



St.A.R.T.UptoEU (Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe)
Creative Writing Relay



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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(Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe)

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A SOUL FOR INFINITY



A young man named Marcus.

A journey through time to discover
his roots: the Ancient Roman Empire,
Persia, the Iberian Peninsula, the
Mediterranean Sea...

A gift or a curse?

Papers, a notebook, whispers, voices,
a box, dusty books: many secrets but
also many emotions and passions.

And questions:

Is he the only timetraveller?

Who are the two mysterious women?

Where is his disappeared mother?

What is his mission?

Erasmus+ Creative Writing Relay

Books for the young, written by the young.

Stories that make children and young writers protagonists of an activity that involves Italy and many other European and non-European countries in a fantastic adventure that thanks to writing weaves a thread from time to time that unites, bonds, and involves the surrounding events...

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"St.A.R.T.UPtoEU

(Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe)
Creative Writing Relay"

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A SOUL FOR INFINITY

The students of the schools indicated below wrote the story starting from the incipit provided by Daniela Colella and the coordination of their teachers:

Chapter 1 - Liceo Scientifico Statale "G. Siani" - Aversa (CE) - Italy

Chapter 2 - IES Jaume II el Just - Tavernes de La Valldigna - Spain

Chapter 3 - Europaschule Langerwehe Gesamtschule - Germany

Chapter 4 - Gymnazium, Praha 4, Na Vitezne Plani 1160 - Czech Republic

Chapter 5 - Europaschule Langerwehe Gesamtschule - Germany

Chapter 6 - IES Jaume II el Just - Tavernes de La Valldigna - Spain

Chapter 7 - Gymnazium, Praha 4, Na Vitezne Plani 1160 - Czech Republic

Chapter 8 - Liceo Scientifico Statale "G. Siani" - Aversa (CE) - Italy



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Erasmus+

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Project Partner Institutions



Project Partner







CREATIVE WRITING RELAY

Introduction

Within the multimedia platform www.startuptoeu.com, a section is assigned to the creative writing relay, as a form of narration of the ancient and modern historical-cultural heritage.

The format used follows that of the Creative Writing Relay, promoted in Italian schools by BIMED, one of the project's partners, but it has different aims, adapted to those of the St.ARTUPToEU project.

The creative writing relay involves the writing of a story by several hands starting with an initial incipit. Groups of students have to write a chapter and pass the baton to another group in order to arrive at the final result, a single shared text. The "passing of the baton", i.e. the chapter, takes place through an online platform whose access data are provided to the teachers participating in the format. A tutor guides the process of writing the chapter, ensuring that the story is consistent in terms of content and coherence with the theme of the relay.

After the composition of the story, the pre-printing and printing phases are professionally disseminated.

As part of the St.A.R.T.UPToEU project, the creative writing relay follows the general principles of the BIMED format, adapting them to the purpose of the project.

The aim is to enable groups of students who are far away from each other and teachers to share the production of a story.

Each chapter is a cross-section of different territories and is in some way an expression of the reality which it comes from.

Furthermore, writing a chapter within a story written by others is an educational exercise of extraordinary importance, to learn to consider the point of view of others and to acquire a conscious approach to creativity, respecting other's inventiveness and allowing oneself to be open to the dialogue, to sharing and to the exchange, that is always a source of enrichment.

The theme of the story must recall the themes of the project, in particular the aim of enhancing different cultures and the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of distant places that are now part of the same European community and once had a common Roman history.



The participants will be the students of the schools involved in the project who will start with an Incipit by the coordinating school, the Siani High School. The text will be published on the online platform and in hard copy for the partners
Dissemination of the results is expected.





BIMED

The reference to the *Ventotene Manifesto For a free and united Europe*, drafted in 1941 by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, appears as a natural consequence, especially for those who, with their personal and institutional actions, are committed to promote a culture of union for the people of the Euro-Mediterranean area. Today, the text is still astonishingly timely and represents an inevitable point of reference for the pupils of the European schools as they are being invested, more than anyone else, with the role and function of builders of a Europe of peace, solidarity, sustainable development and rights. A Europe that we have not yet succeeded to build. For those who worked on the Erasmus+ St.A.R.T.UptoEU Writing Relay, to begin from the spirit and vision of the great founding fathers of European project, represented the principle around which to build an action that recognises the undeniable value of human relationships. It is through the creation of relationship that we will reduce the distance that our citizens and, in particular, young people often feel towards to European institutions.

The long and demanding work we shared over these two years during which we managed to define a common narrative was structured around the effectiveness and the democratic nature of the whole process. In a way, with the narrative of the Italian, German, Czech and Spanish students, we gave the European panorama a true common cultural identity, a common European soul that essentially exceeded the national interest and revived feelings of solidarity, freedom, equality and justice as values to contrast the barbarity, the wars, the totalitarianism and the persecutions that characterize our time.

Altiero Spinelli's Europe corresponded to a vision faithful to the Greek etymology of the word (one of the most likely at least): the gaze ($\delta\psi$) that extends far and wide ($\epsilon\upsilon\rho\upsilon\varsigma$). The story that will soon fascinate you, is once again the result of a common work that brought together so many young students who were called to metaphorically share a vision in which each one of them was able to determine a piece of the journey, by expressing the far and wide dimension that characterizes the horizon of everyone's life... Of course, a journey made of words, but words are the cornerstone around which we can define a framework of perspective that, starting from school, will thrive the principle that sees us all citizens of a part of the world, that is Europe. In fact, Europe increasingly represents a reference point for the global balance that we trust can be



built on the brotherhood beyond any borders and feelings of selfishness. Therefore, able to allow the development of a progress in line with the expectations of the new generations of the planet. Through the Erasmus+ St.A.R.T.UptoEU Writing Relay, we have put in various ways in the hands of our students the power that belongs to them both as European citizens and as citizens of each of their own countries. If we must build the Europe of tomorrow starting from the creation of a European citizenship, the cooperation over the past two years with Italian, German, Czech and Spanish pupils has given us the opportunity to better understand that their expectations and needs are similar as they also share the vision and dream of living in a world where there is more room for discussion and action that leads to the creation of dynamics less oriented towards the value of owning material goods and more oriented towards the value of the spirit. During the carrying out of the activities, we were able to share the principle that on one-hand focuses on our common roots, on the other it requests from us to feel bonded by the same destiny and by the dream of a Europe that we all want to be members of. That is a Europe that will achieve its full fulfilment only when we understand that our common and collective duty is enshrined in the most beautiful article of the Italian Constitution of 1948, which states: “to eliminate the economic and social barriers which, by restricting freedom and equality among citizens, prevent the full development of the individual and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization “of the European Union and not just of a State Member.

The Erasmus+ project has given us the opportunity to be witnesses of an experience in which all key skills were used. Skills on learning how to learn, foreign language skills, computer skills related to the students’ mother tongue, awareness, and cultural expression are some of the most illustrative examples. Through these skills, we managed to attract and welcome the attention of the students, who acted in response to each situation and shared a path that bonded them in making decisions. The project represents an experience that will remain indelible in the memory of the students and on which they will be able to place their commitment on, in favour of the Communitarian evolution process of which they will feel protagonists. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the school principals of the participating schools and to people in charge of the partner institutions. In particular, the teachers involved





in the action, the experts, the technicians and the operators who have assisted us over these years. All these actors allowed us to develop a community of practices capable of achieving the objectives set out in during the design phase of the project. The project carried out over the past two years, is now the basis on which the schools of Europe, if they so wish, can continue experimenting, enriching it and use a number of infrastructures that remain heritage of the European School Community. This aspect also appears to be an important feature of the action that gives credit to the quality of the Announcements that the relevant bodies publish with respect not only to the resources that belong to all European citizens but, also, to the future of each one of us that must be increasingly based on the principles of prudence and parsimony.... Features that, way before defining the economic theories, represent determinants of reflection that are able to reduce consumption and increasingly confirm the value of life that stems mainly from dialogue and exchange of views that allows us to feel the other as important as ourselves.

Andrea Iovino







LICEO SCIENTIFICO STATALE "G. SIANI" - AVERSA (CE) - ITALY

Our school has been participating for over ten years in the initiative of the Creative Writing Relay in the format proposed by BIMED. Insert the experience of the Creative Writing Relay in the Erasmus project "Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe" immediately seemed an interesting idea: a good way to emphasize our storytelling also through a collaborative traditional writing, involving students from the different countries. It's really an opportunity to meet and confront our history with values of each period and country, reflecting on of the Past.

Reading the story reinforces the idea that the Writing Relay could be a natural and relevant contribution to the Project Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe. Writing is settling of thoughts and read into collective Memory and, in this case, it compares historical memory and its interpretation.

In human experience it's necessary that, in the end, the words remain.

Pupils from all the participating countries have created a new history through their words.

Symbolically it's nice to think that in different countries, each with its own specificities, we all work together to continue to write a common history.



Rosaria Barone

IES JAUME II EL JUST - TAVERNES DE LA VALLDIGNA - SPAIN

They say that the destination is not in itself the goal or the objective, but the journey and the whole trajectory to get there. That is why we congratulate ourselves enormously for having participated in such an engrossing project as this one on the Roman footprints in our respective countries.

During these two years our students and teachers, as well as the families and our educational community, have been able to participate in all the activities and work involved in the project. Above all, we have shared and focused on the other's gaze. At the same time that we got to know and discover the richness of our partners, we also discovered ourselves, valuing our Roman heritage in our lands.

Working together and in coordination between all the countries has provided us with an unparalleled opportunity to forge links that go beyond the academic aspects. It has helped us to trace a path like Ariadne's that will help us to find the way of harmony and esteem between different communities and cultures.

These programmes transform us in a positive way and make us grow intellectually and spiritually. It's a lifelong experience as the learning we gain during the programme does not end when we return, but is useful throughout our life.

This challenging opportunity enables us to create international links as at the end of the programme our students and our school will have a network of contacts from different cultural and social backgrounds to build on in the future. That leads to lifelong friendships.

The vast majority of our participants demonstrate a noticeable growth in a very holistic way and a new acquisition of new perspectives.

Living with a host family abroad, attending a school and making friends from all over the world is one of the best ways to gain an overview of the current political, economic and social situation. This global vision is not but a preparation for the future.

Being a host family or travelling abroad are both a unique learning experience. Being exposed to the unknown, forces the participant to put into practice and develop competences to cope with different realities. This allows the students to gain self-awareness, to control emotions and impulses or even, among others, to develop creative thinking and self-confidence.

What we learn will stay with us for the rest of our life and this experience has allowed our students to learn to relate to and be more tolerant and receptive to others, to



broaden their perspective of the world.

This project about our Roman traces around different countries in Europe has allowed students to learn a deeper approach to the Greek-Roman culture and civilisation, so that they can recognise its main aspects and then be able to be aware of its influence on our world. This learning and approach to the classical world and its repercussions on today's society will also give us better understanding of our cultural heritage.

We believe that Erasmus programs will help our students to get rid of their prejudices and be less afraid of differences, because difference is essential to enrich one another. That's why being involved in this programme is so important for our students, our families and teachers, and for our educational community in general. It gives the chance, the opportunity to share experiences, to be open-minded to other people and most of all to be conscious that "Even we may come from different places, different countries, and speak different languages, our hearts beat as one".

As Einstein said: "A mind that is open to a new idea never returns to its original size".

Anna Beliver Garcia







EUROPASCHULE LANGERWEHE GESAMTSCHULE - GERMANY

As the Europaschule Langerwehe we feel particularly committed to giving our students an understanding of our shared European heritage in all its variety. This is why the ERASMUS+ project **St.A.R.T.UP to EU: Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe** plays a decisive role in our school development, combining the fundamental ideas of our educational practice.

The topic of this project is **The Romans**. Students, especially those of the Latin language, explore, document and catalogue the traces of Roman history and culture in the four partner countries Italy, Spain, Czech Republic and Germany.

Latin is Europe's mother tongue and for the students, it provides an insight into the foundations of European culture and fosters the willingness to deal with tradition and modernity in intercultural relationships. The continuity between ancient times and the present is accompanied by teaching values such as integration and diversity, tolerance and democratic participation which are binding for European cooperation and come alive in the project's microcosm.

The digital preparation of this project mirrors the characteristics of contemporary education as also advocated by the Europaschule Langerwehe: changing the acquisition of knowledge, promoting self-regulated learning and networked thinking, enabling participation, encouraging creativity, provoking critical thinking, reinforcing collaborative and communicative work, establishing a basis for new subject-specific demands, and realising contemporary scopes of designing teaching and learning processes at school by means of European processes of exchange.

Aiming at intercultural cooperation and methodical innovation, the ERASMUS+ project **St.A.R.T.UP to EU: Storytelling Ancient Roman Traces up to Europe** represents a key element of quality at our school.

Regina Westermann



GYMNAZIUM, PRAHA 4, NA VITEZNE PLANI 1160 - CZECH REPUBLIC

I am grateful that our students were given the opportunity to take part in the project START UP to EU, as I think it is important for new generations to be able to appreciate the cultural heritage that still unites us in contemporary Europe. The outputs that the students produced allowed them to apply a divergent way of thinking in the processing of the materials obtained during their travels, which not only enriched them of new knowledge, but also gave them the means to understand and appreciate the sociocultural context common to all partner countries of this project.

Jaroslav Mervinsky



INCIPIT

DANIELA COLELLA

Fragmenta

The room was messy, with scattered papers all around the floor. A young man was standing at the door, his bohemian figure was savouring his last moment in the place which, up until then, he had called home.

He adjusted his eyeglasses and was about to fall while staring at a sheet of paper that was resting right on his shoe, It seemed that it was calling him.

Written on there, he read the rambling words of a madman. Surely, it was himself who had written those words, but when? How? His feverish nights had left him nothing but those scrawls and some snippets of memory.

He couldn't remember since when he had been living with that internal turmoil, with that feeling – of certainty – that something was missing.

Humankind feels utterly lost in today's mass society: though we're prospering in wealth, literacy, opportunities and who knows what else, we perceive our living path going downward.

The bond among people has weakened, words like God and tradition are simply meaningless nowadays.

Like Adam and Eve, we've exchanged our Eden for knowledge. And thus, we've fallen. That's what the young man thought while checking his luggage: he didn't want to live in that miserable state, not anymore.

He felt cursed by that genius melancholy, writing nonsense verses, enduring nights that felt endless, the heart that felt restless.

Alone.

He needed something to hold onto new ideals, new roots.

But little did he know that the roots were already there, they were just waiting to be discovered.

Thanks to the blood he shared with his forebears, he could live through the ages, watching from the eyes of his ancestors the shining wonders of the new-founded Rome and crying with the same eyes its fall.

And we'll follow him through his journey, while he retraces the steps of all those that came before him. A one-night decision, a journey that will take him where only God – or maybe Jupiter – knows.



Mark, Markus, Marko, Markos, Marc, Margh, Marek, Marco, Markku, Markos,
Maleko, Marcas, Markuss, Markas, Marcos, Marquinhos, Marcas.

In one word, Marcus. Our protagonist.

Final destination: Rome.



CHAPTER 1

Gifts from the past

«What will be saved will never be what we have kept away from the times, but what we have left to change so that it becomes itself again in a new time»

The Barbarians: An Essay on the Mutation of Culture

Alessandro Baricco

That torturing night of life-changing radical decisions came to an end in the very moment when Marcus took the first step outside of that haunted place that he, somehow, had perceived as comforting enough to be considered his home.

He had been living with no other light than that of the shy sun that was able to slip through the meticulously closed curtains for so long, that now the sun shortly blinded his eyes. The further he walked from the haunted house, the more alive and refreshed he felt. Marcus promised himself to never again end up like that. But his heart knew far too well that his will was utterly weak: he had never been able to resist temptations. However, it was not too late to learn. Here is the reason behind his sudden but responsible decision of leaving: he needed to reconnect with his roots, his ancestors and their glorious history; he needed to live their lives, learn from their suffered decisions and hurtful mistakes.

Technology, habits, fashion, lifestyles may have changed, but human nature has been impressively durable through time and ages, men's and women's behaviour, emotions and passions have always been and will always be changeless.

By that thought he arrived at the train station. He had a half-empty suitcase. "Just as half-empty is the life I am going to leave". He ironically thought while a sarcastic smile appeared on his face. A single rapid glance to the departure billboard got him running: a train headed right to *Caput Mundi* was about to leave. The blindfolded goddess was supporting Marcus' desperate trip.

Marcus was still panting when he spotted a free seat opposite a burly man. He sat and made himself comfortable. Then he decided to have a look at his seat-mate. He was on his phone. It seemed like he was reading something while mumbling softly. His face was relaxed and he had that slight smile of a middle-aged man whose only concern is what his wife is going to cook for dinner. He looked like he was heading

to work. "A simple man with an ordinary life. He probably has a basic name ... maybe Francesco" - Marcus thought, "I bet that he's reading something about football, or the latest TV scandalous news or other futile stuff". For a second Marcus realised he was too judgemental. In the depths of his soul he envied that man.

Marcus' mind had always been frenetic, he could not avoid thinking, he was constantly interrogating himself about everything, mostly about the secrets of humans' soul and life. His only lust was knowledge, he desired it so intensively to become a slave of his own books. Everything interested him, but people were his favourite subject. After all he had a Master in Anthropology! He was so eager to discover every single thought, memory, emotion and little secret of his targets, that he often used to forget his own humanity. Unfortunately he had misunderstood the real objectives of an anthropologist. In fact, he dealt with people in the same way as he dealt with math problems, investing all his energies trying to solve them and when he eventually pursued that, he just threw them away. There was just one time when the predator became the prey, it was one of those very rare occasions when he wasn't afflicted by boredom... He shook his head, he didn't want to think about that. It was the reason why he lost his soul and was on his way to find a better self.

Marcus shifted his gaze to the train window, Francesco had already bored him. The countryside was running fast outside. The old poetry would have described that view of trees and fields as a refuge of peace for tormented souls. Oh, to have at least a protected heaven! The contemporaries knew that it was nothing but an illusion. Even the old poets could escape from God but not from themselves. Nevertheless Marcus knew a way to forget himself, at least for a while. He found out he had received a rare gift: if he concentrated enough to connect with his forebears' energies he could shift into their present and their realities. Marcus was just able to close his eyes, take a deep breath, and then he could open a pair of eyes that were not his own but those of his ancestors. As a boy he used that gift to explore the unknown, to fill his boredom and hunger for forbidden experiences. He had so much fun living his ancestors' life that he started to prefer it to his real life. It was his gift as well as his torture.

While growing up, he used to spend feverish nights and days alone, in a dark room, entering and leaving his ancestors' lives so often that he could not distinguish his own reality anymore. Those intriguing trips had the quality of dreams: it was impossible to recollect them before the memories vanished. That was the aim of



dozens of scribbled post-its, hundreds of paper sheets written quickly, a million incomprehensible notes. Yet, his attempts to protect the memories of his past trips from obscurity were always unsuccessful.

However that was past reality, a boy's game. From that morning it was clear to his renewed adult knowledge that he needed to use that ability to pursue his spiritual recovery. That was the aim of his trip. He could build himself again only starting from the very beginning, from his roots, from Rome, the place where his ancestors' energy was more powerful. Rome, the real place where his forebears' lives took place. Marcus clearly remembered the first time he escaped from his present reality: he was at his grandparents' house and he could see the *Colosseum* in the distance. He was no older than 12 but he felt completely mesmerized by the majestic view of the Roman amphitheatre. As he was wondering how many stories ancient ruins could tell if they had the gift of speech, he found himself on the stands of the Colosseum. In the arena a man, brandishing a *gladium*, was fighting against a lion. The crowd was captured by the bloody show.

Marcus was lost in his thoughts again. As he looked outside he saw San Pietro's dome, so majestic and terrific, simply breathtaking. He could already feel his ancestors' living energy touch and pull his fingers. So much power already surrounding him... he could not resist. He wanted to give it a try, just a brief shift, it could not hurt anyone. He would be able to control himself this time.

Marcus closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he started to see again he wasn't on the train anymore and he did not have eyeglasses on his nose. To his own surprise, he did not see the breathtaking buildings of imperial Rome, he was in a village. Many men were heading in the same direction. The majority of them were armed. Marcus decided to follow the crowd. Looking around he just saw males, a few women hid in their houses as they saw men passing. Marcus was starting to understand... The march stopped when the compact group broke up, the warriors placed themselves in a half circle around a charismatic man standing on a bench. He looked young, his frizzy brown curls were so long to cover all his forehead and touch his sharp nose. His standing muscular figure irradiated power. "My fellow Romans, I've finally found a solution to our population issue " he declared, "Our neighbours were not able to comprehend the meaning of our requests. They cannot see the importance of our missions, we are guided by gods' favour. But they will understand. And they will



cooperate.” Marcus could feel the crowd’s excitement increasing. “It is now clear that good manners lead us nowhere. It is time to show our unstoppable virtues. The festival of Neptune Equester is near. We will organise the most splendid celebration this land has ever seen, and then, during its full swing, we will act!”

A strong whistle distracted Marcus from the speech. It was so intense he had to cover his ears with his hands. Looking around nobody seemed to hear the same annoying noise. And no one was whistling. Marcus opened his eyes. The train had arrived at the station. The burly man was looking at him with a confused expression. Marcus wondered what the man imagined he was doing. He smiled, he did not care. The only thing that mattered now was the fact that he was successful: he remembered everything! There was no need to take notes. The memory was vivid and strong in his mind: he had just assisted to the preparation of the Abduction of the Sabine Women. Marcus got off the train in a state of mind he had never experienced before. He started to walk looking at people in the eyes, listening to the city sounds and smelling its scents... Someone or something mysterious and great was summoning him...



CHAPTER 2

Angelica's library

Marcus had the tremendous desire to wander through this city whilst remembering all the changes it had experienced, having the certain knowledge that he was the only one who could see its variations through time. Streets seemed to evaporate at which moment he walked. Nothing compared to what he kept seeing in his journeys: he definitely thought that society had become industrialized and the monuments that held a culture as old as when the civilization started, couldn't stay in the same square that such banal infrastructures stood. Marcus' judgmental theorizations incepted from his significant tenderness to this square, in particular, because he travelled in time when he was just seventeen years old there. That time, he had no need to write down what he lived, he remembered every second of the three days he was stuck in that ancient Rome that still haunts his dreams: He closed involuntarily his eyes, and he appeared right in the center of a warriors' battle that held the abrupt violence characteristic from the Roman period. He had no time to react, his muscles felt like heavy rocks, and the sound of the swords clicking to each other kept increasing. He thought he was about to die, but then one of the warriors stood right in front of him stopping him from a fatal death. From then on, he carried a debt to him because he could never satisfy the great favor he had done. The Warrior's name was Cassander, a name Marcus will never forget. He stayed the three days of his brief travel with him, learning everything about his culture and admiring him in all his entirety. Cassander was a Greek soldier that travelled through the Mediterranean battling to own his honor. He was a reference to Marcus so the third day when he started to hear the strong whistle that meant that he was about to time travel, he promised Cassander that they would meet again. He then said: "Elpis". When Marcus arrived home researched what that word was. It meant Hope.

His constant thoughts travelled his mind when a glance of wind caressed his figure and it was then that he had a weird feeling about the future. He may have had the possibility to glimpse what the past looked like, but he was sure that what was about to come was nothing but delusional. All out of the sudden, he directed his eyes to the floor, where the purse of a running woman, who was in a hurry, had dropped. Nobody seemed to notice this strange interaction, and when he tried to reach her, she was nowhere to be

seen. He picked it up and as if it was an instinct action, he ran after her, but it was a worthless thought: she was gone. Marcus decided to rummage cutting across her purse hoping he would find something that could lead him to this mysterious lady. Surprisingly, he found nothing but a note that had a direction and an hour: "Piazza di S. Agostino, 8 at 6 pm". That peculiar circumstance astounded him, all the same he knew that going there was the only eventuality that he had to return the purse.

After a walk through the streets that he knew so down to the last, he was now standing in front of the door of a place called "Angelica's Library ", it was 5:50 pm, he couldn't see anything from outside so he decided to enter the library. Somehow, this place felt like a time travel, but he was definitely sure that he was still in his time. The building was decrepit in a shy way, there were stands full of old books some of which Marcus couldn't understand. The colourless walls contrasted with the paintings, all of them, with different stories that had the ability to captivate your soul, one of them caught his eye, his title was: "The Abduction of the Savine Women". "Seems familiar, isn't it?" someone said behind him. He frizzed himself while the mysterious woman was reaching for her purse, "Wasn't sure if you were going to make it, nice to see you at last". Her smile suggested an unknown but fond look, like they knew each other from another time. "Follow me", she said, and Marcus still wondering who this lady was, decided to follow her to the back of the library because there was something in the situation that made him feel safe. Whether it was the confidence of the mysterious woman or the connection he felt to this place, he was certain that following her was what he needed to do. She stopped in front of a bookshelf and looked at him with a barefaced smile. Then she proceeded to touch a book covered by dust, worn out by the years. She slipped her fingers through the cover as if it was velvet silk. Suddenly she decided to grabbe it, and in consequence the whole shelf began to move to introduce an enormous room that had the aesthetic of a pantheon with a tremendous oculus which enlightened the coffered ceiling and all its vivid textures. "You have a gift Marcus, and I'm going to show you how to use it". He could not say a word, his astonished look from what he had glimpsed left him stonelike. The woman continued talking and asked him if he wanted a drink, but he was still lost in the astounding situation and all the brand new information he was just receiving. "This is overwhelming" Marcus found himself saying, "Who are you? What do you know about me?". She then knew it was time to let the cat out of the bag and start to spill everything.



"Marcus, first of all, let me introduce myself: my name is Clara and as strange as it may sound I have been following you for years. Yours, is a unique gift that resides in very few people, myself including. I understand the drawbacks you have been through due to this condition that could lead you to elude this marvelous ability. But you have to know that you are not the only one. Precisely, this is the place where all time travellers gather, it has been since the first time traveller decided to found this alliance, here in the sacred place of the Roman god of time, Aion". The woman remained quiet as if she was waiting for Marcus to react but he was bewildered trying to shape all the questions and uncertainties he needed an answer to.

The first thing he thought about was his Cassander. When he met him, he was sure that it had all been a kind of hallucination, like a figment of his imagination. Now everything was starting to make sense. All those unusual elements he remembered from his childhood, must have been the product of time travel.

Marcus had not said anything for a while, so Clara decided to explain herself.

"As you may know, the Romans believed in a set of gods. Jupiter was the most powerful, but the truth is that there are many others that only the most expert historians know, among them, Aion, the god of time. He had a great friendship with a Roman boy, the son of a merchant couple. His parents died during a trip to Hispania, so the boy was left alone when he was only 12 years old. One night as he was wandering through the city of Rome, he entered the temple of Aion. He decided to help the boy and, throughout his life, he gave him protection. The boy grew up until one day he decided to show up to tell him the truth. From that moment on, the two became inseparable and the boy, named Aeneas, was always thankful.

Jupiter one day asked Aion to be informed of what was going to happen in the human world. Aion thought of Aeneas and decided that he would be the one to keep Jupiter in the loop. Aeneas gladly accepted and the god gave him the power to time travel. The time passed and Aeneas had two daughters who were born with the same power as their father. From that moment began a lineage of travelers in the time that reached today. The temple was abandoned with the advance of Christianity and Roman religion disappeared."

Marcus had a lot going on in his mind. He had many doubts about the true existence of those deities. Still, he left those questions aside and thought about his parents. One of them must have had that power too. He remembered his father, a simple, melancholy

man who enjoyed such plain things as reading the newspaper. He could not have that power. It did not make sense. The problem was that her mother disappeared when he was only five, so he barely remembered her. It was then that he realized that it was precisely her disappearance that made him suspect that her mother had the power. Marcus finally spoke. "Do you know if my mother had that power?" "Is that why she disappeared when I was a child?"

Clara nodded. She knew that Marcus had received a lot of information and that he needed time. But she also knew that there were still many empty spaces in that story. That's why she continued.

"Your mother must have seen something others wanted to hide, so she had no choice but to run away. No one knows what she discovered, but we understand it was something very huge".

"Do you know where she went?" "dared to ask Marcus".

"No, she never said it. However, before she escaped, she left here this box, waiting for you to find it one day. Only you can open it."



CHAPTER 3

Confusion, Headache, Acceptance

His mind was filled with questions. A lot of questions. The brown-haired woman, who still seemed mysterious to Marcus, looked at him invitingly. He was confused, did she ask a question? He scratched his neck and began to feel uncomfortable, because he didn't pay attention to the woman who tried to answer all his questions. A little smile graced his face to show Clara he was still in confusion about himself and that "gift", how she called it. She smiled courteously and took a step backwards. "Come in, you're still on the doorstep. I am sure you want to have a closer look at the room and its contents, especially your box".

"My box? I don't think she left this box behind so I can open it. She could have handed it to me when she had left me, but no, she gave it to a woman, who literally stalked me for the last few years. Isn't it true?"

His voice cracked when he thought about the woman, he used to call Mom. He couldn't realize what happened here, but on the other hand, it made sense. Everything could make sense if he only believed her. Cassander, he thought again about his protector, the man with who he had lived for three days. Was it all a hallucination? A part of Marcus wanted him to be real, to meet him again by his possible power.

"You don't understand, Marcus". Clara looked at him like he was a child. Like he couldn't handle the situation. He didn't like this look. "I did not stalk you or whatever unsuitable things you think of. I was always in your proximity, but not like a stalker!" She looks trustworthy and really shocked about his supposition.

Marcus crossed his arms in front of his chest and leaned against the door frame of this suspicious room to show her he wouldn't enter the room without any comprehensible explanations.

Clara understood his physical message. "Look, every time you hear those whispers, you may travel through time. But these whispers are not only voices in your head, you can focus on them to understand them. They are going to send you to a special time and you have to collect information for them and..."

"Hold on!" Marcus put up his right hand to stop the woman's explanation. "You know about the whispers?" His eyes were wide open and he forgot to close his open mouth. He just forgot his demeanor in front of this woman in this moment of unbelievable

events. Clara first was concerned about the good looking and wholesome man's shocked face. But she seemed to understand. She nodded and walked inside this secret room amidst all these floor-to-ceiling bookcases. Marcus caught up with her, maybe because she wasn't near to him anymore or it was because he has had a breath of fresh air to calm down. He followed Clara's steps with his eyes and because of some surreal cause he couldn't take his eyes off her. But he couldn't let this woman do things to him without telling him the truth!

"Excuse me, but I really don't know what you are supposed to try with me and, honestly, I am much more scared than I should be. Is it possible that you can talk with me straight and not in riddles? My mind will explode if I don't get any clarity".

Marcus threw his arms up while talking to Clara's back and pulled the tips of his brown hair, caused by his frustration that she didn't even listened to him. His mind was filled with so much unbelievable information, which he couldn't get in order. Marcus felt like swimming in a bubble. In a bubble without any reality and this, a life without any reality-based problems, scared him. His breath got faster and a throbbing pain formed in his chest like his heart either stopped beating or it was beating so fast that he couldn't be called a normal human.

Was he hyperventilating? He didn't know anything.

Marcus tried to find Clara with his view again, but there were only blurred outlines. Well, he didn't think this was a good sign. Yes, he was hyperventilating and he didn't know what he had to do in this situation. He took a step forwards to find help in Clara, but he couldn't even feel his footing, because in this moment he fell in a deep black hole. Headache. His first perception as he woke up and tried to open his eyes. He pushed his hands against the unknown bed he was lying on.

Marcus couldn't remember what has happened and where he was now. He was in a room with brown-red walls and a huge carpet with different patterns in the same color as the walls, lying on the floor. He just realized that he wasn't on a bed, it was a couch. Well, his perception was not the greatest so far after getting up. The door in front of his bed made weird noises, somebody surely wanted to open it. But who? Marcus began to feel anxious, because he didn't know nothing and it made him feel like a control-freak, not knowing who was about to come in.

The door opened very lively and a woman appeared in the door frame. Clara. Marcus remembered her and immediately all the things came back to his lagged brain.



TimeTravellers, Aeneas and Aion, Cassander, the Box. His mom. His throat began to scratch, he felt lonely and overwhelmed cause to all this information.

“What...” his voice cracked and he couldn’t form a straight sentence. Marcus eyes were caught by Clara’s appearance and his glance searched for help. Clara just nodded and smiled while closing the tall bright-brown door behind her. She walked into the corner next to the door with a small cupboard filled with many books. She took one of them, a big one with a red cover.

“I hope you are alright now, your panic attack really scared me” she had such a soft and calm voice like his Mom had in his memories.

“Look, here is everything you need to know first. You have enough time to recover and to read this book”. She was going to leave the room, but Marcus voice stopped her.

“Thank you, but is it my duty to be a time-traveller or do I have a choice to have a normal life? I know, it sounds very strange, but until now I was just a normal man, with some hallucinations in my childhood”. Marcus didn’t know if he could handle this new life and if he could meet Clara’s wishes.

But she didn’t turn around, she just said: “I know how you’re feeling but it will be better soon. I don’t think you have a choice, it’s your destiny and you are, like we all, a descendant of Aeneas. We all didn’t have a choice. Now calm down and call if you need something”. She turned her head slightly to him and smiled. This smile wasn’t really convincing, but Marcus had to accept it, he didn’t know anything about Clara. The door closed and he was left alone again.







CHAPTER 4

Return to the roots

Marcus deliberated about his newfound mission in life. He despised that the present-day world regressed and turned away from the Gods, worshipping wealth instead. People even had a saying! "Money is the anthem of success!" they shouted loudly. If Rome was still around, this would not have happened, Marcus thought.

He desired to open the book lying on the table that Clara mentioned, but he feared what could be found in it. Marcus decided that the best choice at this moment was to take a short nap. The black-haired man swiftly fell asleep and entered the state of dreaming.

Marcus dreamt of mighty military clashes between gigantic armies the world has not ever seen before, fierce battles in the Colosseum with lions and gladiators or even dreaming about being crowned as the supreme leader of the Roman empire himself. These dreams brought sleeping Marcus visions of greatness and valor.

However, his dreams had a darker side as well. Marcus had one last dream before waking up. It was about the woman he called mother as a youngster. He saw her leave over and over again in this dream, while she told him one last thing before disappearing for eternity.

Suddenly, Marcus woke up. He still remembered his last dream clear as day. It was now certain what he had to do. He had to open the book which laid on the table. Marcus took a step to the table and placed the book in his hand. He opened the book and began reading.

"Marcus, if you are reading this, I am glad that you made it so far. It also means that I have to be dead by now. I have been blessed with the Gift that you must be familiar with by now. I have seen things that no other being has seen".

To say that Marcus was confused would be a large understatement. What did his mother see? Why did she disappear? He had to keep reading. "I have found traces of the Roman Empire in places I never expected to see. In the frozen north or the middle east". Suddenly, the door opened and Clara entered. Marcus immediately turned to her. "Do you know anything about this? Romans in the cold north or all the way in Persia? Is this really true, what she is saying?" Marcus pondered. Clara did not hesitate for a single second with her answer.

“Your mother was the best of the best, she could see so far with her visions, even to places which other people could not see. Apparently, an entire Roman legion got lost and ended up in a place we now call Iran. Or that’s what the book says.

I know nothing about the frozen North, but Rome did lose a legion deep in the mountains of Persia, where they starved to death after the snowstorms set in. What makes this important is the fact that the legion was carrying gold bars, and if they are still there, whoever finds them would make a lot of money from selling them”.

Money, everything seemed to revolve around it. In this world, they are sufficient motivation for any action. His mother must have seen something she shouldn’t have. Maybe she was trying to stop something, but someone found out? His thoughts were spiraling. He felt Clara looking at him. “What are you thinking about?” she asked.

He tried to answer but he couldn’t bring himself to look up, away from the treasure and tragedy in his hands. His knees started shaking. “All this struggle and dullness, so much time could have been saved if people just looked past themselves and focused on what was once important to people”.

Clara seemed concerned by Marcus’s train of thoughts, which has seemingly gone off the rails. “Marcus, are you alright?” she asked. “Of course, I am just a little confused because of everything that has happened. My mission is now clear. I need to travel back in time to Persia. I must see the bars of gold and find out what was the real role of my mother there”.

Clara took a moment to ponder about what Marcus told her. “Of course, Marcus. Just keep an eye out. What you can see will probably uncover the truth about many things”. Marcus sighed, but he felt ready for the biggest mission of his life. “See you later, Clara” he replied, leaving for his mission.

Marcus lay his body on his bed and closed his eyes. Within moments, he drifted off to his mysterious land of dreams. He was in Persia with a Roman legion. He asked a legionnaire soldier where they were headed. “Did you fall on your head? We are going to Rome with the gold we looted from the Parthians.

“How far do we still have to go?” Marcus asked.

“A week’s journey to the frontier, from there it will be no later than a month. We just have to cross this mountain range, and then the path will be swift, I promise” replied the soldier.

“Thank you, soldier” Marcus replied and went seeking his mother.



He asked the travelling merchants if they saw a tall, brunette woman from Lombardy. One replied that indeed, she saw her in the back of the travelling legion. Marcus set his sights there. However, before he could reach the back, heavy snow set in.

The legion's speed of movement grinded down to a halt and as the night set in, they set up camp high in the perilous mountains. Marcus had a bad gut feeling that if he won't find his mother now, then he will never find her. He rushed to the back of the camp, and after long minutes that felt like hours in the deep snow he spotted the tall brunette he called mother in his present life.

"Gabriella, it's me, Marcus". "My dear child, something bad will happen at this place. I am pleased to see you have the gift, but it is too late. I have a plan to return back to Parthia, but you cannot join me. Desertion is punishable by death". Marcus had so many questions to ask Gabriella, but so little time. "Mother, why did you abandon me so young?" he asked first and foremost.

"I had to leave because I had this gift, same as you. I never returned to your father, but believe me, I knew about your life, as I was well-informed. It's been a few months since I last heard from you. I am pleased to see you now, as I cannot see you in the present". Suddenly, Marcus heard a trumpet sound go off, and he had to go see what happened. "Mother, I will be back. We still have a lot to go over.

"We will meet again, Marcus". said Gabriella. Marcus rushed to the origin of this mysterious noise, but as night fell and the snow continued, he realized he wouldn't make it there. As he tried to make another step forward, he fell into the snow. He hoped that someone would see him and help him, he shouted for help, but to no avail.

The cold slowly set on Marcus, as he slowly fell unconscious. Marcus felt his body enter into a deep slumber, one that he wouldn't wake up from. His vision ended and so did his present life. Doctors were only able to conclude that Marcus passed away in the night, from a heart attack.

Marcus never got another chance to contact Gabriella, and neither did she. Clara fainted when she saw Marcus not waking up in his bed. It was only now that she realized the curse of the Gift. It is unknown what happened to the Society of Aion after the death of their most promising member, as he fathered no children. The Society is set to become extinct in the next decades to come.







CHAPTER 5

Living only once

Clara's hands clenched to the armrests of the chair she is sitting on in her room. A drop from her sweat dropped on the opened book she was reading right before she fell asleep. Her head was still laying on it, but her eyes cramped and her back's muscles too. These pictures of witnessing Marcus dying was terrifying and she couldn't get rid of them. With a loud and deep inhale, she finally woke up, but the pictures were still there. With her eyes wide open and tarnished white, sweaty hands she took many breaths to calm down. Where was she? Where was Marcus? Did she fail?

Her sight slowly became clearer and she recognized being in her room, sitting at her table. She took a slow look around her. Everything was in it's place: her table and chair in the middle of her nude colored carpet in the centre of the room, her bed in the one corner next to the door and the wardrobe in the other corner, her books taking up the whole wall opposite the door, just a small window between the bookshelves. She was at home.

Was it a dream or did she finally have a vision again? It was a long time ago she had something like this. She was just a "normal" time traveller with no big reach trough the time. Her longest ride was about 6 hours when she was 15 years old. Her only speciality are these visions into the past and the future. She got bullied for this her whole childhood, because since her birth she was involved in this terrain of the descendants of Aeneas. She had been the only one, but Marcus was now their most promising member. He could have gotten many more abilities than just time traveling, like his mother did.

Marcus died in her vision, damn! Clara got up really aggressively and she ran out of her room and directly into his. She ignored the whispers that got louder while she stepped near Marcus` chamber. The whispers were not always good, she knew it and she wouldn't let him die. Not now. She arrived at his door and the whispers immediately stopped trying to take control of her mind. She was doing the right thing, he had to live to solve Gabriella's secret and her mission. We were waiting for so long.

She opened the door and entered his room. Marcus stood there next to the table and just opened the book. His eyes caught hers and he was obviously surprised. She understood, she should have been her for a few minutes. She was fast enough, he hadn't yet read his mom's letters.



Marcus was still waiting for an explanation for this entrance.

"I have to talk to you, before you read this.", she said with a neutral and serious face. His hands cramped, because he was ready to be a time traveller and to read his mother's book and her story. Why not now? He ignored her and his eyes got back to the first and empty page of the book. His fingers were about to browse the next page. But a soft and direct hand stopped him. This hand was so small next to his big hands. Clara's hand pushed his a little and took the book off his hand.

"Look at me and do not risk to ignore me a second time. Understood?", her tone was like a sharp knife to his throat, a total opposite from this small hand. Marcus eyes found hers again, but now there was no seriousness in there she feared something. He wanted to know was going on inside the book. He didn't think he had a choice either, like always. He sighed to show her his acceptance. Her hand let go of his and the invisible knife disappeared. He felt empty without any information about his mom or Clara's problem. Without her hand. He shook his head to get a clear and objective mind.

Marcus stepped back to his bed and sat down at the foot of the bed. His hands automatically folded together and his look got back to the brown haired girl. "Tell me, I don't know if I have enough time. So explain me the fear I have seen in your eyes." His words were much more intimate than he wanted them to be. Her eyes widened a little but she caught up again. Her hand covered the book while she was talking: "Your mother, Gabriella, has written about everything important in this book. For you. Don't focus just on the letters, which are on the second page. You have to be trained to travel through time. Gabriella's mission is one of the most important which is still not solved yet and you are the only one who can do it. You will need time, a lot of time, before you are able to do this."

His eyes followed her hand but he understood Clara's intention. But why should he first listen to her? It was clear for him that's he had to learn first. "Thank you for your warning, but I wasn't about to just go and travel through time, because I even don't know how to.", he answered confused. She nodded and her eyes got sad. Would Marcus accept her as an "only-vision-and-not-traveling-through-time" person? She got nervous and decided to not tell him about her past. It was not his problem, but hers alone. "I just wanted to be sure that you first read the book and then prepare yourself for the mission. It doesn't matter how long it will take you, just be prepared about every single detail about the time you are going to travel to. It's vital for your



life, because if some...”, she stopped. Her voice cracked. Clara just found out about the curse of the gift.

She didn't recognize Marcus getting closer to her and taking her hand in his to stop her hand tipping brutally on the book cover. Marcus saw the inner conflict in her eyes, she was like an open book for him. Clara seemed uncomfortable in his proximity and took a few steps back and placed her hand in her other one.

Marcus felt like Clara put a knife through his heart. He stumbled back and saw how her nervous features turned into a wall without any emotions. She straightened her back and said: „If you die in another time period, then your present body dies, too. We can't afford your death now, you are important for us, so don't do some naive or dumb, please.“ She turned away and opened the door. Clara didn't look back at him, it hurt her too much without even knowing why it did. She closed the door and left Marcus to himself.

He felt alone. Alone with a mission only he could fulfill. But he knew that he wouldn't make it alone, without her. Clara. He took his book without having opened it and walked out of his room, following Clara. He saw her walking around the corner at the end of the corridor and accelerated his steps. He came to the entrance area, he arrived in yesterday. Or a few hours ago? He didn't even know the time anymore. Clara walked to the front door and turned the “open” poster to „closed“. Well, it seemed like it was still the same day.

„Who do you mean, by ‚us‘?”, Marcus asked.

Clara immediately winces and gasped. Her hand which turned the poster around was now placed above her heart. Marcus took a few steps closer to her, with his hands up, a signal for Clara to calm down. As she realized Marcus was there and no other dangerous human, she relaxed her shoulders and stared at him.

Marcus repeated his question in a soft tone and Clara began to think how to answer. Was she allowed to tell him about the others and where they live? She chose half of the truth: “We are not the only time travellers, you know? There are thousands all over the world. The ones who are based here in this library are on different missions now. I think some of them are going to arrive in two weeks, but the times can change.”

Marcus nodded and Clara's view switched from his face to his hands. To the book. She already knew why he followed her. He wanted to train, to prepare everything for his journey. She understood and accepted his decision. The main thing was that he

was alive now and did not act premature like he did in Clara`s vision. She succeeded. "Come, on. I will help you, but you need time.", she said. Marcus eyes turned very hopefully and excited. She took one of his hands and led him to his room to work with him.

This small hand felt very comfortable and safe in his big and rough one. He hid his smile and followed her.



CHAPTER 6

Seeing the past in living landscape

When we arrived at the room, Clara gave me a series of techniques that I had been practising for weeks, "close your eyes and try to visualise yourself in the place and time you want to be, breathe and let yourself go" she instructed me. When I had mastered that, I started to investigate in the library. I spent the whole day reading documents and books about the god Aion, Aeneas and travelling through time.

Among one of those documents, I found a notebook. When I opened it, I saw that it was a register of the last journeys that my mother had made, and I suddenly felt like wanting to know more, to investigate, to find out who my mother really was and to discover all the knowledge she had, and I set to work.

The first trip on the list was Saguntum.

I went through the whole procedure that Clara taught me, and when I arrived there I was amazed by the people and their clothing, the very different culture.

The first thing that came to my mind were the words at the top of the first page of my mother's notebook: "Seeing the past in a living landscape requires a certain education of the eye". And there I was, on a hill overlooking Saguntum, watching the traffic along its coastline and its roads full of people from all walks of life. A land of fusions and distant origins, Phoenicians, Greeks, Punics, Iberians and Romans. The first town on the Iberian Peninsula mentioned in the ancient history of Rome on the occasion of the Scipiones' war against Hannibal. The relationship between this city and my mother was subject to time, but why? While I couldn't help asking myself a thousand questions, my gaze focused on the immensity of the sea, the Mediterranean, the mare nostrum.

To look, to observe, to educate the gaze in order to find answers. I turned my back to the sea and became aware of what I was surrounded by. A small boy was watching me with curiosity and a look of surprise, probably seeing me there in the midst of so many people and so oblivious to everything and everyone, in a fortified square. And there it was engraved on the marble of a building that seemed to stand out from the others in the square: "Forum. I'll show you where you can easily find any kind of character, so that you can meet anyone you want without delay, be they vicious or virtuous, or decent or indecent. Plautus".

People were flocking to one of the most beautiful buildings in the square, excitement and solemnity pervaded the atmosphere, a certain vertigo began to invade my deepest instincts. "Boy, what's going on? Where are all these people going? "We are going to the Rex Sacrorum, we can't miss the sacrifice of the ram, today is a very important day". Suddenly I remembered one of the texts that Clara had made me learn, the Kalendae, and I knew what was happening around me. It was January, the month dedicated to the god Janus, the two-faced divinity protector of beginnings and endings. I had studied that one of his faces always looked to the past and the other to the future. I could hear the invocation of a deep voice to the initiator god " lane biceps, anni tacite origo..."¹

Suddenly a grey-haired woman, with an incisive but warm gaze, came out of the crowd and addressed me with an attitude of waiting, of an expected encounter. "Don't be afraid Marcus, Gabriela knew that one day you would come. Follow me.

"Who are you? How did you find me? Why do you help me?" I asked her as she kept calm and started to explain to me "I know you're confused, I'm Zoe, I'm connected to your mother". "What do you have to do with her? How did you know her?" I insisted, "we both started to learn to master travelling together and we had a very close relationship, we had to distance ourselves and I didn't know anything more about her, but now all that doesn't matter, it's very dangerous that you are here, probably now they are looking for you" she said while she kept looking around us.

"The other side of the coin, the travellers who only want power and control", she tried to explain. "Wait... what? No one has ever told me anything about that" ,"that's the part they don't explain to new people, who do you think put Hitler in power?", I remain silent trying to assimilate it all, she stared at me..." you look a lot like your mother, you know? You remind me a lot of her", she said while looking melancholic.

We remained silent for a while "and now what? " Zoe takes a while to answer "I'll help you... I'll help you to get out of here, to collect information from Gabriella and I'll teach you to survive with the gifts you have... since your mother and I were not allowed to be together, at least I'll do everything in my power to help you, Marcus..."



1. O two faced Janus origin of the year that glides silently by...



CHAPTER 7

Clues

Marcus was nervous and unsure, but followed Zoe into a tight aisle in between two houses nearby. After a while they got to an entrance door. Zoe opened it and came in, Marcus followed her. He was still confused, but something in his mind was telling him, that with Zoe he's safe. This doorway lead them into a small apartment. The first thing Marcus saw were tall bookshelves with many, many books and a small table with chairs in the centre of the room.

Zoe silently came up to one of the bookshelves and started looking for something. Marcus asked: «What are you looking for? And where even are we? How can I know that I can trust you?»

She didn't respond and kept searching. Marcus was getting anxious and had many questions about everything. Zoe finally found what she was looking for. She reached for a dusty book and blew all of the dust away. As she opened it a charcoal drawing fell out. Marcus picked it up and looked. It was an old faded drawing depicting two young girls.

«Who is this?» Marcus asked curiously.

Zoe took a deep breath and started: «That's me and your mom. We went to high school together and that's where it all started».

Marcus was so impatient and interrupted her: «What started?»

Zoe looked at him with a sweet patient look like a grandmother.

«Just wait, I'll tell you all about it. Me and your mother Gabriella met on the first day of high school. I was sitting alone and waiting in the classroom. She came in and looked all around the classroom and she decided to sit next to me. We started talking and became best friends. At that time, I knew about my ability of time travelling. I never told nobody. One day Gabriella sat me down to tell me a secret. She started talking about having the ability to time travel and she was worried that I wouldn't believe her, because I sat there in shock just staring at her. It took me a while to process it, I always thought that I was the only one».

Zoe stopped talking and looked around; like she was worried somebody was watching them. When she made sure, they were safe, she continued: «So I told her. I told her that I had the same exact power. From that moment, we were really like



sisters. We wanted to find out more, we started searching all around the libraries to maybe find something, something to lead us to why and how. At that time, we were both realizing, that my power was much weaker than hers. We tried many techniques, but she always had something more, she saw much more than just the past we were in. She felt something more, but never could explain it in words. We travelled together. Saguntum was always a place that we came back to. That's why, when I learned how to stay in certain time for as long as I want, I came here and stayed. I knew that something would lead you here».

Marcus was sitting on one of the chairs and listening. He never heard anything from his mother's past, nothing about her friends or family. «So where did you part ways?» he asked after a long moment. «One time I was sick for a while so I couldn't travel for a long time. She was travelling on her own and started exploring new nooks of the time and world. At that time, I already sensed that she has some sort of secret. But life went on, she met your father and they had you. We were still travelling together, but rarely. Then, one day, she told me she has to go somewhere, she did not specify anything, she just told me that she might not return». «Didn't she leave any clues? Anything that could help?» Marcus asked. And in that same exact moment he remembered the box that Clara gave him. Before Zoe could answer, he yelled: «But she did!» Zoe looked at him so confused; she had no idea what he was talking about. «You know Clara? That women from the library of time travelers?»

«Oh, yes, I remember her, we were good friends».

«Well, she told me that my mom left me a box. A box with something in it, but I did not open it yet. That could give us clues!»

«Oh my!» Zoe had excitement in her eyes «I think you should go back and look. That could help us so much!»

And in that moment the strong whistle noise came again. «What a good timing» Marcus thought to himself. Before going back to present, he quickly told Zoe: «I'll be back».

He went straight to find Clara. She was reading a book, but as she heard the steps, she looked up and smiled. Marcus started spilling every information he had: «I found a notebook with my mom's journeys. The first one on the list was Sagunto, so I went there. Do you remember Zoe?»

Clara was shocked. «Yes, yes, I know Zoe, why?» «She was there and she told me everything about her and my mother. How they met and how they found out that they



both had the ability to time travel. She even told me about the travelers that want the power and control. She doesn't know where to find my mother either, but I think that she will be able to help us». «Sure! That's so good! She could help us a lot» Zoe responded with excitement in her voice. «I returned, because I thought of the box. We need any clues we can get. I think it's time to open it and find out more».

Clara stood up and started walking towards the cabinet standing in the corner of the room. She opened it and there it was. The box that could have the answer. Marcus had this weird anxious feeling all over his body. «I think Zoe should see it too. Do you want to travel with me to see her in Sagunto?» Clara nodded. She was nervous too. «See you there!»

They opened their eyes in Sagunto, in the aisle in front of the entrance to Zoe's flat. They looked at each other and both of them took a deep breath. Marcus knocked on the door and Zoe came up to there. When she saw Clara, she was so excited. They both were. They came in, greeted each other. Marcus put the box on the table. «So here it is. Maybe the biggest clue is in there» he spoke first. The tension in the room was intense. Anxiety was taking over the room. For a while, they were all silent. Zoe spoke first: «Marcus, you should open it. She left it for you». He looked at her and nodded. As his hand reached the box, they all stopped breathing. He opened it. And there was a piece of paper.





CHAPTER 8

Gifts from the present

«Our country is the world - our countrymen are all mankind»
(William Lloyd Garrison)

The thoughtful gaze staring into the space, the waxy face with hollow cheeks, the trembling hands, the shortness of breath and the fast heartbeat... his attention at that moment was focused only on the enigmatic note.

What did that mean? What or whom would it lead to?

He couldn't take his eyes off it and more and more questions crowded his mind.

He, like Clara and Zoe, was so confused and upset, eager to know the truth about that supernatural life.

The address was printed on the upper edge: "Locality Monteluco, 06049 Monteluco PG"
«Monteluco! Once it was on everyone's lips: talk and insinuations. But, maybe, they have got imagination working overtime», Marcus hastened.

Unaware of the familiarity of Zoe and Clara with the place, he noticed a nostalgic smile and a glimpse of joy... but why?

Marcus, asked for an explanation.

«This is a place so important for me, Clara and your mother, we are bound to it , but don't worry... We are going to explain everything along the way...» Zoe reassured him. Marcus was eager to know the story that tied the three friends and all their hidden secrets: he didn't know anything about his mother but her name, and now he really wanted to know every details about her life and the "gift".

So from the beginning of the journey, his insistence became evident.

«How did you discover this place? Why did you use to meet there? And...»

Zoe interrupted him with a smile. «Stop, we understand that you want to know».

So Clara began.

«It was the first year of high school when I began to feel different from my classmates: to every awakening I found my room in a mess, I felt severe headaches during the whole day, I heard strange voices booming in my head and sometimes witnessed scenes from the past... I didn't understand what was happening to me. I had no one to talk to, no one would understand me», a tear streamed on her face, and Zoe comforted her with a warm hug.

Clara continued: «...until one day, while I was studying in the library, I unintentionally listened to a conversation between two girls: they were Zoe and Gabriella who were talking about the power that united them. They were deciding to go to Montelucio: the light at the bottom of the tunnel! I had finally found someone who could understand me, so in the afternoon I decided to follow them».

And now he was in Montelucio too. Marcus was feeling contrasting emotions: the strong desire to discover the past of her mother and her friends, but also the amazement of being in that mysterious place, surrounded by ancient trees and the deafening noise of dry leaves moved by the hissing wind, under a sky full of grayish clouds.

Marcus, impatient, followed Clara and Zoe towards a house which could be seen from afar between two great oaks: a ruined building with broken glasses, surrounded by a destroyed fence and with a so neglected vegetation that the weeds climbed on the walls of the house.

When they opened the unstable wooden door, the old house creaked under their feet, a cold shiver ran through the empty rooms and a frightening rustle invaded the ancient cracks.

Zoe said: «I remember perfectly the day when Gabriella and I went here, everything remained untouched, but I did not remember it so battered... while Gabriella and I were preparing to exercise our gift, ready to bring back to the contemporary reality the ancient Mores , we felt footsteps coming from the outside. Frightened, we came up to the door to understand from where that noise came from.

Suddenly we saw a blonde-haired girl behind a tree... she was Clara, that embarrassed came up to us and told her story. From that moment we began to exercise our powers together every afternoon, we became inseparable. That power united us indissolubly». Finally Marcus, eager to discover the place that hid so many secrets, quickly came into the house: the walls brought him back to his mother's past, they were full of memories of her youth.

Clara and Zoe showed him the most hidden parts of that building.

First they inspected the ground floor; then they went to the first floor and were pervaded by a gloomy atmosphere: a long corridor, furnished with dusty antique furniture, old-fashioned paintings and some spider webs hanging from the ceiling. Suddenly an asphyxiating, acrid smell flooded them. Walking down the corridor, they noticed signs of struggles on the walls and stains of blood ... and the three guys, were pervaded by a shiver of terror...



What had happened in that house? Who had been there? Whose blood was that? They were confused and afraid but they took courage and went on. Their attention was caught by a half-open door from which a messy room could be glimpsed. Marcus opened the door and the two girls followed him.

The floor was scattered with papers and various books, broken glasses, torn curtains, destroyed furniture.

It was evident that there were signs of struggle, but what really shocked Marcus was a bloody dagger.

Bending down to pick it up, he saw a dead body at the foot of the bed.

Immediately his heart jumped: it was his mother. The slender body, with glassy eyes, strong signs of fight on the limbs, scratches and cuts on the pallid face, lay there sprawled in a pool of blood. At that view the boy burst into tears; Zoe and Clara came up and saw the body, they were pervaded by a severe pain for the loss of their old friend.

The dagger aroused Marcus' interest in: it looked familiar.

While he was twisting it in his hands, he saw something that he would have never seen: there were engraved his father's initials.

In that moment Marcus heard a whistle that would have brought him back to the real life. «Clara, Zoe, I'm leaving you...» he said.

And the two girls «Marcus, you have to see this through, find out who killed your mother, but be careful».

The three exchanged a warm hug before separating.

Marcus woke up in his room, upset by the hours of "sleep". He was wondering what was fact or fiction.

Did my father kill my mother? But Why? Who is he really? These questions, above all the answers, frightened him.

Marcus, still dazed, was ready to run away and put everything all behind, but remembering Clara and Zoe's words he thought it was right to give justice to his mother's death by coming up with the truth.

So, full of anger, he went to the salon. His father was sitting comfortably and was reading the newspaper. His face seemed calm and serene, but when he came across Marcus' furious look, his face became worried.

«Marcus. what happens? Why have you got that look?»

Then Marcus replied: «I deserve to know the truth! Tell me everything. Why did you do it?»

The tension sharpened, his father's face turned red and his hands began to rub nervously, he seemed to hide something.

«What are you talking about?», getting up quickly he headed into the kitchen, hoping to divert the conversation, but Marcus, imperturbable, followed him.

He grabbed his arm forcing him to confess.

The father tried to deny, but then he sat down exhausted at the table crying desperately. Everything had a sense, it was him: the only person Marcus really trusted was the killer of his mother.

Marcus saw his whole world crashing down, was caught from disappointment towards his father.

He felt a strong sense of loneliness and sadness.

«Marcus, I swear to you that I have always loved your mother madly. From the first moment I saw her I felt that she was different from the other women. We met when we were just teenagers, but it was clearly we had an amazing chemistry: we met in a café and I was immediately struck by her disarming beauty; we started dating, our ideas were very similar and I liked this immediately. I saw also in her a secret side that she kept jealousy hidden and this intrigued me ever more. A great love was born and you are the fruit of it. As the years went by, her hidden side intensified more and more and, despite my continuous questions, I felt her distance; this attitude his speech sobbing with tears.

Still incredulous at his father's words, he desperately tried to calm his anger.

Marcus faced the situation with Senecans'spirit by appealing to the great power inherited from his mother: to bring the great Roman *virtutes* back to today's world.

In particular he relied on *pietas*, referring to the sense of justice towards the family.

Marcus took a deep breath and began: «For the love you felt for my mother, for the love I still feel for her, you must turn yourself in to do justice to her death».

He left the house, leaving everything behind: he was a different person.

The discovery of his mother's past had changed him profoundly and was proud to continue to carry on the "ancient mores" so much preached by his mother's power.

Thanks to the cultural roots, the sense of ethics and in the name of the Roman tradition, Marcus felt the need to give new vitality to the *mos maiorum*: the fidelity, loyalty, trust and reciprocity of citizens, together with truth, honesty and civic sense.

APPENDIX

1. Gifts from the past

Liceo Scientifico Statale "G. Siani" - Aversa (CE) - Italy

Headmaster

Rosaria Barone

Teacher representative for the project

Concetta Esposito, Floriana Vernola

The students participating in the writing relay:

Paola Boccagna, Francesca Cirillo

APPENDIX

2. Angelica's library

IES Jaume II el Just - Tavernes de La Valldigna - Spain

Headmaster

Anna Beliver Garcia

Teacher representative for the project

Angela Grau Escriva

The students participating in the writing relay:

Alessandra Rolli Grau, Llum Grafià de los Angeles, Laura Bosch Pons

APPENDIX

3. Confusion, Headache, Acceptance

Europaschule Langerwehe Gesamtschule - Germany

Headmaster

Regina Westermann

Teacher representative for the project

Sabine Braun

The students participating in the writing relay:

Maike Bittner, Aleya Derin, Marina Vlachou

APPENDIX

4. Return to the roots

Gymnazium, Praha 4, Na Vitezne Plani 1160 - Czech Republic

Headmaster

Jaroslav Mervinsky

Teacher representative for the project

Andromeda Liberiou, Perseus Liberiou, Ginevra Palmeri

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APPENDIX

5. Living only once

Europaschule Langerwehe Gesamtschule - Germany

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Regina Westermann

Teacher representative for the project

Sabine Braun

The students participating in the writing relay:

Maik Bittner

APPENDIX

6. Seeing the past in living landscape

IES Jaume II el Just - Tavernes de La Valldigna - Spain

Headmaster

Anna Beliver Garcia

Teacher representative for the project

Angela Grau Escriva

The students participating in the writing relay:

Andrea Caldenteny Beliver

APPENDIX

7. Clues

Gymnazium, Praha 4, Na Vitezne Plani 1160 - Czech Republic

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APPENDIX

8. Gifts from the present

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INDEX

Incipit by DANIELA COLELLA	pag. 19
1. Gifts from the past	pag. 21
2. Angelica's library	pag. 25
3. Confusion, Headache, Acceptance	pag. 29
4. Return to the roots	pag. 33
5. Living only once	pag. 37
6. Seeing the past in living landscape	pag. 41
7. Clues	pag. 43
8. Gifts from the present	pag. 47
Appendix	pag. 51

Daniela Colella

Was born in 2001, she lives in the province of Caserta and studies Physics at the University of Naples. She studied at the scientific high school Giancarlo Siani where she has always distinguished herself for profit and behavior thanks to an eclectic and multifaceted personality. Her interests range from scientific to humanistic subjects. During her high school career she received several awards and scholarships, also at the University Normale of Pisa.

She participated in the Erasmus project and in particular in mobility in Spain and Italy, contributing profitably to the project activities. In the five years of high school she has always participated in the initiative of the Creative Relay and in the last year (2019) she wrote the beginning of this story, revealing talent, cultural awareness and sensitivity.

As an eclectic person, she has many interests and practices different hobbies. She loves to read, write and do theater.

Erasmus+ Creative Writing Relay

Books for the young, written by the young.

Stories that make children and young writers protagonists of an activity that involves Italy and many other European and non-European countries in a fantastic adventure that thanks to writing weaves a thread from time to time that unites, bonds, and involves the surrounding events...

The publication takes place within the framework of the Erasmus + project

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