

## The House in the Orchard

### The House in the Orchard

By Elsa Rossi

Once upon a time in a tiny city by the sea. There, at the top of the hill, a house was almost hidden in middle of very tall trees, but two towers could be seen.

Seen from a distance, the house seemed to be a church, or if seen from a different angle it seemed to look like a castle.

The trees around the house were so tall that its huge windows could barely be seen.

Its stonewalls were covered with ivy, which is a little green plant that goes up and up towards the sky. Thus, ivy had grown attaching itself to the walls of the old house in a very beautiful manner. Some windows were always kept closed.

The inhabitants of that region said that fifty years ago that house used to be a very happy place, where many parties were thrown and where many guests used to come and go around its gorgeous gardens.

Many years ago a tragic thing happened, and since then its only inhabitant never opened the doors to guests again.

How sad to see the trees left without proper care. Plants and flowers disappearing on among bushes that were now replacing what once had been a beautiful garden.

In the backyard there were many apple trees, which insisted on producing beautiful fruit. Even the apple trees seemed old and tired now!

No one enjoyed its fruit.

Little birds found a great source of food there. Stalks of old trees were covered with moss and insects. Foxes went there to enjoy the apples that had fallen from the trees. Even then, many apples went rotten and became fertilizer that renovates the soil.

No one dared to go near the House in the Bush, for this was how the house became known for many generations. It was said that a very bad old man was living in there and he did not want anyone to go near it.

As time passed by the real story was forgotten and people were not interested anymore in knowing who was living there, or what this person's occupation was.

Many years passed by.

Around the house, a city was growing with new buildings, streets and places.

Many children would come and go from school passing in front of the big old gate, which was always closed.

That day was a very sunny and bright day.

A new family had moved into the number 53 which had borders with number 55, the House in the Bush.

A happy healthy family of 5 moved in.

Ah! Let's not forget the smiling dog Lily. Lily was treated as a member of Mr. Jacques's family: Mrs. Mary and the children, Charles, Claudia and Mirelle. Monsieur Jacques had been transferred from Belgium by his employers and was settled down in that growing neighbourhood with his family, in the suburbs of that little city.

Thus, Mr. Jacques and his family who did not know anything about the old stories of the neighbourhood went out for a walk to get to know the area.

Lily, their little dog, had black and white fur. It was always in good mood and was a source of joy for the family, entertaining everybody with her pirouettes and running ahead of the children.

The three children, Charles, Mirelle and Claudia had got little Lily, when she was still being breast-fed. Her mother had been run over and died from the wounds.

Lily had been brought up with zeal and tenderness, and in recognition to the dedication of the children, Lily was obedient and very hygienic. Lily did not try to escape from her bath time, collaborating with the maintenance of cleanliness of all rooms. It made Mrs. Mary very happy.

And Mrs. Mary was very demanding in establishing the order of the objects and the cleanliness of her house.

Well, a few days after moving in the family decided to go for a walk around.

Mirelle and Claudia were twins. They were both, very obedient dear daughters. They were 10. Charles was 12 years old and very clever, always ahead running with Lily.

The three children run too far ahead and were spying through the slits in the big old gate, already corroded by the weather and time. Plants were coming out of the gate through its slits. The children realized that the gate was slightly open. Who would live in there? - Charles thought.

Tuned in, Claudia and Mirelle had the same thought. It seems that Lily heard the thoughts of the children as Lily started pushing Charles inside the garden, as if inviting him to follow.

Curiosity made the children to open the gate a little further, which quickly opened allowing the children to enter the garden.

When the gate opened Lily very quickly run inside with Charles just after her shouting...

"Lily!... Lily!... come... come back here!... Lily... Lily..."he was calling to his cheeky little dog. But Lily did not listen, she was so happy she found a beautiful and large garden to run free.

That garden was a once stage for many receptions, many parties, lights and happiness. But for a long time now, it had not seen the adventures of children that once rolled over in its grass, or made bouquets with its flowers...

Oh! How sad! It was all being neglected.

No flowers were cultivated, only plants with thorns. Everything had been left in the past.

Young weeds and wild flowers were fighting to survive each other, trying to reach sunlight for vital energy. Some used thorns as a way to defend themselves against animals and insects.

And then, Lily, who was running free and happily went up the clogged up stairs leading to a veranda. It was clogged up with old pieces of wood that had fallen from the ceiling, mixing with the plants born out of humidity created in time that had spread along the stairs. Lily went up to the end of the veranda's corridor, till the back door of the House in the Bush. Charles, who was following Lily, suddenly had his attention caught by to an orchard. "What a beautiful orchard, what beautiful trees!"

He was enchanted when he saw the apple trees full of beautiful apples, and a huge quantity of apples on the soil. He took one of them and went back to call for his sisters to see the orchard!

The children who always had lived in big cities, in small flats, had no idea that a House in the Bush surrounded by trees that produced apples could exist.

And the apples were real, very different from the wax-apples decorating the dinner table at their house. These apples were real, had a sweet perfume and were beautiful... very beautiful!

Charles rubbed one on his shirt and saw that the glint coming from the apple's skin almost reflected his image, as if in a mirror.

- Charles thought: - "Wow! Fantastic! And I thought it only existed in the bedtime stories my mother used to tell me when I was little..."

Charles, running towards his parents, started calling his sisters: Claudiaaaaa! Mirelleeeee! Come here to see what beautiful apples...!

At this moment our little cheeky Lily began to bark incessantly, nervously in front of the backdoor of the house.

She was nowhere to be seen, but could be very well heard.

Although Mirelle called Lily she would not obey. Charles also called but was not obeyed either. It was a very strange behaviour coming from Lily. Carefully, getting away from the rotten wood they manage to reach to where Lily was.

"I will punish her, Charles thought!"

Lily had never disobeyed before, what could be happening to her?

Then suddenly, they stopped and heard a hoarse voice that seemed to come from very far away!

"Heeellp... Heeeellp meeeee... Heeellp... Heeeellp meeee.....  
Heeellp meeee... Heeeellllp..."

They paid more attention and realized that the call for help was coming from inside the house..

Quickly, before answering, Charles run to the gate and called his parents, telling them to come quickly! Somebody was asking for help inside that old house.

Mr. Jacques quickly entered the garden, went to the backdoor and also heard the appeal for help! They all could hear a voice that yelled non-stop but now in a weak voice: - "Help!... Help me!..."

Mr. Jacques reached for the knob and the door opened immediately.

When they entered the kitchen... how sad! They found an old man with long white hair and beard on the floor. Suddenly they realised that he had slipped from a wooden bench while trying to reach for a portrait that for years had been hanging very high on the wall.

Before any question and aiming at helping Mr. John (the old man with white beard and hair). Mr. Jacques did not waste any time. Immediately called the ambulance and Mr. John, was taken to the Hospital of the small city.

They all hugged Lily. Dogs have a much better hearing than human beings.

Lily sensing what had happened inside the house and barking, vigorously, had managed to attract everyone's attention.

Instead of being punished, the little courageous dog Lily got much praise and tenderness for her brave action.

Indeed, Mr. John had been helped in time. If it was not for Lily's action, he could have died there by himself and for sure no one would have missed him, since Mr. John had himself kept everybody away from him.

Two weeks of beautiful sunny spring days had passed.

One morning, when gathering the correspondence, Mrs. Mary found a small yellowish envelope, apparently very old. She opened it and for her surprise, she read the following:

**"My dear friends,**

**Jacques, Mary, Charles, Mirelle, Claudia and little Lily!**

**I am pleased to invite you to come to my house on Saturday afternoon.**

**I want to show my gratitude for your help.**

**If it was not for you I could have died!**

**John**

How exciting!

It seemed that that the invitation was directed at Lily, since she was so excited that run from one place to the other barking much more than the usual. Charles, Mirelle and Claudia, could barely wait for Saturday.

They very much wanted to see Mr. John recover.

However, they were even more interested in seeing the garden of the House in the Bush, in exploring the beautiful trees, in gathering figs and apples.

It was possible that little foxes lived there. They would then have the opportunity to see a real baby fox and not only the one in the book of Saint Exupèry. How exciting!

This would be a very different Saturday in their lives.

The much expected day arrived!

The children got up in the morning, set up their beds, afterwards they what went for shower and to get ready for breakfast. As it was a

Saturday, they did not need to wake up that early, since there was no school. But that did not matter. It was far too important that they were awake and making plans for the visit to the House in the Bush, later on, after lunch.

The neighbours in the street got to know what had happened.

They almost did not believe that the newly arrived Belgian family had already been invited to enter that mysterious house.

Tens of years had passed and nobody dared to put foot in that private place.

Well, the neighbours got happy!

Something had changed. It seemed that the ambiance around the House in the Bush had changed. Yes, even the air seemed to have a perfume! The joy of that Saturday, with its brilliant sun was in perfect keeping with the event.

The time to go arrived.

Jacques, Mary, Mirelle, Charles and Claudia, (not forgetting Lily) went out and walked 50 metres. They stopped in front of the big old gate.

They looked each other! Without a word to each other they all communicated very well. They held hands on a silent agreement of strength in the good and crossed the big gate.

They were walking around the house towards the back when a voice called them:

"Friends, from here"!

They returned and saw Mr. John. - "Good afternoon friends! Through here, through here"... he showed them another side of the entrance, where it seemed to have stairs of pink marble.

Moving with certain difficulty the bushes that hid the steps, they managed to go through stems even more stems and get to the top of the stairs.

It was a very beautiful veranda from where the whole garden could be seen. A large double door in carved wood was open for the first time in fifty years.

They entered the room.

The children, who are the hands of Jesus on Earth, being more relaxed embraced Mr. John. Caught by surprise, he said nothing, was mute. From his beautiful blue eyes, in the face illuminated with happiness, two tears came down and going along his wrinkled face finished into his white beard

Mr. John said:

Forgive me the emotion. It has been fifty years since I received for the last time the sweet embrace of my three children. They were your age.

He kissed their fronts and embraced them, the three at once.

Silence was broken by the noise of the children discovering, in the large room, objects they never saw before. There were hunting trophies hanging in the walls and they were sorry to see heads of deer and other stuffed animals. The room looked like a museum they had visited in their city.

Mrs. Mary realized that the house had been cleaned in a hurry. He had taken the dust from the chairs and the large table, where sweet apples, biscuits and a teapot with hot tea were now ready waiting for the guests.

It was Mr. John's way to thank the help he got from his new neighbours, or better, his friends!

When Mr. John saw little Lily, he got down on his knees with some difficulty, took her on his lap and tenderly embraced her, while stroking her fur and saying to her:

" - Thanks little Lily!" "Thanks for having heard my request for help. If it was not for you, for all of you, looking at all of them, what would have been of me? Where would I be now? I could have died as my dear loved ones fifty years ago."

He was going to continue talking but was interrupted by the request of the children.

- Mr. John, can we visit your apple trees, and play in your orchard?

It will be a pleasure to see you playing under the trees, my little ones, answered Mr. John.

Their parents also agreed to it.

The three children left the house running happily, followed by their attentive little friend, Lily.

Mr. John, told his new friends what caused the accident in the kitchen.

From time to time he used to take the portrait where he kept the pictures of his wife and 3 children putting the portrait to his heart. He cried for many and many hours incapable of accepting their abrupt departure.

Mr. John did not believe that the spirit was immortal, that there was no death. He did not believe that life is composed of many existences and that in each existence the spirit progresses.

But he was talking about the pictures in the portrait and saying:

*"These are the pictures of my wife and three little children, who died when a carriage in which they were coming back home, fell into a river on a stormy day".*

*"They were coming from school around 4 miles from here. The landscape was much different at that time. There were no houses nearby".*

"

*The horse got frightened and the carriage dived into the river. There was nobody to help them. The driver and the governess... all died".*

*"Since then", said Mr. John, "I had no more happiness. I decided to live by myself, enclosed and alone in this house".*

Later, slowly everybody left me and age started to come and I stayed here just waiting for the time of my death.

At this point, Monsieur Jacques, who was a spiritualised man and very religious and cultivated charity in his heart, looking for spiritual inspiration took the opportunity and with few words explained to Mr. John about the wonders of the after life, that nobody dies. He told Mr. John about the immense work of the Spirits, codified by Allan Kardec.

Mr. John got interested and they agreed to start a reading to allow Mr. John to obtain enlightenment about the after life. There were so many questions that Mr. John asked to Jacques, that he decided to go to his house and brought a fabulous gift for Mr. John, "The Spirits' Book."

Giving the book to Mr. John, he said:

- "Dear friend, everything in life has a reason for its existence. There are no coincidences. Neither victims nor punishments. Neither heaven nor hell has such physical spaces. In this book you will find all answers to your questions.

Continuing, Jacques said: - *" Thus, dear John, if you want, we can study together and say prayers of gratitude to God, to our Master Jesus for having put us in the pathway of each other. Together in prayer, walking towards the same direction, which is the spiritual evolution of each one of us."*

Mr. John cried in gratitude. In years he had never had guests that caring. He had never seen a book like that. These were simple people who came to bring him soothing to this sufferance of so many years.

He thought:

Certainly coincidences do not exist. I am the prove of it. I am here, healthy again thanks to you, friends of my heart.

At a certain point the children come back, happily, with Lily always smiling.

The little dog jumps onto the lap of Mr. John.

The children do the same and they all smile happily.

They were a happy family reunited.

From the spiritual world, four illuminated spirits also smile.

These were Mr. John's wife and children who had always been besides him, giving help from the Spiritual World.

They were happy, yes, because, Monsieur Jacques's family had listened to them through intuition.

Due to these events, happiness came back to Mr. John's heart.

The House in the Bush would not be called in this way, but **The House in the Orchard.**

As from that day, Mr. John started to invite all neighbours and all who wished to gather apples, figs and to make picnics in this garden.

The neighbours loved such change.

Each one who would go there to gather apples helped to cut the grass, the old stems of the trees, planting and gathering what made the community, the whole village very happy.

Mr. John became loved by all, adults and children.

There were far too many invitations for tea from his neighbours for him to be able to make it.

*We always must have it in mind that whatever happened to us, has a reason to be. We must have always a heart grateful to God, because some good learning experiences will be derived from the easy and the difficult situations in our existences.*

The End

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