

CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAMME 2021 PORTFOLIO

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SOUS LA LUNE

The Sun descended off in the horizon, shedding rosy light on the rippling waters of the Seine. Flowing methodically, the turquoise tide meandered like a steadily rolling jelly, carrying the faint scent of sea spray through the air. Closing his eyes, the raven-haired gentleman leaned against the tarnished banister and let his memories rush back.....

Two days ago...

“Reeling from the disastrous events of World War Two, France- “The television crackled with static, the pixelated screen fading to black as sparks flew from the steaming monitor. Leaning back onto his stained futon, Claude scanned his surroundings. From the malfunctioning television tucked into the dusty corner of his room to the peeling wallpaper plastered to the walls, his accommodation was far from welcoming.

It was only six years ago when Claude Beaumont, an ordinary Parisian man, was drafted to fight in the second world war. He remembered eagerly lining up outside the recruiting office amidst throngs of young men. They were all buzzing with excitement, ready to serve their nation and fight against the cruel Germans. But what he experienced on the frontlines was indescribable and even though the rest was a blur, one thing was for sure, his life had changed forever.

Every day he would wake up to gunshots and blood-curdling screams, the putrid stench of gunpowder permeating the frigid air of the Rhineland. And every day all he would see was an endless river of blood, painting the rolling hills a crimson shade and illuminating the sky a scarlet

hue. A perpetual sense of dread would fill the trenches as young men faced their fears, risking their lives for their country as explosions resonated in their ears and dirt erupted from the ground.

After the war, his life had spiralled downhill, and his mental health had deteriorated. Every day was a battle, and he was constantly bitter, frustrated with the universe for how it had treated him. Memories of war were fresh in his mind and the gaping wounds were barely healing, plaguing his mind like incessant locusts, and tearing their way into his dreams. They lurked in his mind day and night, biding their time to strike. He had lost his will to live, and the only splash of colour in his dreary life was the paintings he created.

Walking across the cramped room, the tall man retrieved what little materials he had, and begun his work. Claude brought life to his blank canvas with a single stroke of his brush, the watery smear rippling like a pool. Delicately moving the brush across the fabric, he left a trail of muted shapes in its wake. A sense of tranquillity overcame him, and his body relaxed. The graceful motions therapeutic to his troubled mind.

Minutes passed, and then hours. Before long, night had fallen, and Paris was blanketed in an inky darkness, glittering stars twinkling amidst the gloom. Straightening his back, the artist lifted his brush from his canvas and gazed at the magnificent piece of art before him.

It was the Seine, gently lapping at the Pont Neuf, its waters speckled with a medley of blue hues. Indigo, cerulean, and azure brush strokes blended to resemble the river, the primeval bridge casting a dark shadow over the stream. Laced with bubbling sea foam, small waves broke the surface of the river. And standing out amongst the starry sky, a silver orb hovered above the

Seine, bringing a comforting beauty to the dreaming night. Looking at his artwork, Claude could almost taste the salty breeze on his tongue and feel the chilly wind whipping past his face.

Shafts of moonlight peaked through the tattered curtains, illuminating his angular face in a silver glow. As Claude swivelled his head around and stared out the cloudy windows, his gaze fell onto the moon, its platinum sheen reflecting off his warm brown eyes. How could something so beautiful grace this horrible world every single day? He wondered.

As that thought caressed his consciousness, he reached out and let his palm rest on the cool glass. A wave of lethargy washed over him, and he began drifting off, finding solace in the moon's embrace. That night, his lost soul was finally put to rest. For his dreams were no longer infested with the macabre horrors of war, but instead were filled with the melodic lulling of a soporific rhythm.

.....Claude's eyes fluttered open, and his senses returned. Looking over the Seine at the picturesque sunset before him, hair tousled in the wind, he finally felt free.

The warm buttery glow of the sun soon melted into the Seine and the moon began its ascension, its distant silhouette barely in his vision. Reaching into his satchel, he pulled out his painting and held it over the Seine. As the moon came into full view and sparkling stars permeated the night sky, his canvas came to life.

Breathing in the fresh air, he enjoyed the brief moment of euphoria, a mere fluke of the universe giving him a semblance of joy. Spinning on his heels, he began making his way down the bridge, his leather boots scraping against the coarse cement.

As he neared the base of the bridge, the soothing melody of a familiar lullaby caught his attention, the faint hum coming from behind him. Slowly riveting his body, he turned to see a willowy frame where he had originally been standing, looking at the waters below. A svelte woman tilted her face towards him, her ebony tresses doing pirouettes above her head.

“Wh-wh-who are you?” Claude stammered as he struggled to believe what he was seeing.

“We’ve met before,” the woman replied in a honeyed tone, her eyes sparkling like the glint on broken glass.

She leaned back from the railing and turned to face him, allowing Claude to see her properly for the first time. Draped in a gossamer scarf and a lavender gown, jet black locks cascaded off her shoulders. Strands of her hair twirled in the air, weaving themselves into a makeshift crown above her snowy pale face. In her hands she clutched a rose and had been tossing its burgundy petals into the river.

Seeing Claude’s bewildered expression, a slight grin formed on her face. She directed his gaze towards the moon floating above the Seine and as she did so, silver threads of moonlight emanated from her. And for a brief second, she was surrounded in a glittering halo of light. Claude stumbled back in surprise, hardly believing his eyes.

“I’m Selene,” the ghostly pale woman said as she reached out with a well-manicured hand.

Gathering his composure, Claude tried to return the gesture but all he felt was the freezing air, his hand passing straight through hers.

“Sorry about that,” she said shyly, a rosy complexion appearing on her cheeks. “I’d better go soon.”

Before he could reply, she started off in a hurry, her stilettos gliding across the pavestones like a cool breeze. Claude raced towards her, a million thoughts whizzing through his mind as he attempted to make sense of the situation. He tried reaching for her shoulder, but his hand passed right through her spectral form.

“Please! I need answers.....” his voice trailed off, desperately wanting to be heard for once.

Selene stopped dead in her tracks and turned around. And as their eyes met, Claude felt his heart begin palpitating against his chest, his breaths becoming extremely laborious. She took a step forward nervously, her eyes lost in his as if there was an invisible tether connecting their souls.

There was a quick moment of silence where all that could be heard was the soft crashing of the waves and the sound of Claude’s heart pulsing against his ribcage. Then it happened. She leaned towards him, and their lips met. And just like how his brush brought life to the empty canvas, her lips lightly caressing his brought a sense of warmth to his dismal life.

Claude’s heart burst like a kaleidoscope of butterflies erupting from a chrysalis as the sweet feeling of her lips stunned his every nerve. Dazed, he felt his body succumb to fatigue, but he shook off the feeling. Opening his eyes, he expected to see Selene’s iridescent irises staring back at his but was instead greeted by an empty pavement. His heart pounding, Claude frantically tried to look for her, but the ethereal beauty was gone with the wind.

Heartbroken, he fell to his knees, silently chastising himself for believing that any of it was real. It was all a creation of his own imagination, an embodiment of his wildest dreams, nothing more.

As he dwelled in his despair, feeling like a fool, he saw a shape out of the corner of his eye and he turned towards it, expecting it to be a piece of newspaper being blown by the wind. His heart stopped.

Carried by the breeze, a single rose blew across the pavement, scattering its ruby petals along the jagged stones.

(1497 words)