

# The Sun Reversed

*Written by Emilie Boguet*

Three defibrillator shocks. The body rises. My body. Subject to uncontrollable spasms. Plunged into nothingness. Disconnected from reality. As always. Except that this time, I am no longer in control. Total letting go. An incredible feeling of well-being. I wait. Three more defibrillator shocks. I sink. The voices fade around me. And again, I wait. Where is that damn tunnel and this light that we always hear about at the final instant ? Nothing. Just a huge black hole. No light, no God. No one reaching for me, finally. A moment of indescribable loneliness. I can hear voices around me. Hospital staff panics. In that gloomy and cold room, I see everything. I hear everything. Suddenly I remember my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. The day I realized that life is an incredible joke. And I laugh. I laugh endlessly.

I discovered my difference very early. The day before entering sixth grade. To celebrate the end of the school year, a sport meeting had been organized, thirty kilometers away from school. Until that day, my parents had preserved me by refusing to let me attend those kinds of events. They knew that the idea of leaving the house and the places I knew, really made me freak out. But on that day, my mother had decided it was time for me to “grow up” and “take my responsibilities”. My daily routine was completely screwed up. The day of the meeting, I lost all marks. I boarded the bus, doing my best to follow my classmates, scared to lose my way. During the trip, I counted each space between the white stripes on the side of the road, to know exactly how far I was from home. Knowing that on the highway, the bands separating the right lane and the emergency lane have a length of 39 meters and have spaces of 14 meters in between... From my seat, I counted 1,132 white bands. 2264 a return.

Once we got there, I was tossed from one place to another and finally reached a giant football field. There, hundreds of parents were screaming and encouraging their children. Screeches. Whistles. Crisps packets opening and closing. The howls of all those boys, having the time of their life. Noise, lots of noise ... Too much noise. A growing and permanent insecurity. And the ball, flying in all directions. There was such a vast sweep of perfectly manicured grass lying in front of me that I could, in my head, measure the exact area of the land by adding every inch of grass. I had to keep on counting. It would have been so unwise to stop. So I counted. I counted and counted again with this visceral need of making sure that my calculations were correct. Until I received the ball right in my face... I remember lying there, face against the ground, bewildered. Stopped in my favorite activity. Fucked up and lost. Drowning under stifling panic. And everyone around me, bent with laughter. Feeling like an alien, I just ran away, hands glued on my ears. I left

the event without anyone noticing. And when doing so, curiously I didn't think at all about the obsession I often have to lose my way. I was found in the evening, almost two kilometers away from the meeting, sitting on the street. I had a head injury. Everyone thought it was because of the impact with the ball. But in my race to escape, I had just banged my head against a wall, unable to handle the tensions that were eating me alive.

Since I was born, I have never been able to fall asleep easily at night. I just can't turn off my brains. I have to think. Permanently, which is quite ironic because my brains can crack up unexpectedly as well. This kind of thing often happens to me during the day. Especially when I am bored. At those moments, my eyes freeze and I can get up in the middle of the conversation, leaving the person I was supposedly talking to speechless. I do not realize when it happens. But I know I do that because my mother told me about it several times. At night, I can get up ten times in a row. With the light on, I walk around in my room for hours, lost and tormented. When I was younger, I always ended up going back to my bed before sunrise. Calmly, I would stare at the phosphorescent stars glued on the ceiling of my room, next to the solar system that I had made. At that time, I often wondered what it would be like to have a friend. I liked imagining distant planets, where there were maybe other weird boys like me. I didn't know why I wanted to have a friend. All my classmates had one or even several. And they often made fun of me because I was always alone. So I knew, somehow, that my situation was not normal. Then at night, I liked dreaming of a school where I would stop walking around the pillars of the courtyard so as to escape the crazy foot ball. A place where I would not have to give names to trees so as to feel that I was connected to the world somehow. I liked dreaming of teachers that would not scold me because I sometimes sing loudly without realizing it. I liked imagining another child, who would be just like me. A boy with whom I could talk about astronomy for hours.

Lying there in my hospital bed, diving into a heavy coma that seems to settle down, I realize that this is not my life. I was parachuted into this world by mistake, when I was born. Expected by my mother as the promised messiah, because she couldn't get pregnant... Unfortunately, I haven't managed to turn my birth into a miracle, even for my parents. When entering secondary school, I felt my loneliness even more. While my classmates were losing themselves in the game of adolescence and idiocy, I was reading philosophy books. Enclosed in a post-traumatic shock that I was not able to handle, I kept everything inside me : the rejection of others, the constant humiliation, the impossible reconciliation with the world. The misunderstanding of my family. My mother, who would often tell me, bluntly, that I am "full of contradictions". She doesn't even realize that she is not accurate enough, when making such a comment. Being "full of contradictions", it doesn't mean anything. It is a compliment but it is also an insult. I dislike inaccuracy so much. But I also hate pragmatism.

I know what my problem is. I do not understand social codes. When I found out about that, I became restless for weeks and months. At first, a revelation. A glimmer of hope in the dark tunnel of my existence. The possibility of becoming like other people, in the twinkling of an eye. From that moment, I spent a lot of time studying carefully all that was happening around me so as to be able to analyze my own reactions. And I did my best to immerse myself in every personality I had in front of me. I thought that doing that, I would be able to deal with all sorts of people and situations. I made a thousand attempts to do so. I really strove, throughout my years in secondary school, to do something I've always hated : looking like others.

The day I turned 16, my mother sent me to the bakery. Yet I was not in the mood for walking into shops. At that time, I had just discovered Hermann Hesse's "Demian". For me, a revolution. The awakening of the senses. A way of reaching the deeper self. The upheaval of all my convictions. Finally. I had then said, very confident, that philosophy could not answer the consumerist logic of this world... "I see, I buy, I swallow, I throw away". Having to go and buy bread while my readings confronted me with a dilemma that I could not handle... It was as futile as it was boring. When I entered the bakery that day, I just wanted to say "Hello" and run as fast as I could. So I made a huge effort, saying the ordinary fatal remark : "The weather's nice today !" Too late. Big smile on the baker's face. And me, standing there stupidly, caught in the throes of a banal situation from which I would not extricate myself. And how are you, young man ? As nice as he is polite... We don't see many like you, these days ! Politeness requires this kind of exchange. The only thing is... I do not see the point. When I meet people who are total strangers to me, I don't care about the complexities of their daily life : age, address, job, children, what they do on weekends... According to standards, these details are crucial because they allow you to understand others and their ideas better. For me, it's the opposite. First I want to know the profound ideas of people and then, I can try trusting them. Then I can hope to discuss their daily lives. Knowing that the baker has three children and two dogs. Really, I don't give a damn.

Speaking with that woman, I was only dying to ask this crucial question that had been burning in my mind for months : did she think that the translation of the book I was reading was sticking well to the original ? Certainly there were a few notes on each page. But still. I was always frustrated when reading foreign books, not being able to access the original language fully and directly. It seems to me that most word play cannot really be transcribed. And their translation is certainly 100% inadequate if one wants to understand the deep meaning of a masterpiece. When a text is crucial, it cannot be read in the "about". So, I started following intensive German courses so as to try and understand Hermann Hesse's book better. Just like two years earlier when I learned

English, because I was dying to reach the deeper meaning of Keats' poems. I just wanted to know if I was going in the right direction. I wanted some clarification on this point. The problem is that according to social codes, you cannot ask such questions to a complete stranger. No more than you can ask this woman what she thinks of the String Quartet in C major K465 by Mozart, that has been occupying all my thoughts for a year or so. I have no clue why but that's the way it is. This kind of evidence cannot be questioned. This world tends inexorably to the eradication of differences. The individual disappears, in favor of a community that just keeps getting lost in indifference.

I often feel that people are pointing an accusing finger towards me : the fact that I never speak at the right moment or that I do not understand hidden messages thrown at my face with impatience. Yet I like being accurate, focused and honest in everything I do. I analyze every situation perfectly. I am also loyal. Defects, in others' eyes. Because in life, people can only swear by what is socially acceptable. Playing football on Sundays, going to clubs on Saturday night, wearing clothes made of the latest fashion, watching stupid shows on TV every single day, that's socially acceptable. It is even socially wanted. Saying that I spend my evenings reading and writing, or working alone locked with my violin, it is simply unimaginable for most people. Other things are required, if you want to be "socially correct". The worst of them is lying. This code is not really obvious, so it took me years before understanding it. Lying is not an aberration, nowadays. It's a convenience. Lies have settled naturally among people who use them quite automatically and without scruples. For many, lying is as simple as saying "Hello". Nothing else matters than selling an image of what you are not but wished to be. For people like me, naive and unable to lie, it is a complete disaster. I know I am a keen observer, but... I always fall into the trap. For me, people's bad intentions are very difficult to admit. And I always end up terribly disappointed because of all those predictable attitudes, that I bury in a heartbreakin fog of hope.

When I feel really sick about all this, my mother tells me that maybe someone is waiting for me somewhere. A way of admitting her own failure, or the desire to prove to the world that she knows how to reassure her only child. Parental guilt, what a strange invention... Despite myself, I hear my mother's words. And if she was right, after all ? And if someone was waiting for me somewhere ? One thing is certain, I always wonder where the "others" are. People like me, I mean. Those people I've never met. Obviously, they are out there, wandering around. Lost in the mass... Like me. And no doubt these people have the feeling too, that they are on exile from themselves. As for me, I think I am some kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. During the day, I pretend. And when the night comes, I have to face what I did and I punish myself for daring not to be myself. Behaving exactly like others so as to satisfy a futile but crucial need of belonging to the world, without betraying myself... For me, it is just unbearable. Intolerable. Impossible to live with. It is like banging my head against the wall, like when I was 10.

Three defibrillator shocks. The last ones. And suddenly, the feeling that I was wrong. I want to go back, right now. None of this has happened. Instead of pursuing its rotation forward, Earth moves back abruptly. One minute. Two. Three... Here I am in the ambulance, my mother weeping at my side. Back home. Time slows down. I am in my bedroom, trying to swallow the tablets. I spit them all out, one by one. God, I took the whole thing... Knocks on the door. My mother screaming. Too bad for her. Too late for me. I can see my violin and my classical CDs on my bed. My books. A few by Nietzsche and another one on Isaac Newton. The tablets fly through the window. I open my room's door. I see my mother, frozen. A look of horror on her face. Seeing her like that, mouth open, I want to laugh. But laughter is out of place, when talking about suicide. I retreat to the kitchen and reach the courtyard of our house. I'm sitting on the bus. Here I am in college, standing next to the girl who rejected me, nastily. I watch her make faces at me and laugh in front of the other students who sneer stupidly. "You're dreaming, Sissi !" Actually, my name is Simon. But others have renamed me since sixth grade with this joyous nickname because I have "girl manners". Another disappointment. The ultimate. The night before, I had dreamed that this girl was kissing me. A real sign because I usually hate when people try to touch me. I just wanted to believe that this gesture, this tenderness could happen to me when I was awake... In reality, it's a slap I received right in the face. Nausea overwhelms me, suddenly. The idea of dying grabs my mind like a net closing around me. I shake my head to clear these black thoughts. I step back again, in a split second. I did not approach this girl to tell her that I love her in secret. I was not too unconscious to be true and sincere, as I have always been despite myself, since I was born.

My name is Jeanne. I met Simon in the psychiatric hospital. It was a beautiful spring day, when birds sing their promise of renewal and everything seems possible. Hearing the sound of a violin, I entered his room. He was standing there, playing the Concerto in E minor - opus 64, by Mendelssohn. My favorite. It was so sublime that I couldn't do anything but sit, breathless. Who would have thought that this young man, so talented, had tried to end his life a few weeks earlier... When Simon put his violin down on the table after playing the last note, he walked around his room several times at full speed, repeated tirelessly : "I don't give a shit. The sun will explode in 5 billion years. So I don't give a shit." Simon had just heard from the doctor that he was suffering from Asperger's syndrome. He was in the same state as I had been when hearing the same diagnosis the year before. A cataclysm, for those who hear this revelation. An indescribable anger, as the impression of having been cheated on for decades is unbearable. The end of everything.

Like me, Simon hadn't had many happy moments in life. He often compared happiness to a dying star. Fleeting moments barely noticeable, which you observe from a distance although they do not concern you directly. Scattered and isolated fragments in the sky, that can be extinguished at any time. When listening to Simon, I was thinking of a quote I had heard a few months earlier. "Autism is like a reversed sun. Its rays are directed inward." One day, when Simon would be

ready to hear it, I would share this thought with him. One day, I would help him understand that happiness comes with the encounters that we make. Like those stars, that eventually collide in the sky.