

My Name is Philippe

by Christine Daffe

My name is Philippe (French), and I am Mr. Smith's imaginary friend. I have been for ever, but I am not a flying cloaked hero anymore. I no longer prevent the schoolboy from jumping into the void. I'm not either the talkative roommate, good for boosting self-confidence or playing sex coach with round eyes. Nowadays, I ask the old man to breathe deeply, to open his mouth and to say "A" as in *abstraction*. I ask him to follow my finger from right to left and from left to right. Could come a coma, could happen an accident—a shock, a yell and *gyrophares*. When Mr. Smith opens his eyes, he sees a caring gentleman, wearing a white smock.

For Mr. Smith, it is all right to feel pain, all right to be assaulted and wounded, all right to undergo an agony, to deal with dreadful disabilities, with blindness, with paraplegia, with every loss... I always help. Is this an open wound? I guarantee that it heals in no time. Is this degeneration? I concoct miracle cures. I keep death on the side. I pass for an angel or a ghost. I take the old man by the hand, lead him to the engine room, send him headfirst into large metallic cylinders and use over him formidable devices that are not yet invented.

His great-granddaughter is clear-witted. "Poppa," she says, "do you have an imaginary friend?"

"Hmm... yes," replies the worrying old man.

"Is he good looking?"

"Good looking?! Hmm... I don't know. Imaginary friends are always hurried when you're an adult. I guess I don't have time to see them! Ha! Ha!"

"You have many?!"

Despite his wobbling jaw, the old man takes a deep breath and declares: "Well, imaginary friends transform themselves. They grow

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up, in their own way. When you turn white and shaky, one single voice remains and helps you think.”

Mr. Smith walks away from the child, opens the fridge and tries to find a snack or a distraction. It is risky, at his age, to deceive and be presumptuous. His heart beats fast. His mouth dries up. Sparkly, atom-like dots blur his vision. Suddenly, some kind of rapid warming spreads throughout his body, followed by an abrupt, astounding contraction of all his muscles. His mind collapses as if his last hour has come.

Lying on the floor, the old man has this expression on his face, *comme Mallarmé devant le spectre d'Einstein*—an expression so challenging it could stimulate countless dissertations and seminars. The boy is busy. He is standing on a chair and hanging an apricot-size crystal prism in front of the window. The object throws mini rainbows all over the kitchen. The black cat, up on his two back paws, tries to catch them. My name is Philippe. Mr. Smith is being transported on a stretcher. My expertise is needed. I ought to see, in Mr. Smith's dilated pupils, the projection of his last reverie.

