

C. A. Saltoris

Face
of the immortal



FACE OF THE IMMORTAL
STORIES BLOWN IN THE WIND



C. A. SALTORIS



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FACE OF THE IMMORTAL



The Lady's interior was as gloomy as her own. The stone walls muffled the lively sounds of the world outside. Her footsteps echoed through centuries of sin and penance. The brittle saints and martyrs cast long, formless shadows in the twilight as the last rays of sunlight streamed through the cathedral's vast pink glass mosaics. They looked at her, judged her. No doubt they intended to force her to her knees, to beg forgiveness for what she was about to do. Not here, their fixed eyes said. Not in our house. It was as if nothing had ever happened in their home that did not shame the Lord.

It wandered about unhurriedly. There would be no questions from any living soul. Her fingers trembled as she felt the thick columns of the imposing building. She watched it with reverence, trying to engrave it in her memory. Would there be such places where she would go? Were there places at all? She was about to find out.

The long wooden benches were cold. Cold like the ground beneath her bare feet. Cold like the statues all around her that seemed to come to life as the hours went by. High flames from

hundreds of candles guided her. The air was thick with the smell of wax and smoke. The bell called Emmanuel and his brothers rang out ominously, the sound stretching to the curves of the vast ceiling. They filled the silence with their own accusations. The ominous cries of the immortals pierced her ears and tightened her throat, trying to stop her. She took a deep breath.

Lightly, almost as if they had no weight to carry, her legs carried her to the top of the spiral staircase. The mercy of the immortals, she thought wryly. She tattooed bitterness on her face in the form of a sad smile.

The summer breeze embraced her as she reached the tower. For the last time. Her strength vanished for a moment. Against gravity, her blood rushed. Her lips trembled.

Up here, the air smelled of crêpes and wine; a trap set by her instinct for survival. A single tear rolled down her pale skin.

She put one foot on the wall. Her time had come.

"Alain is coming home a little bit more determined every day. He has dreams," a man nearby said quietly.

She climbed. Her hand slipped. She held on to the rock, her eyes glued to his cliff. Her opaque cheeks caught fire, her pupils shrank, her breathing grew stronger, her heart wilder.

She was afraid to turn her head in his direction. She didn't know whether to feel embarrassment or hatred. Someone was interfering with the moment she had so carefully planned. Someone was taking away her last chance to do something important. Nothing was granted to her, not even a dignified death. But whoever that someone was, he knew Alain, the abused boy who wanted to leave school. She didn't allow it.

She hesitated.

"Today he told his mother that he wanted to be a doctor after being a poet. He went on. She smiled involuntarily, her single tear no longer alone." "He said that if he tried long and hard enough, he

could be anything he wanted to be. You taught him that. Your friendship means so much to him."

"I'm not his friend, I just..."

"Oh, yes, you are. The only friend he ever had, Caroline."

People never called her by name. It did her good to hear it. It was like she was an individual.

"The one-eyed stray you feed will not starve when you are gone... but how good it is to have someone to look after you." She trembled. He went on. "The gratitude of the wretched is a far greater reward than the attention of those who pretend to have what you think you need. Free will will be granted to you as well, but how sad it is to see the good ones give up on giving their best to this world because they don't realize their own worth. No one said it would be easy, but no one ever said it couldn't be beautiful... for everyone in their own way."

Then he fell silent.

The light show began on the famous metal tower in front of her. It seemed new, though she had seen it dozens of times before. Sparkier. Celestial.

Slowly she moved away. Alain and the dog needed her. The misfortune that had brought them together was their bond.

Her chest was filled with an undefined warmth. Some would call that love.

Caroline still had a sense of the man's presence. She turned to him in a gesture of thanks, a sign of her understanding. She wanted to read the kindness in his face and imprint it on her memory, so that she would be able to call it back to her consciousness every time she felt weak. But there was no one there. There was also no sound of footsteps that would be an indication of his presence.

She looked up and smiled. An angel, she thought.

The sky was permanently tinted. Amber gave way to amethyst, which turned to sapphire. The world was so colorful, it made her cry. For the first time, in joy.

Overtaken by feelings she had never known before, she was able to take in everything around her. Beside her, on the wall, was a statue, a hideous creature with the grotesque face of a demon, huge cracked stone wings and sharp teeth. The gargoyle had not been there when she reached the tower. She remembered that well.

She looked into its eyes: they were alive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C. A. Saltoris writes beautiful and dark tales, like her soul.



