

THE HORSE.

There is a path, no, many paths, leading through the woods. Maybe it's actually just a park and not the woods, because despite its size it's located in the midst of the city. The paths are lit by street lights, and in the summer it's a popular area for recreation. On warm, sunny days its crowded with families going for a walk, joggers, bicyclists, and people who are taking their dogs out. Still, even then, it doesn't feel like a park but rather an ancient forest, straight from a fairy-tale. The trees are old and sincere, standing irregularly, with every single one of them maintaining a specific, individual character despite the tight clusters they form. The bushes and shrubs gather wild and freely underneath them, and only every once in a while do they open up to allow the sight of mossy arcane rocks. The whole forest seems to form an alliance in order to guard its secrets from the unaware passers-by. These intruders are bound to stay on the paths. They can cut aisles of civilization through the forest, but nevertheless are unable to trespass.

But right now, in the nighttime and deepest winter, all the paths -and also this path in front of him- are empty, and the dark air swallows most of the forest around. Only the outline of the closest trees remain there, gray on gray and halfway dissolving into the mist that lingers between them, making the air seem almost like solid matter. The street lamps expose a tunnel of light, cutting through the dark. Against the whiteness of the snow the light accentuates the powerful silhouettes of a few branches reaching towards the path, as if they were trying to reclaim it.

He is happy that he went outside and came here for a walk. He escaped from the sticky apartment and the nervous wait for a phone call that just didn't come but instead became more and more unlikely with every passing minute. He enjoys the grave sound of his steps and all of the gloomy scenery that invites him to another world. It's a relief, leading him away from his self-circling mind, tangled up in the wrong kind of thoughts. His breath is adding to the mist. The genuine sensation of the air in his lungs and the physical effort of lifting one foot after the other in the heavy deep snow are at odds with the fantastic, dream like scenery that surrounds him.

All of the sudden he hears a noise coming closer, unclear at first. It is a roaring, with branches cracking, and galloping towards him. Suddenly a black, majestic horse is breaking out of the mist, coming closer and clearer, fast and powerful down the path. It is heading straight towards him at high speed, with steam emitting from its nostrils in wild blows, snow sputtering when the hoofs are hitting the ground with force. He can already see the movement of the muscles underneath the black shiny fur, but he is not afraid, just amazed. Calmly he takes a step aside, into the deeper snow next to the path, and watches in astonishment as it passes. There is a saddle, but no rider; the mane and tail are waving, and it gets swallowed by the mist as fast as it came. There is silence again when he steps back onto the path and nothing remains of the occurrence, except for the deep imprints the hoofs have left in the snow.

Dazed he steps back onto the path and slowly starts to walk again, continuing on his way, home-bound now, his mind still filled with the mysterious encounter.

When he comes home, the regular green blinks of the answering machine tell him right away that no one called. Still, before getting out of his heavy, snow-wet shoes, he picks up the phone and starts to dial. Words are already aligning in his head, trying to form sentences to explain what he saw. But then he holds on, puts back the receiver and slowly takes off his shoes and coat. There is not any more reason to call now than there was before, and there is nothing to tell. The mist will clear away, the trees will not remember -or if, they will not tell- and the imprints of the hoofs will be covered with fresh snow tomorrow morning.

He was not supposed to be there in the forest in the first place. He shouldn't have seen it. It never happened.