

Excerpt from *Hutchison Street*, by Abla Farhoud
Translation by Judith Weisz Woodsworth
Published by Linda Leith Publishing
March 2018

www.lindaleith.com

FRANÇOISE CAMIRAND

She flitted like a butterfly from one character to another, from her notebooks to her characters. From the street to her computer. She had files full of notes taken haphazardly as she read, as she walked around. She would grapple with one of the characters, then embrace one of the others. She was moving forward in baby steps. One word here, one sentence there. Rewrite a section, fix another, polish many...

Sentences, ideas, emotions and images swirled around in her brain pell-mell. The time it took to decide which character went with each of these, they vanished ... and then returned even more distinctly... She would then put them down on paper, telling them, "wait, your time will come." By protecting them from oblivion, she felt calm, and so were they. Emotions can wait until we arouse them.

Characters appeared and took shape.

She continued to stroll up and down Hutchison Street, from Van Horne to Mont-Royal and back. Sometimes she took Park Avenue on the way home.

Each time she goes for a walk, she sings a different song. Today, she has picked *Mistral gagnant*, a nostalgic piece in which the songwriter recalls walking in the rain by the seaside with his young daughter.*

For a change, she decides to take the back lane behind Hutchinson. That's where she sees her. The old lady, standing on the edge of the laneway, is calling to the birds, concentrating so hard that it looks like this is the most important thing in the world.

Françoise has seen her in the neighbourhood hundreds of times, and although the old woman lives only four doors down, she has never seen her in action, in her own world.

Françoise remains hidden behind the fence and watches her for a long time. She hears her chirping well before she hears the birds. When they dive frantically to snatch bits of torn-up bread, the old lady's face lights up with a breathtaking smile. She has the disarming look and movements of a happy little girl. As if her smile and innocent gestures alone could make the universe come to life.

Both laughable and dignified, this moment encapsulates all that is laughable and dignified in our world...

*Note to the reader: You can listen to *Mistral gagnant* by Renaud [here](#).

Text © Abla Farhoud
Translation © Judith Weisz Woodsworth