

A Short Story Prompt
2/2021

With each purposeful step she took down the bustling city street of Chicago, Louise imagined she was stomping out the butterflies that relentlessly fluttered and filled her stomach. With gloved fingers she worked to keep her wind whipped hair out of her face, while clinging tightly to the coiled scarf round her neck.

She finally made it to the brasserie on the corner of 65 E Washington St. A familiar chime of a bell, warm air, and the comforting smell of fresh croissants and hot coffee welcomed her in as she pushed through the front door. Her tense muscles relaxed a little more, color began returning to her frozen cheeks. Marcel's warm smile and hearty, "Bonjour Louise!" softened the sharp edge of anticipation surrounding the meeting that was to take place in 10 short minutes. "This is my territory," Louise thought to herself. "I can do this."

"The usual?" asked Marcel. "Yes, but not the triple today." The idea of adding extra caffeine to the adrenaline already pumping through her veins did not seem wise. Louise said a quick prayer of thanks when she saw that her favorite table next to the front window was vacant, and took it as a good sign. She made her way across the herringbone brick floor, pulled out the a chair with the best view of the front door, and sat down at the small, round, darkly stained wooden table. Louise pulled off her leather gloves and set them to the side before she took off her heavy overcoat and hung it on the back of her chair. She closed her eyes as she took in one long, deep breath. Though the atmosphere was filled with her favorite sights and smells, she struggled to savor them like she would on a typical Saturday morning. This Saturday morning was anything but typical.

"Your coffee, Madame," said Marcel, breaking her trance. "Oh, yes, thank you Marcel." She smiled weakly as she looked up into his questioning eyes and puzzled expression. "I'm okay, I promise."

Unconvinced, Marcel left Louise with her steaming Americano. She loosened her scarf and pulled off her knit beanie, repositioning her stray hairs back into place. Louise weaved her cold fingers around her small white cup, and lifting it from its matching saucer, she took a sip of the hot liquid that seemed to melt her icy insides as it went down.