

RISING STARS 2019

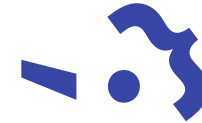
12 bright new
children's authors

Translated from the French by Vineet Lal



CONTENTS

<i>The Little Ghost Who Loved Gardening</i> by Géraldine Bobinet	6
<i>Going Grey</i> by Floriane Derain	12
<i>What Happened Next</i> by Faustina Fiore	18
<i>Granny Fatou, the Woman Wrestler of Kinshasa</i> by Sébastien Gayet ..	24
<i>Feathers</i> by Perrine Lachenal	30
<i>The Cat's Got Her Tongue</i> by Lalou	36
<i>The Voice of the Djembe</i> by Anaïs La porte	42
<i>Before the Darkness</i> by Annaïg Le Quellec	48
<i>Destination Blood</i> by Manech	54
<i>Whispers</i> by Olivier Roux	60
<i>Standard</i> by Julia Thévenot	66
<i>Fatous of the World</i> by Angélique Thyssen	72



The *Charte des auteurs et illustrateurs jeunesse* gathers more than 1400 authors, illustrators and translators for children's books, from France and several French-speaking countries. The idea of this collective came from a few authors who had decided to unite and make their voices heard by publishers and literary events' organizers, in 1975.

The main role of the organization is to defend authors' rights and status. Another purpose is to assist structures that wish to invite authors for literary events, setting up for instance remuneration rates for public readings, workshops and meetings, or book signings. The Charte also aims at promoting a quality contemporary youth literature. It organizes as well cultural activities encouraging the professionalization of illustrators through «*Le Voyage professionnel à la foire de Bologne*» (since 2012), and of authors, through «*Emergences*», ("Risings stars !"), since 2018.

THE LITTLE GHOST WHO LOVED GARDENING

Géraldine Bobinet



For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early...

Even though she was a little ghost. Every night, instead of haunting the empty corridors in her manor house, she could be found snoring in her bed. She was exhausted, as she'd spent the whole day making her kitchen garden look pretty!

Fatou loved to make the most of the sun, planting pumpkins and enjoying the scent of her tomatoes. She loved gardening so much that even the sheet she wore was patterned with watering cans. And everything was perfectly fine... until the day a couple came to live in her home.

The baron and baroness moved in one stormy day. The rain gurgled furiously through the gutters, and the wind rattled the pipes with rage. But the loudest noises of all came from the baron. Bulging out of his frock coat, he yelled at the removal men:

"Put some welly in, lads! What on earth are you doing? Those stuffed boar heads go above the fireplace, not in the bin!"

Hidden under the stairs, Fatou observed the commotion and felt a twinge of anxiety. Although she'd been there for many hundreds of years (but was still only eleven years old) this was the first time people had ever moved in. She thought the stuffed boar heads were frankly hideous.

The removal men carried in some even uglier things and then left with a measly tip.

After closing the door behind them, the baroness fanned herself with long fingers dripping with shiny rings:

“Alone at last, my barony-boo-boo!”

The baron nodded:

“We’re going to be very happy here, my cutie-wutie pie!”

And Fatou took the opportunity to introduce herself:

“I’m Fatou, your ghost. You’ve bought my manor, you know, but you’re welcome to stay.”

At the sight of the apparition, the baron and baroness screamed at the top of their lungs, and fled to their bedroom where they double-locked the door.

The following day, after plotting and scheming all night, the baron and baroness had perked up again. They managed to find Fatou’s room, and woke her up with their raging tempers and booming voices:

“We’ll have you know we’re here for good – and what’s more, you’re the one who’s leaving!”

The baron and baroness towered over Fatou, using their height to full effect, looking both impressive and severe. But Fatou – who was only a little ghost after all – protested: “I can’t. I’ve got my kitchen garden.”

A few days later, while Fatou was doing some gardening, the baron and the baroness re-entered the fray. Forcing a smile, the baron said:

“Seeing as you want to stay, we’re going to share the manor. It’ll be ours by day, and yours during the night.”

The baroness added:

“It’s terribly unsettling, you know, seeing you in your garden all day long. Would you be so kind as to do your stuff

by night, like a normal ghost?”

On hearing the word “normal”, Fatou looked down sadly. She knew her freedom ended when other people’s began. Perhaps she didn’t have the right to be up and about by day, much as she wanted to? Her head was throbbing with doubt, and she finally let out a sigh:

“Very well.”

A week passed by. Fatou would garden by night and sleep by day. But she was so sad that she couldn’t see her vegetables glistening in the sun that she hardly slept a wink.

Her sleeplessness grew worse when the baron converted her bedroom into a library.

“I do hope you won’t mind,” he said, “but this room is so nice and quiet. It’s perfect for reading!”

The baron’s eyes shone with an evil glint – so evil that Fatou said nothing and moved her bed up to the attic.

A week later, the baroness decided to have an organ fitted in the attic.

“I do hope you won’t mind,” she cooed softly, “but this spot is so nice and secluded. It’s perfect for playing music!”

The baroness wore such a cruel smile that Fatou, without a word, moved her bed into a cupboard.

One day, at lunchtime, Fatou’s fragile sleep was disturbed by the sound of laughter. Fatou got up secretly and peeked into the living room, where the baron and baroness were smoking cigars.

The baron chuckled:

“I’ll turn her garden into a golf course!”

And the baroness sniggered:

“We’ll get that silly fool to leave after all!”

Fatou quivered with rage. Picking on her precious garden, were they? The longer she stared at the baron and the baroness, with their fat cigars and little smiles, the more her anger welled up inside...

Suddenly, like a dam bursting, Fatou exploded:
"GET OUT OF MY MANOR!"

Her fury made the walls shake, the beams creak and the doors slam shut. In the middle of this dreadful racket, Fatou suddenly had an idea: what about calling on the spirits of the stuffed boars? But not for real, of course. Fatou had no wish to see her garden flattened by the ghosts of those vile creatures!

Raising her arms to the sky, Fatou howled a fake invocation:

"O COME ALL YE BOAR-SPIRITS, AND HUNT DOWN THESE WICKED INTRUDERS!"

Terrified, the baron and the baroness ran for their lives...
And Fatou burst out laughing.

Ever since that day, Fatou's been going to bed early once more. And if you ever feel the urge to meet her, just remember that she prefers broad daylight, and that she's certain to be in her kitchen garden.



Géraldine Bobinet

Géraldine Bobinet was born in 1989. As a child, she thrilled to the magic of *Princess Mononoke*, *Jumanji* and *The Mask*, and devoured the novels of Marie-Aude Murail and Roald Dahl. She currently divides her time between Spain, where she does her writing, and Paris, where she edits television programmes. Her tale *La course folle folle folle* was published in the magazine *J'aime Lire* in 2016 and republished as a novel by Bayard Jeunesse in 2019.

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GOING GREY

Floriane Derain



For a long time, Fatou's been going to bed early, even though in space it's hard to tell between day and night.

Fatou has never known what Earth was like, but her parents talk about it often. They tell her about how it was destroyed before she was born, and how the survivors fled on board spaceships like the one they're living on now.

Papa says they're searching for a new planet to make their home. Maman hopes they won't repeat the errors of the past.

A few days ago, they suggested going on a trip for the very first time. To begin with, Fatou had been a little sad to say goodbye to her friends. She'd never been away from them for so long before. So, to help her get over missing them, and to keep her company, they gave her a present: a little mouse. Fatou was delighted, and decided to call her new protégé Surimi.

When their apartment-capsule decoupled from the mother ship, Fatou knew they really were setting off on a proper adventure. As her mother's an engineer, she makes lots of complicated calculations to propel them through the galaxies. Papa says it's a long way to their destination. In the meantime they need to keep themselves busy, or take lots of rest.

Even on holiday, Papa makes sure Fatou sticks to her normal bedtime so as to "keep to the same routine", as he puts

it. So she doesn't need to be asked twice to go to bed. Or rather to enter her chamber. It looks like a huge transparent egg and it's extremely cold inside.

Papa and Maman had it installed in her bedroom before they left. When Fatou climbs inside and it tips backwards, it gives her a ticklish feeling in the pit of her stomach. Then everything happens very fast. A jet of cold air rushes through her nostrils and she's overcome by drowsiness. She doesn't even need to wait for her eyelids to droop in order to fall asleep.

Bizarrely, ever since she's been sleeping in the chamber, she hasn't had any dreams. Moreover, every time she wakes up she discovers something or other that's a bit odd. On the first morning, her digital calendar was showing the wrong date. Papa helped her re-programme the device, but the following day the battery stopped working. Maman said it was because of variations in the magnetic fields in space. Fatou couldn't really understand her explanation – just the fact she had nothing to worry about.

However, she's also noticed something unusual on Maman's head: her first grey hairs!

Of course, Fatou's seen them before – Papa's head is covered with them. But the problem with Maman's grey hairs is that they've appeared at breakneck speed – even faster than Martian invaders! Yesterday, she only had a few, and today a whole colony's taken up residence. There aren't many mirrors in the apartment. Perhaps Maman hasn't noticed anything?

What concerns Fatou most in all this is that even Surimi's brown fur is now flecked with grey. Fatou hasn't said anything to her parents, so as not to bother them with questions that have no answer. But since it's worrying her, it's time to solve the mystery!

In the evening, Papa and Maman come to tuck Fatou into her chamber.

"Good night," they say, kissing her forehead in turn.

When the lid closes over her, Fatou holds her breath. She mustn't inhale the oxygen that normally makes her fall asleep. The moment her parents have left the room, she presses the "EMERGENCY STOP" button. Then she steps out of the chamber to escape the cold. Her heart's pounding furiously and her teeth are chattering. She wraps up warm in a dressing gown and quietly slips into the corridor. She tiptoes up to the living room.

Papa and Maman are sitting on the sofa. They're deep in conversation.

"Do you still think we were right to leave?" asks Papa.

"We couldn't risk catching the virus," replies Maman firmly.

"People were going mad, couldn't you see?"

Papa sighs.

"We've already been drifting through space for three years..."

Maman cuts him short.

"As long as we still have supplies, we need to keep our hopes up! Fatou doesn't suspect a thing, so we have to carry on pretending."

"We're getting older," Papa points out to her.

"That's true... perhaps I ought to cover my head," says Maman, idly twisting a strand of grey hair around her fingers.

"And our wrinkles, what'll we do about them?" asks Papa.

"When a single night passes for Fatou, a whole six months fly by for us. Time's not working in our favour."

"I'd rather she slept," says Maman. "It's less nerve-wracking. And besides, we don't have the right to rob her of her childhood."

“The hypersleep chamber might save her from getting old,” admits Papa, “but not from reality. What if we’re not there when she wakes up one day?”

All of a sudden, Fatou feels tears rolling down her cheeks. She rushes out of her hiding place and into Maman’s arms. “No, you can’t!” she wails. “You’re not allowed to die! You’re not allowed! I never wanna sleep ever again!”

While Fatou sobs, Papa whispers softly in her ear and runs his fingers through her hair.

“Hush, my darling. Everything will be fine. We’re here with you.”

Above their heads, the voice of the onboard computer suddenly makes them jump.

“ATTENTION. RED ALERT. Habitable planet detected... ATTENTION. RED ALERT. Habitable planet detected...” The message keeps on repeating. Papa and Maman are stunned. They stare at each other in silence. Finally huge smiles light up their faces, and they erupt with joy as they hug Fatou even tighter in their arms.

Tonight, for sure, she’s not going to bed early.



Floriane Derain

Floriane Derain was born in 1987 and has been writing poems since she was eleven. It wasn’t long before poetry notebooks weren’t enough to fire her imagination, and she progressed to more complex writing. From soft science fiction to steampunk, via dystopian narratives, her short stories explore a host of different worlds where the complexity of human relationships can be placed centre stage. She is currently working on a Young Adult novel, and her next publication, entitled *La vie du bon côté*, will be included in an anthology to be published by Éditions Kelach.

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WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Faustina Fiore



*For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early...
Imagine what happened next.*

You're kidding? Was that the best he could come up with, for our essay topic? Does our teacher think we're still in Primary 4 or something? Well, 'cos he said we could leave soon as we'd finished, I'm gonna bang out a couple of sentences and then I'm doing a runner. At 4.10 I'm outta here!
For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early, and then one day she got into the habit of going to bed late.

Hmm. But a bit short, all the same. That's a dead cert to get me a big fat zero. Should maybe at least explain why she went to bed early, instead of playing with her Nintendo for hours and hours. I can only think of one possible explanation...

For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early because she was absolutely shattered every night after dinner. And then one day she discovered her father had been slipping a sleeping pill into her glass of water so he could have a quiet evening to himself, so she stopped drinking anything at dinner.

Now that I think about it, our teacher told us not to forget adding a few details, 'cos that's the "meat and bones" of the story. What rubbish. Still, if that's what floats his boat...

For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early, between 8.20 and 8.55pm. And then at eleven years and three months, she discovered her father had been slipping a FortyWinks sleeping pill into her glass of water so he could have a quiet evening to himself watching football. So she stopped drinking anything at dinner, even when they were having salt cod stew and she was dying of thirst. And she got into the habit of playing with her Nintendo under her duvet until one in the morning. By the way, her duvet was orange and her Nintendo was white.

Jeez, that's as dull as double maths, ain't it? Absolutely nothing happens in this story. Anyhow, it's not even a story! We need some action. Oh well, guess I could stay till 4.25.

For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early, and then one day she discovered her father had been slipping a sleeping pill into her glass of water so he could have a quiet evening to himself, so she threw him a mawashigerry and he responded with an ipponseohnagay, and she tried to knock him out with the pasta pan, and he defended himself with the cane tablemat Granny had given as a present, but it was the pasta pan that won. Then Fatou pulled out the computer cables to tie up her father and threatened to throw him out of their fourth-floor window, so he swore never to put sleeping pills in her water again. But at that very moment three robbers turned up and threatened them with water pistols filled with lemon juice (that stings like mad, getting lemon juice in your eyes). The first one ran off with the cane tablemat, the second ate all the pasta (filthy swine!) and the third drank a large glass of water and fell asleep on the spot, so Fatou and her father chucked him out of the window.

Good – well, at least we've got some action going on there. But something tells me our teacher's gonna come

out with "it's not believable" and "the style leaves much to be desired". Let's try making it a bit classier. Got it!

*Early to bed, 'twas Fatou's motto for years
Till one day her father admitted in tears*

*That he'd taken a fancy to drugging her drink
With pills that would make her too drowsy to think.*

*"O horror of horrors! You're so evil and cold
And I who thought you had a heart made of gold!
Alas, I no longer wish you in my sight.*

I shall live on the streets, O miserable plight!"

Choking his sobs, her father caved in

And begged her to pardon his terrible sin.

*He swore on her honour, and each hair on her head,
Never to send her early to bed.*

Sweetie darling, that's as beautiful as good ol' Shakespeare. I know 'cos for five minutes I've been yawning as much as when Mum took me to the Globe Theatre last Saturday. In fact, I think I'm the one who's going to bed early tonight. Righto, gonna try some dialogue instead, that'll keep me awake.

"Fatou, go to bed!"

"Go to hell!"

"Sorry? Cheeky bugger!"

"I know what you're up to, Dad! I saw you!"

"No idea what you're on about."

"Yeah, right! So what's that then?"

"Erm, some sleeping pills... for when I can't get to sleep..."

"It's against the law to drug kids! I'm gonna report you to the police!"

"Listen, I'll let you watch the footie with me tonight, and we won't talk about it any more, OK?"

"Any ice cream left?"

"Yep."

"Cool, it's a deal."

Or what about a letter?

Dear Granny,

Today I found out Dad's been putting sleeping pills in my water every evening to make me go to bed early. When I caught him red-handed, his defence was that you were the one who'd suggested it, and that you did the same to him when he was little. Frankly, you disgust me, and I hate your guts.

Fatou

PS That last Pokemon game you gave me was wicked. Could I have Pokemon Moon for my birthday?

Meh – to be honest I'm not so keen on the sleeping pill angle. I should be able to find something better.

Eh, what? Whaddaya mean, he's collecting our scripts in five minutes? Quick!

For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early, because her father confiscated her Nintendo every night after dinner, and so she couldn't keep playing it secretly till one in the morning. And then one day, she threatened she'd steal the TV remote if he carried on doing it, so he stopped and they got into the habit of spending their evenings doing their own thing – he'd be on the sofa watching the footie, and she'd be with her Pokemons under the (orange) duvet.

Perfect. It's short but punchy, with just enough details. Now, if that's not enough for the teacher to give me at least a B+...



Faustina Fiore

I was born in Paris in 1976, and with an Italian father and French mother I grew up in a bilingual household. After my studies, I spent two years in England, where I also learned Spanish. Once back in France, I was keen to find a way of combining my language skills with my interest in children's literature from all over the world. In 2003 I became a translator of children's books while trying to find space to write at the same time! I currently live in Paris with my four children. *Les oiseaux noirs* was my first novel, published by Casterman in 2012.

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GRANNY FATOU, THE WOMAN WRESTLER OF KINSHASHA

Sébastien Gayet



For a long time, Fatou would go down early... Just a few words, written by hand on the cover of an old spiral-bound notebook. They leave Pablo and Mina feeling puzzled. "D'you think it's something to do with Granny Fatou?" asks Pablo.

"Let me see!"

Mina seizes the red notebook, blows off the dust and begins to flick through it. Inside, she finds a faded newspaper cutting with a headline in big blue letters:

FATOU MBOLOKO FLOORS THE GIANT NIAOU-NIAOU

"Have you seen this photo, Pablo? It really does look like her!!! But when she was a lot younger."

"Are you sure?"

The two friends leave the basement of their building, and take a seat on the only bench on the estate that's still in one piece. Mina opens the notebook and reads the article out loud. It's from a daily newspaper, *La Tempête des Tropiques*, and dated 17 June 1981.

This "Clash of the Titans" certainly lived up to all the hype: Congolese wrestling legend Niaou-Niaou, unbeaten for a decade, pitted against the puny Fatou Mboloko. The Mbongul Saint-Michel Stadium in Brazzaville was far too

small to accommodate everyone who wanted to watch, and large numbers were forced to remain outside.

When the two champions entered the ring, the boisterous, colourful crowd roared with delight. The opening rounds were a powerful show of strength. The giant Niaou-Niaou was a sight to behold – a daunting two metres high, sporting an impressive red Mohican. He tried his utmost to grab hold of his opponent, but frail little Fatou was supple and agile enough to avoid his lunges every time. Then, in the fifth round, Niaou-Niaou dealt her a horrifying blow, and the young woman crumpled to the ground in deafening silence. She lay motionless for several seconds, dazed by her fall. Word spread through the audience that he'd killed her...

Suddenly, just as the giant was savouring his victory with crowds of hysterical fans, the Woman Wrestler of Kinshasa flung herself on him in a fit of rage, and finally conquered the Ogre of Brazzaville.

The last part of the article is hidden by an ink stain. The children reel from the shock.

"That's incredible... D'you think that could be our own Granny Fatou?"

Breathless with excitement, Mina and Pablo run off and climb the six floors of the huge council block as fast as they can. Panting heavily, they hammer on the left-hand door.

"Granny FATOUUUUU! It's us! Open the door!"

"What's got into you pair? Are you being chased by lions or something?"

"Granny Fatou, Granny Fatou! What's all this about wrestling? And Kinshasa? And Fatou Mboloko, is that you? Please Granny, please tell us..."

"Oh là, là... Calm down kids," scolds the old lady, laughing

gently. Ah yes... the famous notebook. I'd forgotten about it, after all this time..."

"But tell us, Granny, is that really you in the photo? And we don't have a clue what this sentence means: For a long time Fatou would go down very early..."

"OK. Plonk yourselves on my sofa. Are you ready for an epic journey to the Congo, in Africa? We're talking a very long time ago. Granny Fatou didn't even exist as yet... just Baby Fatou!"

"I lived with my parents and my eight brothers and sisters in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. We were very poor and I'd spend my days roaming the streets, horsing around with the boys!"

"You didn't go to school?"

"No. School was for rich kids! I was ten when I discovered all-in wrestling, a kind of wrestling where any sort of hold is allowed. The sport was really popular back home. I started playing it with the friends I'd made in the neighbourhood."

"But weren't you scared of getting hit, or getting injured?"

"No. I loved getting into a brawl! And as I was the only girl, they began to take an interest in me. When I was fifteen, some promoters gave me the chance to take part in some fights. The presence of a female wrestler intrigued the public, and more and more of them turned up to watch. But as this was an exclusively male world, it was inconceivable that a girl should win. So they would ask me to lose, and go down in the ring in the middle of the fight. The matches were rigged and they'd give me a bit of money in return.

"But that's cheating!"

"Yes, that's true. But we were very poor. And thanks to the wrestling I would bring money back home."

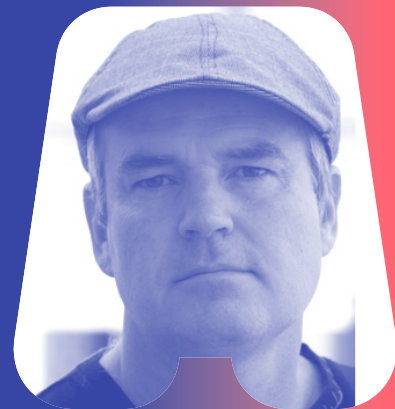
“And why that name, Fatou Mboloko?”

“Mboloko means antelope in Congolese. They called me that because I was lively, supple and nimble.

“When did you decide not to go down any more?”

“Just after I turned 18. The fights were getting harder and harder. I found it more and more difficult to put up with getting hit. There’s an African proverb that says: *the living are the standing and the dead are the lying*. I decided to call it a day. But not before one last fight. The most important of my career, and the most hyped as well. Against the legend Niaou-Niaou. A monster with a ton of muscles. The rest you know since you’ve read the article from *La Tempête des Tropiques*.

For a long time Fatou would go down early in the ring, but that day your good old Fatou refused to go down. I took up the challenge and I won. For all the women of Congo, Africa and the World...



Sébastien Gayet

Sébastien Gayet was born in 1967. After teaching sport in schools for ten years, he turned to journalism – firstly in Lyon and then in the Ardèche where he currently lives. As the father of three children, he would become their “daddy-reader” and tell them beautiful stories. He was in charge of public relations for the team that made the facsimile of the prehistoric Chauvet cave, and his first book, published by Actes Sud Junior, was *À la découverte de la grotte Chauvet* Having been bitten by the writing bug, his second novel, *Les bébés flingueurs*, was published by Éditions Ex Aequo in 2019.

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FEATHERS



For a long time, Fatou's been going to bed early...

Until this April evening, a night she will always remember – right down to the smallest detail – when she's older. Tonight she's to meet Bachir in front of the mosque. She knows that her mother will soon nod off in front of the TV, as she normally does, and she'll be able to leave without waking her.

Six years have passed since Fatou and Aminata, her mother, left Côte d'Ivoire and arrived in Tunisia. Six years of living in a tiny blue-walled apartment, just the two of them. In the beginning, Aminata had said it was only temporary – simply enough time to scrape together some money and organise their journey to France.

"It's only for a few more weeks, my little swallow," she says each time, whenever it seems her daughter's had a bad day or been teased at school. "They're jealous of your hair, that's all," she tells her, "because they'll never have plaits as lovely as yours, with so many colours. They're jealous of you looking like a rainbow."

Fatou likes her mother comforting her, and sometimes she overdoes things a bit so her mother ends up fetching a sugar-coated sweet, a *dragée*, from the enormous trunk in her bedroom. She loves making *dragées* melt in her mouth, and feeling the smooth sugar coating soften without knowing whether she'll find an almond or chocolate underneath. From time to time, Fatou slips her *dragées* into the pocket of her denim jacket, so she can give them to Bachir later on.

Bachir is tall. His hair's slicked back with gel, he smokes and he rides a moped that's exactly the same colour as the walls in Fatou and Aminata's apartment. But more importantly, Bachir keeps birds. He breeds pigeons at home. Dozens and dozens of pigeons: white, black, beige and even one – their favourite – that's grey all over, with feathers so delicate they look like lace. Bachir has constructed huge wooden cages on the roof of his apartment block, and every evening, as the sun begins to set, and before the call to prayer echoes through the skies above Tunis, he sets his pigeons free.

He opens the cages one by one, and all the birds flutter away, circling high above the buildings for a long while. Bachir remains standing, waving a bit of cloth in the air to encourage them to fly even higher and further. When he finally calls them back, the pigeons return and take up their places again in their wire-mesh houses. Fatou never tires of watching them soar through the sky, even though she has to help clean their cages at the same time.

Bachir often talks about France. He too has plans to leave; he has friends who've managed to cross the Medi-

terranean and are waiting for him on the other side. His cousin was also meant to wait for him over there, but he never arrived. Bachir's eyes look dull and lifeless whenever he mentions him. He was his favourite cousin.

Many times, Bachir confides in Fatou that he'd love to be able to fly like a bird, paying no attention to the borders that humans have traced across the earth. With all the wisdom of her ten years, Fatou knows just how he feels and, to make him smile, describes a world where frontiers would melt in the sun – just like the delicacies from Abidjan her mother sells in Tunis – and turn into rivers of sugar and chocolate.

Tonight it's almost ten o'clock when Fatou clammers onto the blue moped, her jacket pockets overflowing with *dragées*. Bachir has entrusted her with his backpack, stuffed with several plastic bottles full of petrol: it's a long way and they'll probably have to fill the tank quite a few times. It was Bachir who'd come up with the idea for this trip, after seeing a programme on TV about bird migration. Fatou didn't hesitate for a second before accepting: "It's not every day you get the chance to see that," she'd exclaimed.

"It's almost a two-hour drive," says Bachir as he starts the moped. Fatou clings on to him. Speed bumps come thick and fast along the way, making the bottles in the backpack knock against each other. They can't make out a thing in the surrounding countryside. Fatou is astonished: she's not even tired. But when Bachir confirms they've arrived at their destination, she eventually falls asleep all the same, stretched out in the grass.

Dawn breaks, softly and gently, and to begin with there's total silence. Then the sound of chirruping echoes all around. Quietly, at first, and then louder and louder. The birds are waking up and soon they'll take flight, leaving the trees where they've spent the night and regained their strength before continuing their journey towards the north. The flapping of their wings sounds like a low rumble. As if the whole sky had started to vibrate.

Fatou opens her eyes. Bachir is sitting beside her, gazing up at the sky. The birds have gathered in enormous clouds with incredible, ever-changing shapes. Hundreds of thousands of them – perhaps millions. Fatou is transfixed. It's Bachir who eventually speaks. In a whisper. "They're swallows."



Perrine Lachenal



Perrine Lachenal began her career as a researcher in the social sciences almost ten years ago, focusing on issues around gender and violence in the Arab world. Alongside her academic publications, she has tried her hand at other forms of writing, searching for new ways of telling stories. In 2013 she co-authored a graphic novel on the theme of sexual harassment in Egypt, *Éloigne-toi!*, which appeared the revue *Rukh*, and in 2016 published *Questions du Genre* (Éditions Le Cavalier Bleu).
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THE CAT'S GOT HER TONGUE

Lalou



For a long time, Fatou's been going to bed early... A habit that's forcing her eyelids shut this evening. It's already 9pm and she's yawning her head off. In fact, she would have been tucked up long before, had she not been distracted by something rather strange outside. One of the windows in the house opposite seems to be blinking in the darkness. The light's flashing on and off to a precise rhythm, without stopping.

"That's funny. It looks like a signal," she muses.

An old lady lives in that house, all on her own. She never smiles or speaks to anyone. She appears to be mute, but no one's quite sure. A white chignon bristling with pins, dark shawls and dresses, and that ugly-looking cat prowling around the house, a creature that's lost half its fur and even a bit of its ear... More than enough for the local kids to nickname her the Witch (and the grown-ups too, but only under their breath). People avoid her, or gave her funny looks. Fatou has always found that unfair and a bit simplistic. What a lack of imagination! Granted, her neighbour doesn't look terribly friendly, but to go from that to calling her a witch...

Half-asleep, she stares at the light and wonders just how many cantankerous old women have been burnt at the stake on the basis of so little. At ten, she's past the age of being afraid of witches. She's not the least scared by the sight of a pointed hat. On the other hand, this business of the flashing light is really starting to intrigue her. Fatou opens her window.

Shortly before, as she was coming back from school, Fatou had run into Tomy Barraque, a burly lad in Year 9. He was chuckling and rattling a large dustbin. Inside, a terrified little cat was screeching and scratching like a thing possessed. Fatou saw red. Without thinking, she hurtled straight at him, screaming like a banshee, with her fist in the air, teeth bared and eyes blazing with fury: "LET IT GOOOO! YAAAAY!"

Was it purely surprise or her terrifying rage that scared off the horrid bully? Either way, the scene had its desired effect. Faced with this scrap of a girl in a frenzy of anger, Big Tomy cleared off as fast as he could. Fatou set the poor creature free: it was her neighbour's balding cat. Panic-stricken, it fled without further ado. But the old lady remained indoors.

Thinking back over things tonight, Fatou feels anxious. Could this light – flashing away so persistently – in fact be a cry for help? She pricks up her ears, listening out for anything that sounds suspicious. She feels like she ought to tell her parents.

"Mam..." But the rest of the word remains stuck in her throat. Fatou stares, wide-eyed. A silhouette has appeared in the brightly lit window frame opposite. It looks like a tiny person, wearing a dress and a... pointed hat! Climbing onto the window sill, the little figure waves to her. Fatou pinches herself. Ouch! No, she's not asleep. The dreamy apparition then starts dancing like a ballerina. While she's twirling around, as light as a feather carried on the wind, a second pixie-like figure makes an entrance. This one's wearing a woolly hat pulled right down over his head. Fatou squeals with delight. He's the spitting image of Tomy Barraque, swaggering around and bobbing his head like an idiot, just as he does. He frightens off the little witch, who flees into the shadows. Suddenly a crimson ball of fury bursts onto the scene, dressed in the very same pyjamas as Fatou.

"But that's *me!*" thinks the little girl, utterly dumbstruck. In a series of comic routines, little Tomy receives his comeuppance. It's amazing, exactly like the real thing! Fatou's completely forgotten about feeling drowsy. She chuckles heartily. Then the mini-show draws to a close. The cast take a bow one by one, as you would at the theatre. Overjoyed, she applauds silently. The curtains pull shut across the window, as if it were a stage. She remains frozen to the spot, astounded. Not knowing quite what to do, she rushes to the light switch and flashes her bulb frenetically on and off.

"Please come back!" she begs in silence. She hasn't the slightest wish to alert her parents now. Phew! The curtain opens again, but the little people have disappeared. In their place, Fatou sees her neighbour's

cat, seated in the window frame. Behind it flutters a sign with the words “Thanks for saving him!”.

Fatou can’t believe her eyes. Flabbergasted, she nods her head and mouths some words, as clearly and distinctly as she can:

“You’re welcome!”. After all, cats might be able to lipread.

The cat does nothing but gape at her. Clearly, the ordeal of the dustbin has been long forgotten. Good. But what’s this? A hand appearing from nowhere to stroke his fur? Fatou feels her heart leap in her chest. The time has come. The old lady emerges from her hiding place and greets her audience in turn, with a curtsy. Then, with a mischievous smile, she spreads her arms slowly, very slowly, in a theatrical gesture. All of her wrinkles break into a smile. And there, below her spread-out fingers, lies the key to the mystery. Two dancing marionettes, suspended in the air.



Lalou

Lalou was born on the island of Réunion – a child of the high Plains, she was brought up in the cool air on the slopes of a volcano. With a passion for everything, her multi-cultural journey has been anything but the norm, woven together from all manner of influences – people, books and of course her fertile imagination. It’s from this mishmash that she draws the settings and characters for her fictional worlds. Her first novel, *Où le vent te mène*, was published in November 2017 by Zébulo Editions. She returned with *Pieds de Bois* two years later, and fully intends to continue with her writing career.

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THE VOICE OF THE DJEMBE

Anaïs La porte



For a long time, Fatou’s been going to bed early: what’s the point of staying up for the evening gathering? She already knows all the tales that Atia, the village storyteller, or griot, has to tell. And it’s too painful to watch her enthralling an audience with her spellbinding voice, when the little girl knows she’ll never be able to take her place. Because Fatou herself is mute.

Tonight, however, she discovers the whole village has assembled to hear the griot’s stories. People say that Atia’s about to choose her apprentice. Fatou is there to accompany her brother Mallé – and what with his beautifully modulated voice and quick-witted repartee, he’s the ideal candidate! As he tells his tale, she’ll support him by playing her drum, the African djembe.

Yet even though Fatou’s voice seems to have evaporated in the sun, like puddles after the rain, this doesn’t stop her from making herself understood. With her hands and eyes, of course, but especially with her djembe.

This evening, at the foot of Boubakakou, the baobab tree, Atia addresses the villagers to the sound of her jingling bracelets.

"The griots say that Boubakakou-the-baobab has been watching over our village since time began. When you look at her from a distance, she looks just like a tree planted upside down, with her roots reaching up to the sky. Perhaps she takes sustenance from the air? Have you ever run your hand over her bark? They say she can grant your wishes. And do you know what the three gifts of the baobab happen to be?"

She steps aside to make way for Mallé.

"Fruit, leaves, trunk. Food and drink, medicine, shelter. But for me, the first gift's the most important!"

Gentle laughter ripples through the crowd, which Fatou echoes with joyful tapping on her drum. Spurred on by this, Mallé continues.

"They say it was the miller's daughter who first had the idea of pressing the baobab's fruit. It became so famous that even the king asked to taste it."

Fatou skims across her djembe to patter out the drip-drip-drip of the golden liquid, squeezed into the king's goblet by the miller's daughter.

Mallé smiles knowingly at Fatou.

"He married her. No one's quite sure whether he fell in love with the young girl or the fruit."

This time, everyone bursts out laughing.

The second candidate to become the apprentice griot is Daly. She's Fatou and Mallé's cousin. While she changes places with Mallé, Atia holds Fatou back.

"Stay here, and play for Daly too. It wouldn't be fair to let her speak on her own, after you've accompanied Mallé."

Fatou nods and sits down again, feeling daunted. It's easy playing alongside her brother, who loves to joke as he speaks and makes you forget all about the djembe. But Daly is far more solemn.

"The second gift of Boubakakou-the-baobab," she declares in a calm, controlled voice, "is hidden within her leaves. There was once a young shepherd who was afraid he'd lose his entire flock because of a fever."

Fatou's fingers slide jerkily across the skin of the djembe to convey the shepherd's sense of fear.

"The village healer advised him to brew a potion from Boubakakou's softest leaves. The shepherd almost broke his neck climbing along the thinnest branches."

Fatou taps her drum slowly, imagining the shepherd's anxiety as he performs his acrobatics.

"He managed to bring down enough leaves and so his flock was saved."

A flurry of jubilant little beats, like the bleating of the sheep cured by Boubakakou.

Daly thanks Fatou and goes back to sit down. Atia is meant to conclude the tale of the three gifts. Fatou turns towards the griot. Will she grant her the honour of accompanying her?

"And now, Fatou's going to tell us the third part, about Boubakakou's gift of shelter."

The villagers look astonished, and all eyes turn to Fatou. Feeling the heat, she tries miming to explain she can't speak. She has no voice. Doesn't Atia know that?

But the griot simply encourages her with a smile and a gesture, her bracelets tinkling in the darkness.

"You do know the story, don't you?"

Fatou nods, with an air of resignation. It's her favourite tale. *The sleepy village is immersed in its daily routine.*

A constant light tapping on the djembe.

Watch out! The raiders are coming!

Fatou's fingers rattle out a series of rapid, sharp beats to evoke their hostility.

Then she calms things down, patting her drum gently to portray the sound of the villagers' feet. Groping their way, they slip inside Boubakakou's trunk. Fatou traces its twisted contours across the skin of her djembe.

Then it's back to the aggressive drumbeat of the raiders, cut through with with the soothing caress of Boubakakou who refuses to give away her secret.

The raiders are leaving! The villagers emerge from their hiding place, their hearts bursting with joy.

Clear, loud beats, to a staccato rhythm.

Fatou finally surfaces from her tale and looks around her. Immersed in her story, she's forgotten where she is. The villagers gaze at her, transfixed. Mallé leaps to his feet and applauds. Daly does the same, followed by everyone else. Atia the griot opens her arms.

"I have chosen my apprentice."

Fatou can feel her jaw dropping. She signals her bewilderment to Mallé, who interprets for her.

"She says there's no such thing as a mute griot."

Atia points to the djembe.

"She might not have any vocal cords, but she certainly has a voice."



Anaïs La porte

Anaïs La Porte was born in 1984 and grew up on the island of Réunion, within a multicultural family. She then settled in France – where she lives today – to pursue her studies. She splits her working day between writing and her career as an engineer in the water industry. Her fantasy series for children, *Les Puissances de Nilgir*, began publication in 2014 with Éditions Yucca.

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BEFORE THE DARKNESS

Annaïg Le Quellec



For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early... when there was still daylight, and there was still night. But that was before the darkness came. Because, one morning, the sky turned black and the sun disappeared. She was only a little girl back then, yet she remembers it clearly. Today, when she looks at her wrinkled hands, she feels as though she's always been old.

Now Fatou finds it hard to sleep. In the evenings she will lie for hours, her eyes wide open, lost in her thoughts. She recalls the sun that used to warm the ochre earth and burn her skin. The wind that blew thick with sand, and the rain that sometimes came lashing down in a roll of thunder. In those days the fields were tinged with a soft green and adorned with fluffy balls of cotton. She thinks back to the warm evenings, and the singing, and the dancing that marked out the seasons. Sometimes, when she's feeling a little sad, she remembers the stars. If she closes her eyes,

she can draw them in her head and make them shine. The children say the stars have all died, or never existed at all. But Fatou knows this isn't true. They are always there. They're just hidden, that's all.

Ever since the clouds blackened out the light, nothing grows any more. So the people are leaving. They're heading for the city. They're crossing the sea. Elsewhere it's no less dark, but life is less hard. In any case, that's what they say. One day, a little girl told Fatou that her father had tried to jump from one side of the Mediterranean to the other, in a single leap.

"Maybe he went through the clouds?" added the child, in a timid voice filled with hope. "Maybe he's with the stars now?"

"Maybe," replied Fatou as she stroked the child's head. "Maybe he is."

That night, for the first time in a long while, Fatou cried.

To begin with, the rest of the village elders advised Fatou to let go. To forget. They told her, time and again, that she was only hurting herself by thinking about the past.

"That's how it is," they would say, "the world's changed, you just have to deal with it." But Fatou is not one for forgetting. And so, day by day, village by village, Fatou tells her stories. She tells tales of the savannah and the warm winds that used to bend the yellow grass. She mourns for the monkeys, the giraffes and the lions. Her wrinkled hands trace pictures on the ashy soil. Her clear voice sings of the baobabs that would touch the sky and shelter children from the blazing sun. When she speaks, she gently plucks the strings on her kora to accompany herself, even though her fingers are less agile than before.

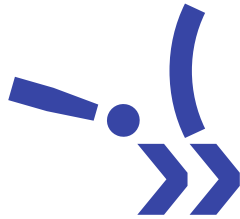
Sometimes, they ask her to talk about the disaster, to explain why the sky filled with ash and the sun disappeared. But she declines politely. Each time she patiently repeats that there is nothing to understand. Simply that one day men dropped bombs that blew rocks and soil into the heavens, and the sky has been dark ever since. There is nothing more to be said.

Fatou has been tired for some time. With each passing day her footsteps feel heavier and heavier. Her back, once proud and straight, is increasingly bent over. Yet there is always another village, always more children, waiting for her to come and tell her stories. One evening she makes a decision: one more journey, just one. It will be the last.

So she rolls up her mat one last time and takes to the road again. With each step she leans on her worn out staff. The smoothness of the wood, polished by the repeated rubbing of her fingers, comforts her and gives her the courage to keep going. Around the staff, feathers, lucky charms and a few strands of plaited wool dance whenever she moves. Those are the only gifts she accepts from children. Suddenly, a sound attracts her attention. In the low-lying bushes – the only ones that still manage to survive here – the prickly branches twitch and spring to life. Fatou stands completely still. Within the tangled vegetation she can make out a fawn shadow. That's impossible, she muses, the sun took all the colours away with it and the big animals left too. And yet, in front of Fatou's eyes, a lion cub emerges from the brush. Two shining eyes stare at her intently from below the first wisps of a mane. Fatou remains rooted to the spot. Partly because she's afraid, but mostly because she fears this moment will simply

melt away and the creature will disappear, as if it had never existed. But the cub remains. He looks at her briefly, without animosity, and then, just as he came, pads back into the bushes.

Then Fatou feels her heart lifting and warmth seeping through her body. She looks up at the sky. It's a little less grey. Yes, Fatou can see things better now. Everything is a little clearer. So she picks up her staff again and continues her journey. One more village, and then one more. Because now, she is sure, there will be many new stories to tell.



Annaïg Le Quellec

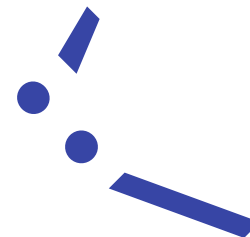
Annaïg Le Quellec was born in 1986. Even as a little girl she was fascinated by stories, especially tales of the past. Today she lives at the ends of the earth, in Finistère, where she teaches history and geography at secondary school. In parallel, she writes novels for children and short stories in the science fiction genre – the latest of which, *Surgente vento*, won a prize in the “Visions du Futur” short story competition in 2019.

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DESTINATION BLOOD

Manech



For some time now, Fatou's been going to bed early... Trust me, I know what I'm talking about. Four nights in a row, I've been watching this little girl. Four nights that have seemed like forever. Four nights of ceaseless taunting from your nightlight. Because – poor old me – I've been held captive. On the wrong side of her bedroom window.

Thankfully, my torture came to an end this morning. Before leaving for school, she opened her window to air the room. I seized my chance to slip inside. I was desperate for a drink, and a bite to eat, but too tired to go hunting straight away. What I really needed was a good day's sleep. So I made for the ceiling where I dozed off...

Suddenly I'm in darkness. It's crept up on me and woken me up. Oh joy! Fatou's back. She's all snug and tucked up

in bed, and deep in a book, even though it's pitch black outside. I guess there's no school tomorrow. From my observation post, I inhale her skin's delicate perfume. It's been calling me – irresistibly – for ages.

GO! I allow myself to be led by the scent and head towards her neck. I'm drooling already, just thinking about the slap-up meal I'm about to have... Oops! I'm too impatient to quench my thirst. I've been careless enough to fly too close to her ear. I barely miss her fingers. And now she's heard me, she'll be on the lookout. I'm going to have to wait just a b... CAREFUL! That slipper very nearly finished me off. Fortunately for me, the kid's a poor shot. Ooh, this was a bad idea, returning to the ceiling, seeing as it's white – now she's on the alert, and she's spotted me easily. Quick! Let's move somewhere less obvious. Hmm, that corner over there ought to do the trick.

Hidden quietly behind the curtain, I enjoy the luxury of seeing without being seen. Fatou's scanning every nook and cranny in the room, looking for me. Phew! She's given up and gone back to her book.

I'm absolutely ravenous, but I fight against it and force myself to stay hidden. To remain invisible for as long as possible. That's how it works, at this stage of the game.

Oh look, she's rubbing her eyes. I know this signal by heart. It means the show's about to get interesting. This is the fifth performance I've been at. But tonight, I'm feeling rather smug because I'm in the starring role. Act One: putting the book away and turning off the lamp. Act Two: I make my entrance.

Fatou's scent pulls me to her like iron filings to a magnet. I simply have to resist those forces of attraction. Careful, not yet, it's still too early... Patience, caution, silence. Now, if I just obey these three rules to the letter, my survival's guaranteed. And the lives of my offspring, too! To be honest, I'd gladly make do with the juice in fruit, or nectar from flowers. I only do the whole vampire thing for the sake of my eggs: mammalian blood is vital for their healthy development – and Fatou is a mammal. But her sacrifice shall not be in vain. You have my solemn oath.

Ah, there you go – her breathing's getting slower and deeper. Sleep's getting the better of her. When I hear the little one begin to snore, I launch myself into the air. Her snoring makes the humming of my wings pretty much inaudible. The nightlight adds a faint glow to the shadows, but I can still see as clearly as in broad darkness.

It's you and me now, Fatou! Your left arm's nice and safe under that blanket. But the right one's not so lucky. In a matter of seconds, I cross the room and land on your lightly seasoned skin. You'll note I'm kitted out with a slender tube, sharp as a needle – all the better to suck your blood with, my child! Your skin's so fine it puts up no resistance at all. I pierce through and inject you with a drop of saliva (now we wouldn't want your precious blood clotting on me, would we?). I slurp it up greedily. Oh, that's delicious!

In a flash, I take off again, so as to avoid any sudden movement by my victim. A second swig of blood, sir? Don't mind if I do – especially given I'm still a bit peckish. Who knows when I'll next run into a member of the mammal class? Best to stock up, you know – be prepared for nights when food's a bit scarce. Besides, I'm sure, my sweetheart, that

your blood could probably taste even better. I've really got the urge to bite you somewhere else. Without a second's thought, I set off, back to the battlefield.

That fold in your elbow will do as a landing strip. Mmm, what a wonderful cocktail! It's sheer joy, darling, sipping it with a straw. I'm in seventh heaven as I drink this little pick-me-up with its first-class nutritional benefits. Thanks to you, my pretty, I won't be short of a descendant or two.

GOOD GRIEF! You jump up and turn your lamp on again. My bite woke you up! I switch from hunter to hunted. Panic-stricken, confused and driven by my blasted instinct, I head straight for the light. But you're ahead of me, and I narrowly miss a whack from your hands. I somehow manage to zigzag around them. Curses for being so greedy! My abdomen's bursting with blood, I'm struggling to fly any higher. Come on, just a bit more! One last push... I'm utterly exhausted, but I'm finally out of your reach. That was a close shave!

Ah, little one, next time you'd do well to eat your greens! AAAARGH, I've seen that slipper some... SPLAT!



Manech

Manech was born in LA (well, Loire-Atlantique), but then settled in Upper Brittany where he worked as a primary school teacher for many years. Being a precocious sort of guy, he got to his mid-life crisis before mid-life got to him: he went back to uni and scooped up a Master's in children's literature. His first picture book, *Petit Radeau* (Éditions Cépages). His next book will be published by Éditions Dyzol. His stories are liberally flavoured with burlesque, poetry and philosophy – and more than a hint of Breton butter.

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WHISPERS



For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early. So would I.

Fatou would go to bed early but she wouldn't fall asleep at once. Neither would I.

Fatou was my neighbour. She lived in a block that really was stuck to mine. Our two bedrooms were only separated from each other by a simple wall. A thin partition that let whispers pass through. I could hear everything that went on in her room, and Fatou could hear everything I did in mine.

When I moved into the area with my mother, I had no idea someone was living so close to me, let alone that she was called Fatou.

My mother wouldn't believe me when I told her I'd heard noises that seemed to be coming from the apartment right next to ours. Creaking. Footsteps. Words being whispered very softly. She explained that this deserted building was completely derelict and might collapse at any moment. No one was allowed to move into such a dangerous place. The entrance had been blocked off with a heavy chain and padlock to prevent anyone getting inside. Sometimes tiles would slip off the roof and crash into the street. The wooden floorboards were all rotten. There was no water or

electricity. It was soon to be demolished.

My mother assured me that the sounds I had picked up came from the new tenants who'd just moved in upstairs. According to her, they must have been shifting furniture around and unpacking their things in order to settle in.

But I was convinced someone was living right next to us.

There was even music sometimes. Rhythms I'd never heard before. When the songs reached my ears, I couldn't help swaying to the beat, I couldn't help dancing. Some of the lyrics were in English. I didn't understand what they meant. But others were in French. They spoke of Africa, and Africans in Paris, of freedom, and borders we ought to fling open.

I'd pushed my mattress against the wall that divided our two rooms. I hoped the person next to me had had the same idea. I'd never have guessed she was called Fatou, that she was a girl like me and that she was eleven, just as I was.

One evening I scratched the wall with my fingers. She did the same.

"Psst, what's your name?" I asked, my mouth almost glued to the wall.

"Fatou," she replied in a whisper.

"Are you a girl or a boy?" I added. I'd never heard this name.

"A girl, of course! Fatou's a girl's name, didn't you know? And what about you, what's your name?"

"I'm called Léa," I replied, still whispering.

"Are you a girl or a boy?" she asked in turn.

We burst out laughing.

For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early to be close to me. As would I, to be close to her. We never fell asleep at once. I would tell her about my school, my class, the other children. She would share her fears, her nightmares, her dreams. She told me about the land she had left to come here, and the music she'd brought with her. The music of Bob Marley and Tiken Jah Fakoly that made me want to dance, that left me spellbound.

She taught me the words:

*We too, we want the chance to study,
The chance to see our dreams come true*

One night, we decided to make a hole in the wall. Each of us began digging on our own side. We just wanted to make a small opening to start with. A narrow little channel for our hands, so they could touch each other. We hadn't even finished the hole before we began dreaming of making it bigger, so we could pass from one room to the next!

We didn't have time to finish digging through. Fatou was forced to leave. To flee. The deafening sound of huge demolition machines filled the neighbourhood. Mechanical excavators destroyed her building.

For a long time Fatou and I would go to bed early so we could tell each other stories. Long enough for me not to

forget, for me not to forget our nights spent close to each other, barely divided by a wall no thicker than a school ruler. The thinnest of brick partitions, one we'd have liked to tear down.

We never met. We never touched. We never saw each other. I only knew her voice.

I grew up. I often wondered whether Fatou still went to bed early to share her songs, her fears, her dreams with some other little girl who'd perhaps placed her mattress right next to hers.

I grew up and I moved away. I now live in another city, in a vast block filled just with young students like myself. My neighbour's apartment is separated from mine by a very thin partition. I don't have a lot of things. Just a suitcase full of clothes and big bag filled with books.

One evening I heard music coming from the bedroom next to mine. Music I knew very well. I pushed my bed against the wall and lay down.

I scratched the wall with my fingertips.

"Psst, what's your name?" I asked in a whisper.

"Fatou. And yours?"



Olivier Roux

Born at a time when hideous polo-neck jumpers (they always came in that distinctive material) and psychedelic wallpaper were all the rage, Olivier Roux is bravely trying to adapt to Life 2.0. He rather fancies himself as a pirate (well, in his dreams, given his incurable sea-sickness) and pens short stories with a dark edge for grown-ups (his latest, *Même pas mal!*, appeared in *Impasse et perd*, published by La Gidouille in 2018). *Whispers* is his first story for children. This encounter with Fatou has certainly fired his ambition to write more.

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STANDARD



For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early. She didn't have much choice: at the Centre for Standardisation, the wardens did their rounds at seven o'clock, and you were well advised to be lying perfectly straight below your stiff sheets, with your hands placed on top nice and neat, and your sweet face suffused with the serene glow of childhood. However, as soon as the wardens had left, the secret commotion would kick off in the dormitory. It would drift up between the beds – no one quite knew from where. Little knocks and blows, grunts and growls, and the odd whisper of excitement.

But Fatou herself was already asleep. Speaking Standard from morning till night left her drained and grey. And what's more, she'd been slaving away all day, forever the first to finish her chores.

What needed doing? The dishes? Ironing uniforms? Typing flyers in Standard? Fatou would wash, and fold, and type as she was told.

Every week, if she'd been a "Good Element", they gave her a Standard Ticket, which she clutched in her fingers, her heart brimming over with peace and happiness.

The Ticket was, for her, the most prized thing of all, as it opened the doors to the library.

*

The library was only open on Saturdays. On the door, a notice read:

The children of the Beloved Republic
Speak the language of the Beloved Republic!
Below was an orderly line of children, all colours and races, giving a thumbs-up and looking happy. Fatou chose not to look at them and hurried inside.
The library housed row upon row of books and films in Standard, alphabet posters, shelves by the dozen and – above all – what Fatou cherished the most: her brother, Jonah. They would hide between the shelves to talk about their week, tell disgusting jokes about the wardens, pick bogeys from their noses, tickle each other like a pair of crazed fools and – above all – do what Fatou cherished the most: speak the language of freedom.
The language that was theirs, and that of their parents, and of all those before them too.
When they parted, they wished each other “Láya”. *Be brave*. Those were their favourite words.

*

But one Saturday, Jonah never came.
“Where’s Jonah?” she asked the warden, Sweet-Motherland.
“The wild kid? He’s been confined to Building B.”
“Confined?” This was a word she didn’t know. Ever hopeful, Fatou held out her Tickets.
“I want to see him.”
“We don’t say ‘I want’, we say ‘I would like’.”
“I would like...”
“*Enough!* It’s forbidden, and well you know it.”
Then her heart erupted in a cry of revolt and Fatou howled into Sweet-Motherland’s face.
That earned her ten lashes of the whip. Five for bad language and five for the language used.

*

In the evening, she went to bed early. Her heart was neither peaceful nor happy – In fact quite the opposite. But her savaged body needed sleep, and so she heard nothing when the secret commotion started up. Scratching, noises, excited whispers. Just there, close by, in the dormitory.

*

The following week, she performed her tasks badly. She wasn’t given a single Ticket. But what use were they anyway, if they didn’t allow her to meet Jonah, and let them speak the language of freedom?

*

One day, when their chore was cleaning windows, she sneaked off to Building B where her brother was polishing a pane of glass.

“Psst!! Jonah!!”

He gave a start, then looked around with a worried expression.

“Why are you ‘confined’?” she asked.

But through the window, Fatou could only hear every other word:

“... Punished... but... plan... problem... warden Brotherhood... let me go... sole...”

A severe face suddenly appeared.

“Jonah! Fatou!”

It was the warden Brotherhood.

*

Jonah and Fatou were given yet more lashes: ten and ten. They counted each one, in Standard, as they were ordered to do. “Láya”, they said to themselves between each crack of the whip.

And just when Fatou thought she was about to buckle under, the lashes stopped; a hand laid a cool flannel on

her forehead and slipped her under the sheets.
“Now, be good,” whispered Sweet-Motherland.
Put to bed early, Fatou closed her eyes, her hands placed on top nice and neat, her sweet face suffused with the serene glow of childhood.
But when the warden had gone, Fatou opened her eyes again, her heart black with rage.
That evening, it was impossible to go to sleep. So when the secret commotion began, she heard it for the first time. She got up... and went to look for it.
Suddenly, Philippa’s blonde head shot up between two beds.
“What are you doing?” whispered Fatou, shivering with anticipation.
“We’re digging a tunnel to escape.”
Fatou felt her heart leap with joy and wonder.
“It’s almost finished. Come!”
Under Philippa’s bed, there was a hole, like a burrow. The girls wriggled their way inside. The “Bad Elements” from Buildings A, B, C – everyone was there! Digging with stolen rakes and forks, in the heady buzz of all the forbidden languages ever spoken. Fatou plunged deeper and deeper, down to the end of the gallery.
The earth crumbled away, and there, suddenly, on the other side of the tunnel, was...
“Jonah!”
“Fatou! Thank goodness you’re not in bed!”
He gave her a tickle, then grabbed her hand and pulled her forward.
“Láya! Our long tunnel to freedom.”



Julia Thévenot

Julia Thévenot was born in Tours in 1990 and announced she wanted to be a writer at the age of six – “alongside a proper job”. Following degrees in literature and law, she was inspired by J.K. Rowling and Clémentine Beauvais to focus on writing for children. Her passion led to her becoming a literary blogger and then an editorial assistant (working on fiction and graphic novels at Sarbacane) before, finally, turning author herself. Her first novel, *Bordeterre*, will be published by Sarbacane in March 2020.

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FATOUS OF THE WORLD

Angélique Thyssen



For a long time, Fatou would go to bed early. Especially in summer. That way, she was always the first to get up and could escape from the village on her own, while everyone was still asleep. She would slip on her furry sealskin boots, fasten her anorak tightly and step outside. She would fill her lungs with the chilly air of the *piteraq*, the bitter wind that buffets the slopes of Greenland. Then this little Inuit girl with an African name would untie her two dogs before harnessing them to her sledge, scrunching the frozen snow below her feet as she walked. Plunging herself into the freezing winds, she would glide her sledge effortlessly between mountains of snow that were far taller than she was. She was heading for her secret place, a place where she knew she'd find a great many white seals. A place with a stunning view across an expanse of icy blue water.

Fatou's parents had given her a name coloured by sand and heat, by fire and the desert, even though she lived deep in the polar ice and cold. Fatou had seen photos of children with black skin. She looked nothing like them, with her pale complexion, her almond-shaped eyes and her coat with its furry hood. And yet this name suited her rather well.

"Apparently, the Fatous in Africa are all such chatter-boxes!" she heard her mother say. Which was the case with her too, here in Greenland. She was told that little girls over there had to travel many kilometres in search of water, or to go to school. Which was what she also did each day, with her dogs and her sledge. She might be a little Fatou who lived in the Arctic, but she was – first and foremost – one of the many Fatous of the world. One day she would go to Africa and meet her twin sisters. They would stroll along side by side, and she would show them photos of her dogs and her sledge. They would see that little girls called Fatou really can share thoughts and feelings, even if they come from very different walks of life.

Every summer morning, as she watched the sun refusing to set above the sea, Fatou promised herself she'd soon climb on board the only plane that shuttled back and forth between her frozen land and the rest of the globe. One day she'd go there too.

"For the time being you need to focus on the here and now, my darling," said her mother. "Greenland needs you. Put those dreams of flying away to the back of your mind. You're still not old enough to go running off abroad!" Fatou would listen with half an ear; then she'd go back to watching the seals and carry on dreaming, just as before.

Her parents had never left their island, with its extreme cold, but they did have a lot of books about geography and the natural world. They would spend time together, leafing through them page by page. You had to pay attention to books: they had once been trees, a long time ago, and now they were filled with knowledge. Fatou's parents thought Africa was more beautiful than anywhere else on earth, and so had chosen a name that evoked its arid landscapes for their little child from the North Pole. They'd shown her what the terrain of her given name was like: over there, the icebergs and snowy wastes of home were replaced by savannah and blazing dunes, by palm trees and lush jungles. Her mother had told her that in some parts of the desert the heat could exceed 60 degrees. Fatou couldn't even imagine what that would be like. Perhaps like the heat above the fire where her mother grilled the fish her father had caught? She would stroke the smooth, fragrant pages of the books with her supple, delicate hand. Soon she too would get on a plane, and fly off to discover the searing heat for herself.

Soon being right now. Hand in hand, walking barefoot beside a Fatou from Africa in the oppressive heat of the desert that makes you screw up your eyes. She explains how she's able to recognise the seals that she observes during the polar night which lasts all day:

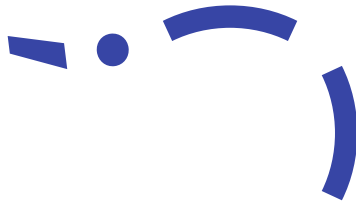
"You just have to look them in the eye and hold their attention," she explains. "From that moment on, you and the animal understand one another; you know who he is."

Fatou from Africa can do the same with gazelles. It's a gift the Fatous of the world all possess: being able to read the eyes of living creatures. The little girls exchange smiles;

they've always known each other in their dreams. They touch each other's hands, smooth and differently coloured. They are twinned in their hearts and twinned by their name.

There is so much to be shared across the whole planet! Fatou will soon be ten years old. The age at which you're considered grown-up in your tribe. The age at which you can take a plane to go and meet others. Her parents have been promising her this trip for a long time. She can feel her heart pounding with excitement at the prospect.

For a long time, Fatou's been going to bed early. To make the morning come faster, to make her tenth birthday come quicker, to make this meeting come sooner. A Fatou from here and a Fatou from there, sharing their worlds, linked by the tender bond of sharing the same name.



Angélique Thyssen



Angélique Thyssen was born in 1978 and lives in Brittany, in a large eco-friendly house in the heart of the countryside. She teaches in nursery and primary school, edits board games and has written for both children and adults. Her many interests include *pâtisserie*, ecology, travel and reading. Her first picture book, *Le Grand Secret de la Petite Souris*, illustrated by Xavière Devos and published by Éditions de l'Élan Vert, won her first prize at the Festival de la 1ère Œuvre de Littérature de Jeunesse in Bourg-en-Bresse in 2018.

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Vineet Lal



Vineet Lal is a literary translator from French to English, based in Scotland. He has degrees in French from The University of Edinburgh and Princeton University, and in Translating and Conference Interpreting from Heriot-Watt University. In 2010 he was awarded one of the first-ever Mentorships in Literary Translation by the British Centre for Literary Translation, and in 2011 published his first full-length translation, *Lacrimosa* by Régis Jauffret. His first translated children's book, *Panthera Tigris* by Sylvain Alzial and Héléne Rajcak, was published in October 2019 and his translation of *The Woman Who Didn't Grow Old* by Grégoire Delacourt is due in February 2020 from Weidenfeld & Nicolson. His literary interests include the French *nouveau roman*, childhood in French cinema and children's fiction, particularly the work of Michel Tournier, C.S. Lewis, Philip Pullman, Alan Garner and Tove Jansson. He has also interpreted for Francophone authors at the Edinburgh International Book Festival for many years – including Goncourt winners Alexis Jenni and Tahar Ben Jelloun, Michel Bussi and Annie Ernaux – and been a Trustee of Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature since 2013.

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