killed your father, why? *Manti* rules the world.

It wasn't easy. When our poor house was destroyed by the cyclone, that's when I decided we had to leave our cursed island. You agreed.

Everything eventually worked out. We were able to leave together. We are safe now.

Bondye bon, as we say in our island.

I have to stop writing now because I must go to work. I am happy with this new job. Working in the cafeteria is hard, but the customers are nice and leave big tips. At the World Trade Center, it's as if there were only rich people in offices. I will mail you this letter when I get there. There's a mailbox just under the West Tower. It's nice out today, a nice day for your birthday.

Your mommy who will always love you.

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+ THE JUDGE

That's enough. I do not want to hear anymore. Get the witnesses out of here. Get the public out of here. I do not want to hear anymore stories. Excess is evil. Evil is excess. Morals, morals. The horror of virtue. The virtue of vice. What am I saying? What did the lawyers say? Evil, vice, excess. Evil, vice, excess...

Meg milione ou guess, Shalosh milionim, Zeks milionen, Three thousand and twenty four, Treinta mil, Tres mil, Hatshi man, Juroomi milyo, Dvadtsiat piat tisiatch, Pi li(e)n, Un million.

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