



LE MALAIMANT
THE MISENAMORED

**MICHÈLE
VINET**

ROMAN / NOVEL

L'INTERLIGNE



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Aurel, in love with Blanche, has a notebook to write the tales he invents for her. He soon realizes that it is not his stories that he wants to write, but his feelings. Doubts take hold of him and frightened by the task, he remains unable to write for a long time. He will seek help from Florimond the Elder who, with his herbs and potions, will try to help him. Gregor the shaman arrives to inspire Aurel to fill out his notebook. Trying to write down his love makes the protagonist a torn being, plagued by hallucinations and the remedies of improvised healers. In order to achieve his goal, Aurel will suffer injuries of the body, mind and soul.

Michèle Vinet, benevolently observes her characters navigate the tumultuous waters of love with this luminous novel, served by sumptuous writing.

TRANSLATION SAMPLE

NEST

A white notebook.

A white heart-book.

In a blue one, he would have seen a midnight sky, a blueberry jay, a tidal wave.

In a jade one, he would have felt the forest, its ailing leaves, dying from too much greening.

He would have feared violence in a red notebook. Before the wound of the first sentence, he would have wept.

A white one, then. Pure and snow and lovely paper. Fresh linens where nothing has yet sighed. White. For her, for the silence before her, for his stark-white love.

A page much like a name. Her French name: Blanche. Her dresses like blowing snow. A white notebook for her opal madness. Aurel, like wings. Like a treble clef around her.

A pencil, sharpened with a pocket-knife. To avoid ink smears. An eraser to get rid of exaggerations and little lies. To utter a dove with a voice other than his, for upon its very whisper the name of love has flown, engulfed by time and space.

— Blanche?

— Yes

— I am writing your name.

— Why?

— Because.

She smiles and turns away. In the window, adoring mirror, her

delirium reflection. Blanche, Sauvignon blonde. Wrapped in Aurel's benevolence. Incomparable flower, delirious poetry. Manna.

They are so young.

Aurel, like a new spring bear, falling in love with Blanche the moment he set his eyes on her, recognized her in the wilderness, on the smallness of the planet whitened by her presence.

Broken by pain and abandon, she was eating berries at the edge of the woods, wearing a frightening blood-soaked dress.

Aurel had gone to get help and had brought her home. And loved her. He had cut much wood to buy dresses for her. White, every one of them. Whenever he went to the village, he asked that she not leave the house. Others could laugh at him for cherishing a repudiated madwoman, as long as she was left alone. Blanche loved him, he thought. A love of gratitude. For his kindness. For the dresses.

How do you make the mad love you?

From the village, he would return with oranges and ribbons. She would have made soup. They would eat in silence, and then curl up under the duvet to listen to the nightingale in the summer, the wind in the winter.

In Aurel's presence, Blanche was innocent again. Her terrible deed forgiven. Her beauty preserved. When she awakened embers within him, fullness ebbed. Blanche, like breaking waves. Privilege. In her arms, he could have sworn she loved him.

Constellation.

Aurora borealis.

Aurel, enamored with a pearl, a jewel in the shell of time. At times, softly, a petal word. And Blanche, lost, allowed his love to rock her fears to sleep, greedy for his arms, for his soul.

Some days, when the meal was served, Blanche forgot to eat, surrendering to inner turmoil and far-off wanderings. She whispered enigmatic sounds that only Aurel could decipher for having so often heard her scorched vocabulary. He would say:

— Blanche, my Blanche?

She would not reply, but quietly return from her orbit 'round a nameless and unnamable planet.

Some evenings, after tea, Aurel would invent tales to please her. He would fill the hearth with dragons and Punchinellos, the Minotaur and sorcerers. He would become the valiant defender of kingdoms in peril, slayer of vile monsters. Blanche, delighted, imagined a unicorn carrying her off to a land of mercy.

She had once said:

— Aurel, you need a notebook.

Now that he had one, he would revive the victors and the vanquished of their evenings. A fabulous bestiary. Tumultuous adventures. Romantic and legendary heroes. In her eyes, at the corners of her lips, in the slight tremor of Blanche's fingers, Aurel intuited his tales.

She would say:

— You have cut more wood?

He answered:

— Yes.

— You have sold it?

— Yes.

— Then we will eat.

— Yes.

— And you will story-tell.

And the seasons flowed through their fingers, nameless, colourless. Aurel and Blanche had made a nest of their fascination for one another. Time had stood still in the episodes of a young man and the white dresses of a pretty girl.

MEMORIES

Aurel's house had travelled near and far, through all seasons and weather to find the perfect corner of the world to rest and remove its hiking boots. Somewhat shabby and exhausted, it had put an end to its wayfaring at the edge of the forest. A young man, tired too, had discovered it. Aurel and the blue house had recognized each other. They had formed a duo. One day, Blanche had put smiles and lace at the windows of their hearts.

Whenever he left, Aurel begged his house to watch over her. The lichen ridden roof took its protector's role quite seriously. To watch over Blanche, its walls seemed to rise like a citadel's, like supple yet impregnable ramparts.

Aurel had gone to the village to find a notebook. In his shop, the second-hand dealer had pointed to a weathered cardboard box. Aurel had looked through it. Old books and papers, a few washed-out pictures, the smell of dusty cellars. No. Nothing tattered for Blanche. Beautiful and new, only.

An intrusive light fills the shop, snakes around the boxes. A sepia-toned photo. Sudden, immediate tears. Salt. His heart pounds. Aurel can barely breathe. Remarkable resemblance. Same smile, same black beribboned hair. The sadness of her eyes. He looks up.

He sees her. There she is. In the way-back-then and the before, in the very-long-ago. He is a child. He hears her. She says:

— My Aurel-Angel.

— Mommy. Oh, Mommy.

The memory ignited his blood and then froze it. He was sweating, he was hot, and he was cold. The photograph

of a stranger fell to the floor. A new customer soon trampled it with his big peasant shoes. Aurel was the child of yesterday.

He runs for help. From the burning end of his breath. A trickle of voice. Doctor, help. It's my Mom. Blood. Everywhere. Again.

Aurel shook it off. Amidst the trees, in the chinks of the years, he had forgotten his mother's blood and the good doctor, his bitterness was long-buried. He must at once put aside this painful past.

The angry doctor runs to her side. Yes, again. Again, blood on the face of the beautiful Odile. The child feels the doctor's tenderness. He is grateful. Devoted to his patients, the doctor attends to the injured woman. He wishes he could snatch her from the horror. Take her in his arms. Hold her close. Treat and heal her, protect her from such an insane brother.

Aurel flees to his hiding place amongst the trees. He cries until dusk. His nose runs. He wipes it with a leaf. He nibbles a few nuts found at the bottom of his schoolbag. How can he help his mother? Why not let the doctor take them both. He has a nice house. They would be happy there. There would be no more suffering. The doctor loves his mother. Aurel knows that. You can sometimes be right about love.

Upon his return, his Mom-Odile is not there. His mother, in her blood, is not there. Aurel the child waits for the one he loves. He waits for his mother. She will come back. Of course, she will come back. The doctor always brings her back. She would never leave her Aurel-Angel behind.

Blanche like Odile. But Blanche was alive. If he had not saved Odile, he would save Blanche; he would save her one day at a time. One tale at a time.

Shaken, he had gone around the village to find a notebook. Cardboard and leather ones, others covered with embroidered fabric. Listening. Waiting for the paper to extend its invitation, awaiting its voice, its open arms, her name, Blanche, like a butterfly atop a shelf.

Among the stationery's pens and blotters, the memory of his mother persisted. A swarm of bees to chase away. Her caressing voice when she read the Brothers Grimm to him. He would write the tales of Aurel-the-Bear. He would fill his notebook with epics and sagas. With elephants. Albino tigers. Mammoths, why not? With lovers too. Their break-ups and reconciliations. And many kisses.

Kisses, on her eyelids, in the blood coating his mother's hair. Courage-kisses in so much carmine.

— *Mommy, mommy.*

Aurel dismissed these disturbing images. He returned home with a white notebook. On each of its pages, he would forgive his powerless childhood. He would be the man the boy could not be. On the satin paper, he would find redemption. He would enjoy writing wrenching passions and wild triumphs. In his perilous and incredible adventures, he would forget his ruby-red years.

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«Perhaps it was not a man who had written a book, but a book who had written a man.»

A graduate of the University of Ottawa in French literature and education, and specialized in French as a second language, Michèle Vinet has worked in the fields of education, theatre and cinema. She has already published four books, including an award-winning novel and narrative (Trilium Prize, Émile-Ollivier and Le Droit), and several short stories in a variety of literary journals.