

LÉNA JOMAHÉ

LES OUBLIÉS

TOME 1 - DERNIERS JOURS

COMMENT RÉAGIRIEZ-VOUS SI VOUS DÉCOUVRIEZ QUE TOUT
CE QUE L'ON VOUS APPREND N'EST QUE MENSONGE ?



THE FORGOTTEN



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LÉNA JOMAHÉ

The Forgotten

(Novel)

"Unlike utopia, dystopia tells a story that takes place in an imaginary society that is difficult or impossible to live in, full of defects, and whose model must not be imitated".

L'INTERNAUTE

*To the one who passed on to me his passion for reading and
writing. To my grandfather.*

*What interests me is not the happiness of all men, but that of
each one.*

BORIS VIAN

Last Days

PROLOGUE

Sitting on the tree, I tear off another fruit, laughing. Above me, Simon and Aurore do the same. I bite in the peach; the sweet and sugary taste runs down my throat.

“You are so dirty!” exclaims Aurore, throwing her peach pit on my head. “Couldn’t you eat properly!”

I give her a big smile before biting again in the tender and tasty flesh.

I love accompanying my parents at their workplace, I’ve been doing it since I was little. At first, it did not cause any problem to Mister Gabe, the owner of the Gabe Plantation. We would climb into the trees, run through the rows of fruits and vegetables, sometimes his son would even join us. But for some years now, Simon, Aurore and I have been obligated to hide to not cause any problem to my family and the said son only give us haughty looks when we run into him during school trips.

I look around me. In the orchard, the vegetables extend as far as the eyes can see. It is besides the only time of the year where my parents allow us to come; when they gather peaches. Installed at the back of the plantation, on a tree out of sight of their boss, we stuff ourselves every morning before joining our classmates for many hours of swimming.

However, today is a particular day. We are the June 20th, school holidays have started yesterday and in occasion of tomorrow’s events, my parents will not work this afternoon. I know I should not react like that, but I don’t want to spend these few hours at home. Everyone will act as if nothing was happening, but the atmosphere is for sure going to be heavy.

Simon’s gaze catches mine. He smiles at me with tenderness before pouting. His second brother is the same age as Anaïs, my sister, so they both are participants at this year’s Raid.

The Raid.

At this evocation, my fist tightens on the fruit I’m still holding in my hand, my fingers cracking its skin to sink into the flesh. I still can’t understand this system of Raid. Why couldn’t we choose by ourselves what we want to do?

Just like in the Ancient World. According to our lessons, at that time, children would go to school, take the studies they wanted to, and then practice a profession that would suit them. But today, everything is different.

With my gaze lost on my parents picking fruits, I wonder if this is what they would have chosen if they had a choice. Wouldn't they rather do any other profession? Live in another city? I shake my head as Aurore places her hand on my arm.

"I know what you're thinking about honey, but you know we don't have a choice. You have to stop torturing yourself with all that."

I shrug my shoulders. I hate hearing this kind of reasoning. Aurore may be my best friend, but I cannot tolerate such talk. Why accept the Raids without having a word to say about it? The answer is imposing itself to me; by fear of exclusion. I catch myself hating this Ancient World who destroyed everything and led us here. If only things had happened differently.

Raids appeared the day after World War IV, which took place in the year 2048 of the old era. At that time, the global economy was to the edge of explosion. Disputes between countries had escalated and war had become inevitable. It went on for only a few weeks but had been devastating. Nuclear weapons ravaged the planet and made billions of deaths. When there was no one to fight left and no more economy to straighten out, the war stopped, leaving huge scars behind it. Survivors from all over the world united to form the New Mondial Order (the N.M.O). They gathered under domes protecting them from external pollution. To mark the break with the Old World, our leaders decided to start again from year 0, and so, the year that followed the end of the war was considered as the year 1.

Our history books call the after-war period « The Chaos ». The world cruelly missed adults, most of them having died in the war. To procure manpower, and thinking heads, the most influential set up Raids. For ten years, teenagers would be kidnapped to take tests to be directed to a profession or a formation. After that, the N.M.O. legalized Raids, making obligatory the tests for every sixteen years old teenagers. The term of Raids stayed; even though there is no kidnapping anymore, strictly speaking.

The more qualified go to institutes to be formed, becoming the new elite or new bosses; they're the Great. The less qualified, the Workers, see themselves getting an imposed job according to their aptitudes and are sent to the city corresponding to the profession they will exercise their whole life. The third category, the Forgotten, is the most recent, it has only existed for 20 years... we don't know anything about them. They disappear at the end of the tests and their family can't get in touch with them ever again. According to some saying, they would also be placed in institutes but under high protection and would never get out of them.

My mom calls out for us, pulling me out of my thoughts.

"We're going home kids. Take the shortcut through the fields and the forest. We meet at home."

I lift my head to the sky. The sun is already high. It must not be far from noon. Simon and Aurore go down first, then Simon reaches out to help me. I growl but accept his help. If only life finally decided itself to make me grow a little. He puts me down, in front of my mom, who gives me a little forced smile. Her features are drawn. Everything in the way she's standing, the way she looks at us, screams her sadness facing tomorrow's events. A little behind her, I see that my father does not look better. They put on a brave face in front of my sister since several weeks, but they don't realize how much they let their dismay appear the rest of the time. I smile back at her, trying to hide my feelings in the bottom of my heart. Between my parents who are sad to let Anaïs leave, and her who's afraid of the tests' results, it's been almost two months that I spend my time reassuring one and the other while hiding my own fears and anxiety.

"See you later, mom. We'll be quick. I promise."

She nods before turning her back to me and leaving with my dad towards the entrance of the plantation to receive their work order. This voucher, distributed every working day, is used to eat, dress and get everything a Worker family can need. Which means, not a lot.

The only thing I would really like to have is a flyshut . To be able to move and, why not, go visit other cities of the New World. But my parents would have to save, at the very least, one year of work orders to be able to consider buying a used one.

Simon and I take the road dragging our feet. Aurore, as usual, tries to entertain us. She hates seeing us sad, but today, all her jokes fall flat. Finally, she sighs and stays silent. We cross the wood which leads to the lake, in silence. While we haven't reached it yet, the first cries of teenagers playing in the water reach us.

I envy them being here today. I would also have liked to end the day like that; having fun with my friends and swimming for a long time under the sun's warmth. Aurore takes my hand as we arrive to the shore. I now she wants the same thing I want, but I also know she wouldn't come without us: her blond half and her brown half. Simon turns towards us.

"Promise me that, in two years, we'll come and spend our June 20th here. I don't want to spend the day before my Raid at home, waiting and seeing my parents mope."

Aurore applauds his words.

"What a great idea! Act as if nothing was happening."

She takes back my hand, hopping.

"Come on Eléa, say you agree! If we're not all three for that last day, it's not going to be the same!"

I smile at them, looking at them in turn.

"Then it's a deal?"

They nod at the same timer, waiting for my answer.

"Great. I agree a hundred percent. That's a great idea. Act as if nothing was happening until the end. "

"Inseparables' words?" asks Simon

"Inseparables' words!" we laugh.

Our hearts a little lighter, we resume our journey towards Orange trees street.

When I arrive home, I run into Lana who comes out with red and swollen eyes. Lana is Anaïs' best friend. It's been almost ten years since they know each other, and they spend a lot of time together. I hug her.

"You'll see, I'm sure everything will be fine," I try to reassure her.

She pursues her lips, nodding, then turns her back on me to continue her way without adding a word.

In the house, the ground floor is empty. My parents are not home yet and apparently, Anaïs took refuge upstairs. I climb the stairs two by two and let the sobs lead me. I find her seated on the ground, in the bathroom, a toiletry bag in her hands. I kneel next to her, softly take the bag and hug her.

"Shhhhhhh...," I whisper. "Calm down."

She sniffles against my shoulder and her body starts trembling again under the assault of another burst of tears. I stroke her hair, like I did many times these last days, while rocking her tenderly.

"Anaïs... calm down please. You'll end up making me cry too."

During long minutes, I let her discharge her sadness without adding anything else. My heart is in pieces, and I have to grit my teeth so as not to break down in tears too. I can't break, not now, we will see tomorrow, once she'll be in the flyshut and will disappear at the street corner. Little by little, her hiccups become less frequent, and the tears end up drying up. I slowly stand back up to soak a glove with ice water and place it over her eyes.

"Mom and dad will not be long, and they are feeling miserable enough by themselves, better not see them in your state."

She nods, sniffles and swallows with difficulty.

"I'm so scared," she sighs.

I growl.

"Anaïs... we had this conversation a thousand times. Seriously, what are you afraid of? You're strong and smart. The N.M.O. would be really dumb to place anywhere but a Great's institute!"

She shrugs her shoulders, pressing the glove against her eyes to massage them.

"I don't know, Eléa. What intelligence level is necessary to enter a Great's institute? We don't know that!"

I sigh and seat down in my turn against the bathtub.

"Anaïs. You saw a lot of people leaving before you. You know some of them who are in institute right now. You're smarter than most of them!"

I voluntarily do not speak about the Forgotten. It will always be in our mind, no matter what.

She strokes her face a last time before putting her hands down and tossing the washcloth in the sink. Her eyes are still a little red, but at least they are not swollen. We can't do better anyways.

"I don't want to be a Worker and leave far away from home. To be a Great, yes... I can accept living far away from you, but to be a Worker..."

She doesn't finish her sentence and I see her eyes tear up again. I get up, take her hand and pull her up to make her on her feet.

"Okay, it's enough. Come!"

I drag her behind me until we reach her bedroom. There are clothes everywhere: on the bed, on her desk, on the ground, it's like a storm blew everywhere and devastated everything. Of course, her wardrobe is empty. I turn towards my sister, frowning.

"What did you try to do, exactly?"

She gives me a small sad smile.

"My suitcase."

I raise my arms.

“You really want to take all of this?” I take her empty bag in one hand, push a pile of clothes off the bed to put the bag on it. I inspect the clothes with an empty look, before turning back to her, sighing. “Do you have any idea of what you have to bring?”

She shakes her head and let herself fall next to the bag.

“No... I have no idea. I was supposed to do it with mom.”

I seat next to her, crossing my arms.

“I ran into Lana in front of the house,” I end up saying.

She chews a moment on her lips before nodding.

“She didn’t seem in a better state than you.”

She shrugs her shoulders.

“You meet each other here for the departure”?

She shakes her head.

“No. She wants to stay with her parents.”

On the ground floor, the entrance door slams. We heard steps noises in the stairs, my mom appears on the doorstep of the bedroom. Her eyes are as red as my sister’s but both of them act as if they saw nothing. Her look lands on us, the bag, then the pile of clothes and a smile ends up on her lips.

“You’re trying to do your suitcase?”

My sister nods, pouting. My mom, whose smile widens, stares at the clothes covering the bedroom’s floor. Suddenly, she goes into a nervous and uncontrollable laugh. My lips widen and, soon enough, I find myself laughing for no reason. My sister, who examines us at first as if we were crazy, ends up giving up and her laugh joins ours.

“Is everything okay up there?” exclaims my dad from the bottom of the stairs.

Far from calming us, his question makes fortify our hilarity, and we are unable to answer him. My eyes cry, my stomach hurts, but I can’t stop myself from laughing. My dad sticks his head in the doorway, looking worried, surprised and then, confused.

“Okay, I’m going to leave you.”

His voice makes us laugh again and it takes us long minutes to manage to control ourselves. Little by little, their laughs transform themselves, immediately stopping mine. When I leave the room to leave them alone, they are in each other’s arms, in tears.

That night, we eat dinner almost in silence. The only words exchanged are between my parents and essentially concern work and the beautiful harvest of peaches the Gabe Plantation will do this year.

“Provided that the inseparables don’t eat everything,” my father says to my attention.

I smile, but it is fake. My mom tries: “Maybe that, thanks to the good production of this year, Mister Gabe will give us bonus work orders just like he usually does. We will save them so that you can visit your sister if she’s not too far.”

Anaïs snuffles and her lower lip trembles. We both know that the only chance we have to see each other in the next two years, is for her to be a Worker in New Paris. All the other destinations will condemn us to wait until she finishes her formation, or she has, or me for that matter, enough work orders to get a ticket on one of the flyshuts between domes.

I take her hand under the table and press it tenderly. She takes a deep breath and take another portion of mashed potatoes drowned in meat and chestnuts juice.

After dinner, we go into the living room. When 8 p.m. rings, the television turns on, on the news of the N.M.O. The twenty minutes of the emission are essentially consecrated to the Raid. The government reminds us how necessary it is while pointing the history of the Ancient World. I know this speech by heart. By dint of hearing it at school, on the television news, at home, I could recite it from memory.

The Great Governor expresses himself, to bring his support and wish good luck to the concerned teenagers. For the first time since I’m old enough to watch the news, his son accompanies him the night of the declaration of the RAid. Unlike his father, we don’t see him often, but, every time we do, his beauty amazes me. He has eyes and a look that pierce through you. I’m pretty sure that all the girls in his school are crazy about him and that he loves it. I blush to think of such things, while gritting my teeth in front of this boy who’s staring at the camera so confidently.

“Oh, but it’s true that the son of the Great Governor is your age, Anaïs!” exclaims mom. “He will also have to say goodbye to his parents tomorrow.”

I roll my eyes up. As if his father would let his son go away from him! The news end on the traditional motto of the N.M.O: Order, Obedience, Security. Three words which horrify me. The tv turns off. My parents and us stay another hour up, talking, or not, before going back in our rooms. As I’m about to go to bed, someone knocks at my door. I don’t even the time to answer that the door half-opens.

“Eléa, can I sleep with you?”

Anaïs is standing on the doorway in nightgown. I nod, smiling.

“Come here. Who knows when we’ll be able to sleep in the same bed again!”

Each of us lay down on a side of the bed and try to find a difficult sleep.

After a complicated night, mom comes to wake us up at the stroke of nine-thirty in the morning. It's exceptional from her, since she hates that we sleep in. As I look at the time on my alarm clock, I also think to myself that it must be a while that she wants to come and wake us up.

There's only an hour and thirty minutes left until the flyshut comes to get my sister.

We quickly go downstairs for breakfast. My parents look awful and I have a hard time swallowing anything. Anaïs turns her spoon in her tea without taking any drop. My father walks behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders.

"Everything will be okay sweetheart. And remember that, no matter what happens, we will be proud of you."

She nods, lowering her head. Her left hand resting on her knee shakes.

"Of course..." says mom with a fake cheerful tone. "Look at your father and me! We're delighted by our Raid and the choice that was made for us. If we didn't both land here, we would have never met each other."

My mom grew up in the dome of New York meanwhile my dad is from New Paris, which he never left.

"And you would never have been born, both of you," concludes my dad, placing a kiss on Anaïs' forehead.

I wince and push back my bowl and plate; I definitely lost my appetite.

I then go upstairs to help Anaïs get her things down and we sit together in the living room, waiting for the time to come. Every minute that passes seems to sink deeper in my stomach. The tears I promised myself not to let fall are about to escape. My sister. My big sister will leave us. My sister who looks like me so much that everyone thinks we're twins.

When my tablet beeps to alert me of a new message, I am so relieved that something momentarily distracts me that I literally jump on it. It's a message from Aurore.

Aurore: Hi my brown half!
Simon is with me, we'd like to come say goodbye to Anaïs,
But I don't know if it a problem or no?

June 21st 248 at 10:41 a.m.

Anaïs, who's reading above my shoulder, smiles.

"Tell them to come. It will make me happy to see the inseparables one last time before leaving." She chokes on the last words and looks away. My mom looks at me, interrogative.

"Simon and Aurore ask to come to say goodbye to Anaïs."

"That's what I understood." She gives me a pale smile. "Tell them to come. It's not like they haven't been a part of the family for fourteen years."

I thank her with a look before answering to Aurore.

Eléa: My parents and Anaïs are okay with it. Come quick, it's stuffy in here!
June 21st 248 at 10:44 a.m.

I barely pressed « sent » that someone knocks at the door. I put my tablet in the back pocket of my shorts and run towards the entrance to let my friends in. Aurore immediately hugs me.

"How are you?" she whispers.

I shrug my shoulders.

"It's hard. I didn't want to cry, but just before your text I wasn't far from it. Again, you know me so well that you knew I would need you both."

She looks at me knowingly before walking into the house to greet my parents. Simon presses me in turn against his chest and we follow Aurore. Between the outpouring of the hellos and goodbyes, the time passes quickly. And soon enough, too soon, my father calls us out.

"Anaïs, it's time, dear."

I lift my head to the clock. 10:56. The flyshut arrives in four minutes. A lump appears in the back of my throat and in my stomach. Black stains dance in front of my eyes. My sister will leave.

My dad takes the bag, I grab Anaïs by an arm, my mom grabs her on the other side, and we go out in the driveway. The flyshut is already at the beginning of the street. It slowly slips down at fifty centimeters away from the ground.

We advance to the sidewalk. Other families are at the edge, waiting. Everyone kisses, hugs each other. We hear sobs, sighs. On their doorway, Aurore's parents call us out and give us a little sign. Caroline, her mother, has red eyes and dabs them with a tissue. The flyshut arrives in front of us. It stops, lands on the ground, the door opens. An agent gets down, a list in his hand.

"Who leaves today?" he asks us.

My sister lifts a trembling hand.

"Good. Approach. Your last name, first name and date of birth, please."

She takes a few steps towards him.

"Anaïs..." Her voice breaks, she clears her throat before starting again. "Anaïs Gilban, I was born on January 17th 232."

The agent looks it up on his list before stopping on my sister's name and checking the little box next to hers.

"Good, say goodbye, take your things and climb in the flyshut."

I find him cold, cruel, indifferent. He looks at us with no emotions. As if all that was nothing. Anaïs comes towards me and hugs me.

"I'll send you a Com' tonight to tell you where I am", she whispers.

A knot in my throat, I nod along. She puts a hand on my cheek.

"Take care, and more importantly, have fun," she concludes.

I smile at her. She takes a step back, but I don't want to let her go. I catch her by the hand to hug her again.

"I love you Anaïs," I whisper, sobbing.

She pinches her trembling lips before answering.

"I love you too, little sister."

I can no longer hold my promise and I burst into tears, Anaïs leaves me in Aurore's arms to step towards my parents. My dad hugs her for a long time. His features are drawn, but he remains worthy. My mom bursts into tears the second my sister turns towards her. They hang on to each other, their bodies shaking with sobs, for many seconds. Too many apparently for the agent.

"We got to go now, Miss Gilban. You're not the only one to leave today."

My sister pulls away from my mother's embrace, she nods, sniffing and wiping her tears. She places a last kiss on mom's cheek; grabs her bag and climbs into the flyshut. The doors close, the flyshut takes off from the ground, my tears flow. Her hand resting on the flyshut's window, Anaïs waves us goodbye. Then the flyshut moves forward, too fast, to end up disappearing at the corner of the street.

CLARA

NEW NEW YORK June, 20th 248

GABRIEL : *Hi my Clara. Tonight, I can only think of you. I would have loved to come and say goodbye to you today. Unfortunately, it was not possible. I leave tomorrow for my Raid. I apprehend a little, I hope everything will be okay. I'll miss you so much. I know you know it already, but I wanted to tell you again; I love you. I hope I'll be able to come back during the next two years to give you a surprise visit. Take care of you, be kind.
Kisses.*

June, 20th, 248 8 h 30 p.m

I stop my tablet, with tears in my eyes. Gabriel leaves tomorrow. My heart bleeds. I would have liked to say goodbye to him in person. By writing, the words don't want to come out.

Tomorrow... tomorrow, it's promised, when they will have a sense again, I'll send him a message.

When I turn off the lights this night, I can't put myself into sleep. I cry during many hours, my head buried in my pillow so that my mom doesn't hear me.

How will I survive two years without him?

CHAPITRE 1

I go out of the water and shake my head to take off the brown curls plastered on my cheeks. Behind me, drowned in the cries of other teenagers having fun, I hear Aurore and Simon splashing each other, laughing. We're the June 20th of the year 250, it's the first day of the holidays and, just like every year, we made a point of celebrating it by picnicking by the lake. The day is coming to an end, the sun goes down on the horizon, the place is beautiful. The lake is so big that I can't even see the other shore. It is bordered by lush trees, the grass mat surrounding it is filled with flowers of all kind of colors. I feel a pinch in my heart as I think that, in a past, lots of animals were living here freely. Today, there's none left.

I lay down on my towel and stare at the azure sky above me: we're the June 20th and I'm sixteen years old like all my friends. I think about this same day last year, we were then fifteen years old, and everything was different. Even if we knew a countdown was starting for us, the day had been amazing and the holidays that followed it, magic. As if it was the last ones... It was the last ones!

I close my eyes and start thinking again about all these years, all this vacations we spent here. The giggles, the hide-and-seek games in the woods, the bike rides by the lake shores, the water battles: as long as I can remember, Aurore and Simon have always been here, with me. I feel my throat tightening and stand back up, shaking my head. I look around me, we're the only ones our age. All the other teenagers are fifteen years old or less. Since we arrived this morning, they have been giving us little sidelong glances. If the others preferred staying with their families, Aurore, Simon and I promised ourselves to do as usual... until the last moment.

"Eléa, what are you doing?" shouts Aurore, putting me out of my daydream.

"I enjoy the sun before it goes down!"

She gets out of the water with Simon and they join me on their towels.

Aurore is my best friend, we know each other since our births, we're only a few days apart and our parents are neighbors, so we practically grew up together. She's the most beautiful and smart girl I ever met. She's tall, slender, her fiery hair gives depth to her emerald eyes and her milky skin is flawless, without spots or scars. It must be said that she is very careful about it, and regularly covers her body with aloe-based cream, which her mother prepares herself, to protect her from the sun. The only rivalry we had was on the scholar plan, but she always ended up winning.

My eyes go to Simon, my best friend. Aurore and I met him in our first years of school, and we immediately adopted him. He is tall, blonde, with brown eyes, and, recently, a certain musculature started to appear on his body, he's not childish anymore. He was far from being the dumbest in school, even if, most of the time, he was only doing his minimum.

Our friends took the habit of calling us the inseparables, Aurore the redhead, Simon the blonde, and me, Eléa, the brunette with midnight blue eyes. We've always been in the same class; we spent all our breaks and vacations together. We always shared everything; joys as well as sorrows and doubts. They're my halves.

However, we're very different on the physic plan. I am smaller than Aurore and skinnier too. Where my best friend is starting to look like a young woman, I still look fourteen. But I don't complain. Rather sporty, my height and weight are a definite advantage in many situations.

Simon sighs and looks at us.

"What do we do now? You want to go home?"

"Wait a little!" answers Aurore. "The sun is only starting to go down, we still have time."

"Yes, but my parents are throwing a party with all my family for the occasion, I don't want to make them wait too long."

"Same for me," I say. "Even Anaïs came!"

Aurore turns towards me.

"What? Your sister is here, and you didn't tell me anything!"

I sigh.

"I miss her so much since she left that I don't specially like to share our conversations, and, it's not like I could have hid her, you would have ended up running into her. She was supposed to arrive this morning, I assumed she would have come swimming with us."

Anaïs... the last time I saw her, it was two years ago, the year of her sixteen years old. June 21st. Thinking about her reminds me of tomorrow, our June 21st, and I see in my friends' eyes that they followed the same reasoning.

“Come on,” I say, clapping my hands. “Let’s put our things together and go home. Aurore, if you want to, come home a moment, you could see Anaïs and stupefy her with questions about her life in New Tokyo!

“I could also ask her questions about...”

“No, you know they don’t talk about it,” I interrupt her. “That nobody ever talks about it. Today less than any other day.”

“And, to say what?” add Simon. “Anaïs is a part of the Greats now, and everything she dealt with those two last years is confidential. She took the oath.”

“I know,” says Aurore, pouting. “But I want to learn so more about it. I hate this non-knowledge that hangs over us!”

I take her hands with tenderness.

“We’re all there, Aurore! We’re all scared!”

Simon put his arm around her shoulders.

“Yes and, we’ll be together: the inseparable trio. Nothing will happen to us. Us three, we’re invincible! Remember all these battles we won at school.”

Aurore looks at him and a little smile draws itself on her face. She stands on tiptoe and plant a peck on his cheek. Then she leans towards me and hugs me.

“You’re right, my halves, we’re inseparable and nothing can happen to us. Come on. It’s time to face the pain of my parents.”

Each of us finish to pack our things in silence, then we ride our bikes. The return is calm, we’re lost in our thoughts. I take this opportunity to let my gaze wander over our neighborhood; the place I know best, where I grew up, where my friends and I had such a great time.

New Paris. The city is not exactly situated where the Paris from the past was, but rather on its periphery and is totally different from the ancient one. Modest in size, it consists exclusively of houses. Larger buildings belong to the government and to plantations owners. All the districts are planted with trees and flowers. The streets are clean. Nothing sticks out.

We put our feet on the ground in front of Simon’s house, the first one of Orange trees street. Many flyshuts are parked in front of it. His parents effectively invited his whole family. We didn’t even stop yet that his mother opens the door.

“Simon! You’re finally here, it’s already been an hour since everyone arrived!”

Her eyes are red, and she holds a tissue. This evening is not going to be easy. Aurore and I embrace Simon, each on a cheek, and I take him in my arms for a moment, whispering to him:

“See you tomorrow, Simon, greet your parents for me, and tell them I hope to see them soon. Tell your mother I’m going to miss her cookies!”

When I step back, I have tears in my eyes, and Simon too. When Aurore steps towards him, her eyes also sparkle more than usual. We promised each other not to cry and to be strong... so we’re not going to start now.

I take a deep breath and get back on my bike. Aurore does the same and Simon turns towards us a last time.

“See you tomorrow, my halves, see you tomorrow for our big day!”

Aurore and I continue in silence until the numbers 43 and 44 of Orange trees street. I throw my bike on the grass in front of my house and run in my friend’s arms.

“See you tomorrow, Aurore! Promise me to be strong tonight! Promise me not to break.”

“I promise, Eléa. I can’t cry in front of them anyways.” I hear her voice tremble on her last words. Then she continues. “I’m their only child! It’ll be horrible!”

“I know sweetheart,” I say, stroking her hair. “I know, but everything is going to be okay, you’ll see! You’re pretty and smart, everything can only go well.”

She takes a deep breath, steps back and holds my hands.

“And you, are you going to be okay?”

I make an evasive gesture to sweep away her worries.

“Pfff! You know, I’m sure that the conversations are going to turn around Anaïs’ life. Anaïs the new Great, Anaïs the first Great of the family, Anaïs sent to New Tokyo to work on nanotechnologies! I’m not even going to have the time to think about all that!”

“Eléa, look at me!” I lift my head to my friend and our eyes meet. “You’re not dumber than your sister! There is no reason for your future to be different from hers! Soon enough, your parents will have twice more reasons to be proud.”

I hug her a last time then step back, decided.

“Thanks, Aurore, thank you for being my friend, thank you for being my half! See you tomorrow for our big day.”

She kisses me on the cheek and, when she stands up, exclaims:

“See you tomorrow for the Raid!”

Tomorrow, June 21st.

World day of the Raid.