**Name and surname: Carlos Andrés Vallejo**

Genre:short story

Age: 66

Country: Spain

EBU National Member: Spanish National Organization of the Blind

Number of words: 1014

**TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER**

Today, with just my thoughts to keep me company, I return to my parents’ and my grandparents’ village…to bury myself away for three days in the hope of rising again on the third day and re-joining with renewed spirit the stressful working life the system has devised in this ‘global village’ we live in.

The village, just as small as Coupvray and on the slopes leading up to a hill, is so quiet that I barely meet anyone to wish ‘good morning’ to as I go through it to reach my house, in the lower part of the village. The house has two storeys, a gable roof, a fireplace, a small front garden and a garage at the back. Although from the outside anyone who has visited Louis Braille’s home may think it is similar, inside it’s been nicely restored and is well equipped in line, more or less, with modern standards, while still retaining some old-style nooks and crannies full of memories.

It’s a lovely day; spring has taken over so, once I had parked the LB-1809, left my luggage in my room and had a cursory glance around the house, I felt like going for an aimless stroll around the village and the surrounding area so that, with the windows of my feelings wide open, the taste of fresh water from the old fountain could come in, so that I could enjoy the beautiful view of the village and surroundings from the cross (symbol of blessings for the fields), smell the life-giving aroma of plants, flowers, trees and the damp, fresh grass superimposed on top, listen to the chirping and singing of the birds in flight or resting - God knows what they are saying -, and hear the incredible clattering of the storks.

Back in the village, after having paid my greetings to a couple of dogs whose bark was worse than their bite, a few cows (from a distance, just in case), and a few old men walking with their heads bowed, dragging their feet and memories (there are no sheep or hens left), I find myself in front of the two schools; the boys’ school and the girls’ school, both practically derelict…those schools my parents attended a lifetime ago now.

Following an impulse brought about, I suppose, by some idea wrapped up in a sudden outburst of filial love, I take out my cutting-edge technological device and check to see what Google, the Doctor Know-it-all of cyberspace, says about ‘Louis Braille 1818’.

Yes, it’s found something - I can read ‘1818, Louis Braille attends school in Coupvray with sighted classmates. He is pupil number 10 on the list of students.’

I can imagine him there, nine years old and with no way of reading or writing, making the most of his memory like a little bird, filling his craw with pieces of culture. What a dark future lay ahead of him, in spite of the goodwill of his family, classmates and teacher. But what if I turn to Doctor Know-it-all again and I ask him to look for ‘Louis Braille 1819’?

Let’s see, let’s see…there’s also some information:

15th February 1819. Louis Braille joined the school for young blind people in Paris.

Maybe the future wasn’t so dark after all.

I walk past the schools, close to my house, and as I get closer a voice I know perfectly well starts to whisper constantly in my ear: “Go on, go up to the loft…go on, go up to the loft.”

I ignore the voice for the time being because I feel like having a glass of wine and reliving, at the same time and thanks to Isaac Asimov, readings and first-hand testimonies of the vicissitudes of an imaginary two-hundred-year old blind man. So I open a bottle of wine (from the Coupvray region, I believe) and toast, in silence, Louis Braille and the six magic dots which have given me so much, although I can see.

After finishing my drink and refilling the glass three-quarters full, I take heed of the voice and go up to the loft, where I enter just like Marcelino Pan y Vino (child star of a heart-warming story by José María Sánchez-Silva), with a firm grip on my glass to make sure I don’t spill a drop.

There is no big crucifix in the loft, nor even a table, but there is an armchair where I take a seat, resting the glass of wine on top of the large trunk to the right. I close my eyes and open my ears, and between sips of the tasty beverage I can hear the echo of two familiar voices who communicate through me.

“What are you doing?”

“Writing a letter to a friend from school.”

“With that awl?”

“It’s called a stylus. Look - in these rectangles, where there’s room for six dots, the letters appear through the different combinations of dots. If you turn the paper over…see? We can read them with our fingers.”

“Is it very difficult to learn?”

“No.”

“Can you teach me?”

Of course I can, but why do you want to learn?”

“To write letters to you when you’re at school.”

“I’ll write out the alphabet for you now, I’ll teach you a few things, and you’ll see how easy it is. And you don’t have to read it with your fingers, which is the toughest part.”

“Just a second…let me get a pencil to…”

“Be quiet, be quiet please”, I interject, joining the conversations, “I want to talk now”.

She was twelve and he was thirteen. From that blessed summer on, the slate, the stylus and the thick paper went from home to home - during the holidays it was in his home, and during school-time it was in her house. And here, in this big trunk whose lid I’m lifting now, beside the eight braille volumes of the illustrious tales of the Brothers Grimm he read to her, rest that slate, that stylus and those letters written by him, my father, and her, my mother.