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## The caravan of Knowledge

When I came into this familiar street, I realized I had changed. The city hadn't. Always the same houses, with the same lively area. But... for me, they were different. What had altered? It was my view of it. Me, everything in me. First, I'd grown. My face hadn't changed a lot. I had very dark brown eyes, with something mysterious and fascinating, my friend Harry always said. But for me, they were just bright, maybe a little mischievous. I had long, curly, dark hair. Well, physically, I hadn't altered too much. But mentally... I knew I was more open-minded now. I had learnt a lot of things about other cultures, my view of the world had broadened a lot, and I saw this country totally differently.

When we took the street, I could draw it with closed eyes, I had my heart in my mouth. I'd always seen these high buildings, with their old fronts, their lengthened windows their many balconies, their heavy wool curtains... They are a part of my life. A part of me.

I should have felt peaceful, maybe joyful to be here. But no. I was scared. And more and more anxious as we moved forward into the city.

"Don't worry! said Harry, next to me."

My life hadn't any secret for him. I couldn't hide my fear.

"We are going the opposite of your family, he went on. Belgrade is huge.

- Mm... I answered, not convinced."

Soon, as the long avenue stretched out in front of me, my memories were overrunning my thought.

I remembered the day I left my parents in order to study in France. I'd always lived in Belgrade, Serbia. My father was a teacher, and I could have had a good education here. But he wanted me to live in a wealthy country, and to do my studies in France. He dreamt I would become a doctor or a teacher at a university. But I didn't. I'd always dreamed to be a translator and to be able to travel all over the world. I loved the unknown, the discovery of other countries, cultures, people, ways of life...

I'd been welcome by my mother's cousin for one year. Going to France was very funny, and fascinating. But staying in a school, I disliked it deeply...

I couldn't stay there any longer! It was the year I met Harry. He was in Lyon for one week, and we had spoken, spoken, spoken... We had the same way of thinking, so we could understand each other perfectly. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

He told me about the caravan of knowledge, his school. I remembered this moment. I was totally fascinated. And all the night, I dreamt to go away with him. I'd ask my father to enter this atypical school, but... he'd refused, of course. But I'd understood I couldn't stay here. It was just impossible. I had to join the caravan. My mother agreed, but I couldn't convince my

. So, I decided to enter this school without his consent. I was helped by my mum and her  
is. We used treasures of cleverness, sometimes of boldness in order to hide my school to



Dad. We'd spoken to each other thanks to Skype, my cousins had installed a device which allowed to transfer my dad's call on my phone...

The biggest problem we met was the marks. We had to dissimulate the school's logo on my reports before sending them to my father. It was hard, and I had to be meticulous. For me, always energetic, strong-willed, enthusiastic, and sometimes careless, it was not easy. But I had no choice. And the caravan of knowledge... it was just a heaven!

The caravan of knowledge is an itinerant school. All the pupils are boarders, and we live in mobile homes. We travel throughout European countries for one year. Without family, away from city, routine... Just friends and teachers. Freedom! We are accommodated by schools in the city we are. We just go there for one week, then we away for another city, other people, other adventures. The lesson? Well... they were a little strange. We studied in classrooms, gymnasiums, wherever we could. We have compulsory subjects in the morning, with a big focus on foreign languages. Everyone learnt at least four foreign languages, in which English was, of course, included. For me, it was French, English, Spanish and Russian. We currently study a lot of European cultures too. European History, Geography, way of life... And a little Mathematics and Science, Literature, Philosophy... With our teachers, we had to speak English. It's our language in the caravan. When students come from all over Europe, they speak English together. My friend Harry is British, and Anika comes from Germany. We often speak about our own country, our way of life... It's just fascinating! During the week, in the afternoon, we visited cities, on our own, or with the teachers. Thus, we learnt about the country we were in, we met the inhabitants, we discovered Europe. I've learnt so much! I know that my mind has broaden a lot.

I followed the caravan for two years. The first one, we went to the Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Denmark.

This year: we went to the Balkans counties... Two weeks ago, we entered Serbia. My own country. And now, I was in my mobile home, in the street of Belgrade, the city I'd grown in. My father's city.

At that moment, I realized Belgrade had been my city. But now? My home is mobile and my city is everywhere. No longer Belgrade.

Anika's voice broke my thought. However, she spoke softly, in a gentle tone.

"Leny? Where does your father work exactly?"

- He works as a teacher in the first Belgrade High School.

- We are going to Belgrade university.

- I know. The first High School is far away from the university. It's OK.

- So relax! intervened Harry.

- I'm still.

- Of course! He answered ironically. Look at your face!

- You won't meet your father, Leny, Anika said gently. If you're too scared, we can find an escape.

- What?

- With a lot of make up, you can change your face. If you're very anxious, you can go to a hairdresser's in order to dye your hair. And anyway you have changed a lot...

- Yes, maybe..."

She sighed.

"When we arrive at the school, we will take care of your face, OK? Now, we haven't got enough time.

- Thank you!"

I finished the journey, my nose stuck on the windows. The streets were streamed, silently, and I was lost in my mind.



We arrived. Belgrade University was a huge and old building, made of grey stones and we could see its Romanesque sculptures. On its front, there were large bay windows with low relief finely sculpted in the 17<sup>th</sup> style. They were hid by lengthened columns and a triangular Greek roof. In front of the university, there was a large paved place, grey and glistening under the pale sun of February.

A man opened the door in order to welcome us and talked with the teacher. We went out of mobiles homes. My legs were numbed, and walking was a relief.

Harry smiled to me and we went to the few stairs which led to the university. It was the moment I saw the man's face. Before, I could see his back, only. Before, he was just a broad-shouldered man who worked at the school. But at the moment he turned over, I saw his face. It made my blood run cold.

I should have been proud to be here. Belgrade University is a prestigious university. The most famous one in the Balkans. But I wasn't. I was panic-stricken, almost desperate, totally amazed; I felt betrayed, and powerless.

My father stood just in front of me.

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I'd ask my father to enter this atypical school, but... he'd refused, of course. *Elle lui a demandé, elle a essayé.*