

Birthday Wish

By Esterline Vielot

Well, I see that you have come for a story. Which one would you like? One about love? A virtuous journey? How about despair? Those are my favorite: desire, deception, destruction. Oh my, I've gotten carried away. Pardon me, where are my manners? I suppose I could give you all of the above since you are here. Get comfortable, this one is a doozy.

Let's get formalities out of the way, I'm Gerard. People like to reduce me to a spirit, but they're mistaken, I am a God. Nevermind how the confusion started. One thing to note, I am in this story, I prey on the weak, and my favorite type of people are people like you: desperate, hopeless, always seeking something better. I gravitate towards those sorrowful spirits, they're the easiest, like Elise.

It was Elise's birthday. She pranced in her mother's hair salon with her yellow bird perched on her right shoulder. She went right into her routine, preparing the salon for the day. She whistled and hummed a happy tune, a mask for the sadness she carried inside.

"Oh Camille." She called the bird. "Isn't this just the saddest birthday?" She asked. She sat in front of a mirror, taking in her aging lines that crinkled her eyes and creased her mouth. The bird whistled in agreement.

"Do you think Mama forgot again or is she trying to be funny? Because twenty-five is a big birthday, it's one worth celebrating, right?" She waited for the bird to respond. It tweeted and flapped its wings as if it was encouraging her delusions.

Elise became giddy, "Maybe, it's an act, maybe there's a surprise party later. Oh Camille, I think she's going to surprise me later." She giggled at the thought. Camille flew multiple laps around the salon in excitement.

Just then, Claudette, Elise's mother, entered. She gasped at the sight of the flying bird.

"Elise! What did I tell you about that bird? Put her in her cage!" Claudette ordered.

"Sorry Mama." Elise stood up and whistled. The bird landed on her shoulder. It tweeted incessantly as if protesting the pending entrapment.

“Just for a little while,” Elise promised. She gently placed the bird inside the cage.

The day went on as Elise ran around the salon under the command of her mother. Elise do this, Elise get that, Elise make it quick! Solange walked in the moment Elise sat down. Solange dripped in riches. Her opulence gave the illusion that she floated to her chair. Elise’s eyes transfixed on her. You see, Elise believed that she was meant to live Solange’s life because Solange was married to Elise’s ex-lover. And if the consequences of being young wasn’t the main factor of their demise, Elise would have married him, but she let him slip away.

Solange’s phone rang, she ignored it, cutting off the ring. It rang for a second time, she cut it off again.

“You goin’ to get that?” Claudette asked.

“It’s my mother-in-law, I’ll pick it up when I’m good and ready,” Solange responded, waving her hand dismissively.

“Oh, hi Patrice,” Claudette said. Solange jumped when her mother-in-law, who managed to out-rich her in appearance, entered the salon. If Solange was the apprentice, Patrice was the master.

“I called you twice now, Solange,” Patrice scolded, ignoring Claudette’s greeting. “It’s time to go.” Solange quickly packed herself up, paid, and followed Patrice’s shadow. The salon erupted in laughter.

“That’s one strange family,” a client commented.

At the end of the day, Elise was back to her routine. The bird was on her shoulder while she swept the floor. The salon was empty, her mother left without a happy birthday, let alone a goodbye.

“She really did forget my birthday, Camille.”

A storm began to brew. Elise found a wig that resembled Solange's thick and wavy brunette tresses. She put the wig on and smiled at her reflection. The bird whistled its approval. Elise sprang out of her seat and danced and sang a happy tune in her new confidence. She found a stale bread roll, a straw, and a piece of paper, which she made a candle out of the two. She lit the straw candle and made a wish.

Thunder clapped, lightning snapped, and sheets of rain flooded down. I knocked on the door. A surprised Elise opened the door. I appeared to her very human, pathetic and wet, a tactic I am proud of, I must say. I could see the concern in her eyes.

“Are you okay, sir?”

“No, actually, I’m not,” I answered. “I desperately need a phone, and I see that you're the only light on.”

“Yes, of course, please get out of the rain.” She let me in. “Would you like a towel?” She asked.

“I think I'm beyond that, but thanks.” I looked around the adorably quaint salon. It was champagne pink with dashes of cream. “I'm new in town, I didn't know this was here. I'll let my lady know,” I lied.

She handed me a phone. “Thank you sir, welcome to town. This is my mother's salon. I’ve been working here all my life.”

“That's splendid. Call me Gerard.”

“I'm Elise.”

I tried and failed with my phone call. “Just my luck.” I spotted her makeshift candle. “Happy birthday.”

“You’re the first person to wish me a happy birthday. How did you know?”

I pointed at her bread roll. She blushed. “What did you wish for?”

“Oh it's silly.”

“Even better, please, indulge me.”

“There's this client, I wish I had her life.”

“What's her name?” I asked.

“Solange.”

This is my favorite part in the story. This is where I become the hero.

“I can grant your wish,” I announced.

“Grant my wish? How is that possible?”

“It's simple, really. My specialty.”

“Your specialty?” She paused. “Who are you?” She took a step back. Her bird let out a low coo.

“Think of me as a genie. I make birthday wishes come true.” I smiled.

“I don't believe you,” she stammered.

Just then, I snapped my fingers. The storm stopped and the light turned off. When it turns on, I'm gone. Then, I knock on the door. Elise opened it and her eyes widened in amazement. I smiled, manipulating time has always been my most impressionable trick.

“How did you do that?” She looked me up and down. “And you're dry now.”

“Now, do you believe me?” She nodded, too stunned to speak.

“May I come in?” She stepped aside. I had her total attention as I walked in.

“In order for me to make your wish come true, you must agree to these two conditions,” I began. Elise walked closer to me. The bird cooed again.

“One,” I continued. “You must assume Solange's life as is. Two, you only have 12 hours to reverse your decision before the portal closes. If you wish to reverse it, you must be right back here. If you miss it, the portal is closed, and there's only two options once that happens...”

“Oh, I'm sure I won't want to come back, go on with granting my wish, please,” she interrupted.

“Are you sure you don't want to hear the rest?”

“I'm more than sure,” she asserted. The bird cooed again.

“Your wish is my command.”

I snapped my fingers. The day started anew. Elise assumed the life of Solange and proudly strided into the salon with a smile plastered on her face. She played an impressive Solange, she

even shooed away her little bird, who flew in behind a client. Claudette swatted the bird out the door.

“Shoo, go away!”

After her appointment, Elise left with an impatient Patrice. At their gaudy and expansive mansion, Patrice was preparing an elaborate dinner. Elise tried to make herself useful, but Patrice waved her away in the same manner Elise did that bird. Elise tried to strike up a conversation with her ex-lover but he cut her a look.

“Not now, I’m trying to watch TV,” he barked.

She retreated to a corner until the dinner guests arrived. They were Charles, Patrice’s romantic partner, and a married couple, Henry and Lisa. The dinner was uneventful, Elise helped Patrice cut the ham. She also sent Elise to the kitchen to fetch some butter, and that was when, under the guise of needing the restroom, Henry cornered Elise, she felt his breath down her neck.

“I love how coy you’ve been acting, it’s turning me on,” he whispered.

“Excuse me?” Elise hurried out the kitchen. Just then, the storm began. It roared and poured and quickly cut the lights. Elise heard quick movements, a guttural sound, and wheezing. The lights kicked on and slumped over the table was Lisa with a knife in her back. The room gasped. Elise stood still in shock.

“Dear God!” Patrice shouted.

“Lisa!” Henry cried.

“What’s going on?” Elise asked. The room looked at her and the blood that dripped from her hands. Elise discovered her bloody hands and screamed.

“What did you do?” Her ex-lover asked.

“Wait, it wasn’t me!”

“Call the police!” Patrice ordered. “Don’t let her go anywhere.” Charles and Henry grabbed Elise by her arms. When the police arrived, they arrested Elise and threw her in a cell.

Elise slumped over the bars of the jail cell with tears falling silently. A shadow hovered over her, she looked up to a grimacing Patrice.

“Save your tears, they won’t rescue you.”

“Patrice? Please help me, you can’t really think I did this.”

Patrice snickered. “You fool. I was the one who put you here. I know about you and Henry and the dirty little escapades. How dare you! I made you and this is how you repay me? Repay my son?”

“No, no...” Elise began to protest.

“You deserve to rot, you ungrateful little twit.”

“I’m sorry, Patrice, please, I beg you, get me out of here.”

“This is where you belong, not in my home.” Patrice stormed out.

“Wait! Please, come back!” Elise pleaded. She cried loudly.

“Gerard, Gerard!” She called out. Of course, I didn’t answer, at least, not right away.

“This was not supposed to happen,” she whispered through fits of hiccups. “I miss Mama, the salon, Camille.”

She stood and looked out the window. From the window, she could see her mother’s salon.

“Mama!”

“Even if she could hear you, she wouldn’t know who you were,” I said, appearing from the shadows. Elise jumped.

“Gerard, please, get me out of here. I want my old life back.”

“Sorry, I can’t do that, the portal is closed,” I said.

“Please, don’t do this.”

“You only have two options,” I reminded.

“Yes, what are those?”

“To get your old life back, someone must remember you from your past life or to get out of this life, you die.”

“Die? And how is the first option possible? How could I be remembered if I never existed?”

I chuckled and cleared my throat, “Well, no one ever figured that one out. They usually go for the latter to end their misery, and I take their souls so I could live forever.”

“Take my soul?” She panicked.

“Well, of course, I wouldn’t want it to go to waste like you did. Call me when you’re ready to die.” I left gleefully, laughing on my way out.

“No!” Elise cried, she fell to the floor. Once she finished crying, she began to sing. Had I known what would happen next, I would have silenced her long before. That bird perched itself on the window sill and began to tweet and chirp, flapping its wings. Elise stopped.

“Camille?” She stood up. “Oh Camille, do you remember me?” Elise continued to sing, the bird jumped and tweeted.

“No!” I ran in. “Stop your singing!” She continued to sing some more. Just then, the ground began to rumble, the walls of the prison began to fall. Elise sang louder and the bird flew in circles in excitement.

“No!” I shouted.

Everything came crumbling down. The curse was broken and Elise was freed. The bird perched on her shoulder again. Suddenly, Elise stood in front of her mother’s salon. She tried to open the door, but it was locked.

“Elise!” She turned around to see her mother approaching her, a street light illuminating her face. “Oh Elise, I’m so glad you’re okay!”

“Mama!” They embraced. “I’m so happy to see you, Mama,” Elise cried.

“I’m sorry, Elise, I let the day go by and didn’t wish you a happy birthday. I wanted to surprise you with a cupcake earlier but then the storm and the power went out...”

“It’s okay, Mama, it’s not a big deal.”

“No, it is.” Claudette pulled out a cupcake out of her purse. She opened the container it came in and stuck a candle in it. With a lighter, she lit it.

“Oh Mama,” Elise said, cupping her cheeks.

“I know this isn’t much...”

“It’s perfect!” Elise screamed. She made a wish and blew out her candle and took a bite of her cupcake. “Have some, Mama. It’s delicious.”

Her mother took a bite. Elise was delighted, the corners of her smile reached her eyes. Her bird tweeted.

“Thanks, Mama.”

“Oh, for your birthday gift, I booked a music studio session, it’s time we take that beautiful voice of yours seriously.”

Elise shrieked and gave her mother a tight hug. “Thank you, Mama. This is the best birthday.”

“Let’s celebrate,” Claudette said. They finished the cupcake. “Let’s get home before the storm starts again.”

They began to walk down the street. “Tonight was such a weird night,” Claudette said. “First, the storm, and then Solange was arrested for murder.”

And there you have it, a story with all of the fixings. Are you amused? You’re probably wondering, why this story? You probably think I lost. Think again, I will always find another one.