



## **Timothy**

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Submitted: 21. October 2017  
Published: 21. October 2017  
Volume: 4  
Issue: 4  
Affiliation: Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg  
Keywords: night, literature, dream, fly, Clara, moon  
DOI: 10.17160/josha.4.4.343

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**Journal of Science,  
Humanities and Arts**

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# Timothy

By Zazie-Charlotte Pfeiffer

It was raining outside when Clara shut the door behind her and stepped out into the dark corridor. She could hear the raindrops knock against the walls and the windows, as if they wanted to get inside to hide from the cold wind. For a second, Clara stopped right in front of her door and listened to the tender whispering of the rain, but she couldn't



understand what it was saying. Before she came here, she had really been hating the rain. The feeling of being trapped with her raincoat in the corner of some house in some place somewhere on the way to somewhere, knowing that the rain was going to keep her in that corner as long as she wouldn't decide to fight her shaking skinny legs and the wish for the sunshine and blue sky. In a certain way, the rain did threaten her still. Sometimes it seemed to grab the sleeves of her coat or the heels of her shoes and hold on so tight that she had to drag it along with every single step she made. A cold wet thing that she just couldn't get rid of. Now, she loved the rain.

She stood in the corner of her door and stared at the shadows of the raindrops sliding down the pale white walls of the corridor wondering what they wanted to tell her. She could see the little dark spots on the floor, the walls and even on her naked toes as she looked down at her feet. Little dancing shadows of raindrops rolling around everywhere. Clara moved her toes, but she couldn't feel the dark spots on her skin. The rain seemed to touch her without giving her the satisfaction of even feeling it. Things have been like that in Clara's life for a really long time. Only spots or shadows of things she thought she could actually see, soft breezes of human emotion or simply the feeling of being far away from someone who stood right in front of her. For some reason things always passed by without really touching her, seemed to happen without her being part of it. But Clara was used to that kind of life. So she smiled at the dumb shadow raindrop-spots on her feet and quietly went down the corridor. She didn't feel that she was sneaking out even though that was exactly what she was doing. Her fingers smoothly slid along the walls as she moved through the labyrinth of white corridors. She knew this place so well. There was no square metre she didn't know. Room number 234. That was where old John was living. He probably the place even better than Clara did, but he never came out of his room. The last time Clara had seen him, he had a long white beard. No one shaved him because no one dared to touch him, but it didn't matter anyway. Clara turned left and then right and right again. Her bare feet didn't make a sound on the laminate floor. Room Number 255, mad Martha's room. People called her mad in a very

loving way and not to offend her. Everyone who stayed here for a longer time got his own name. As in a tribe, where the members are called „White Eagle“ or „Owl of Wisdom“. The only difference here, was that no one was puzzled about the meaning of those names. Clara knew the white pale walls of the corridors better than the people hiding behind them. Sometimes in spring, when the first breeze of spring flew over the park and the flowers started growing, they were allowed to take a stroll in the garden together or when the nurses prepared a picnic for everyone, but only as long as everyone behaved well. Of course, Clara met the others also during breakfast and dinner and several times a week in drawing or singing lessons, but they never talked or painted or sang much. People were rather quiet around here and preferred keeping to themselves. Although Clara liked being with people in general, she always felt much safer alone. There were not so many possibilities to break rules or to do wrong. Being alone was easier.

Steps came closer. Nurse Lee was on her half-hour-round in block C. Clara recognized the sound of her shoes respectively her steps on the floor. Sharp and fast, a tiny little bit like running away from something. Clara's feet didn't make any sound at all. Apart from her nightgown, she didn't wear anything. The steps came closer and closer, but it didn't worry Clara. She knew it was going to be alright. A night like every other night. One dark long night in which she was sneaking out to feel the fresh air of rainy wind on her dry skin. „Tak, tak, tak“ steps on the floor. Clara could already see the windows at the end of the corridor and the moonlight creating a long silver pathway on the floor that almost touched Clara's bare feet. It was simply beautiful. The moon was inviting her. „Come.“ it said. „All you have to do is follow my light, can't you see my light? Can't you see the way?“

Quietly Clara stepped over to the last window on the right. There was a really small spot underneath the window-sill. One would have to come all the way up to the balcony to see it, but Nurse Lee never did. She only took a look at the doors on the left and turned around to get back to her hot cup of coffee and the fig biscuits she always brought along. One day she had given Clara one of the biscuits. Clara could still remember the taste of the warm thick and sweet mass on her tongue and the smile on Nurse Lee's face. While chewing the biscuit and staring into nurse Lee's chubby face, Clara had understood why people become fat. They become fat and lazy and idle by chewing little sweet biscuits every day and wearing white spotless socks like the nurses did. People with fig biscuits have nice cozy houses and husbands to come home to. Sometimes they even have some fig biscuit eating fat little children in their nice cozy homes, whom they go on feeding biscuits and biscuits and biscuits until their thoughts stick together because of all the chewy fig mass and their bodies become as soft and warm and lazy as their parent's. In fact, Clara imagined them to become more and more like those fig biscuits they sometimes share with people, to whom the taste of such a biscuit is almost as strange as those comfortable cozy lives. Clara remembered, that she had felt Nurse Lee's fat normal life on her tongue by eating that biscuit. And she also remembered that look full of regret on the nurse's face when she spat it on the floor.

The steps came closer, but Clara only closed her eyes and tried to become part of the wall behind her. In her white nightgown and with the shadow rain spots all over her body, she almost became part of her surrounding and Nurse Lee's steps didn't change their rhythm when she turned around without noticing anything.

The „Tak, tak, tak“ was slowly fading away, but Clara waited until it was entirely gone before she crawled out of the little corner and turned towards the balcony. She felt the little key between her thin cold fingers. It had been during last summer that Clara had found it underneath the bench in the park where the nurses use to sit and chat sometimes. The following day she had heard them talking about the key, whispering as if they were afraid of something. Of course, they had been afraid. The loss of keys had to be reported to the head nurse immediately and the guilty nurse had to pay for its replacement but luckily it had only been the key to the nurse's little balcony where they sometimes snuck out to have one or two cigarettes. After searching for the key for some time they must have decided that there was no need to report a tiny loss like this. Clara did not hear the whispering again. The following night she had tried the key. Her own door wasn't locked at nights because she had never been a threat to herself or to others. And besides, the nurses usually noticed everything during their rounds. Only Nurse Lee never looked into the rooms or checked every corner of the long corridors. Those nights were always safe. Those were the nights that Clara could steal a little bit of freedom by spending some time out on the balcony without anybody noticing or watching over her. Luckily the door never made a noise.

Clara slipped through the door and closed it carefully behind her. The balcony was in complete darkness and Clara could feel the wet stony ground underneath her feet. She wiggled her toes and as she looked down, she could see that the raindrop-spots on her feet had been replaced by some real raindrops. She smiled and sat down on the wet floor next to the door. With her eyes closed, she could smell the rainy air, the leaves of the trees and even the moss on the parapet. A cold wind ran through the night and made the rain drops change their direction for a second. Clara smiled again as she felt the rain running down her neck, caressing it, touching it, kissing it. That's how love must feel.

„Hello.“

Clara flinched as if the unexpected break of silence had beaten her right into the face. As she turned her head towards the sudden voice, she saw a shadow sitting on the parapet. The face was hidden in the dark, but Clara could see that the shadow moved. Breathed.

„Don't be afraid,“ it said. „I won't tell anyone.“

„Who are you?“ Clara didn't know if shadows could actually smile, but in this moment she could have sworn, that this one did.

„I am just like you,“ it answered. And then again: „I won't tell anyone.“

Clara could hear the voice so clear and loud as if the shadow was sitting right next to her.

„I like the rain.“ The shadow had a tender and soft voice.

„Me too.“

„Do you often come here?“

Clara shook her head. „Only sometimes.“

A soft chuckle slipped off the shadows lips. It was sweet and happy and light and it made Clara taste the sound of freedom for a second. „You mean only when Nurse Lee is on duty.“

„You know her?“

„Oh yes, I do. I said I am just like you.“

„What’s your name?“

„Timothy.“

„Don’t you want to know mine?“

„I already do know it.“

„Oh.“

The shadow, named Timothy, smiled again and moved a little bit more to the edge of the parapet.

„Be careful. You could fall.“ Clara stood up and stared at Timothy with her back pressed against the wall. She wanted to reach out to him, but she stayed right where she was. Her nightgown was completely drenched.

„I could.“

„It’s the fourth floor.“

„I know.“

„Aren’t you afraid?“

„No.“

At that moment the moon must have found a little gap between the clouds and its bright light fell on Timothy’s face. Clara gasped. He was young. Maybe eight or ten years old. Only a boy. His hair a beautiful blonde or golden shade and his eyes were green as the moss in the forest when it was raining. He didn’t seem to be wet at all. He smiled.

„And I do like the moon.“

„Me too,“ Clara whispered.

„I have always wanted to be a bird. A bird that can fly up high enough to touch the moon instead of just admiring its light.“ Timothy was beautiful but his cheeks were pale and his lips had a certain blue color. „People have stopped dreaming, Clara. They have stopped wanting to be birds.“

She didn’t exactly understand what he was saying, but she saw him moving closer and closer to the edge.

„Timothy!“ Clara stepped closer towards him and reached out her hand. She didn’t touch him, but she could still feel him.

He turned around and smiled at her. „Don’t be afraid. It’s alright.“ Then he just raised his hands towards the sky and the moonlight seemed to kiss his fingertips as he jumped into the darkness. Clara heard herself scream. Timothy was flying and she thought she still heard his last words flying through the night. „Don’t be afraid.“ Did she cry or was it only the rain on her face? She couldn’t say. „Don’t be afraid. It’s alright.“ Clara stood completely still in the rain and heard herself

panting. „It’s alright.“ The tender voice was still moving around her and although she was shaking, she felt a strange warmth inside her chest. Clara had once read a story about a man who was making wings for himself to enable him to fly like a bird. The man flew so high up that the sun burned his wings and he died falling from the sky. He wanted to touch the sun and he died trying. Now she was certain that she was crying, but her tears were pure and honest and full of freedom. It was alright to want to touch the sun. Or the moon. It was alright to want to be a bird. It was alright to fly. And even if you might die trying, at least you would have had this one moment of happiness when the sky is all you can see and your wings let you fly over the world light as a feather and full of the most impeccable joy one can ever find in his heart. And isn’t that life at its purest? Isn’t that what people call love?

The moonlight was still coming through the clouds and from the corridor, one could clearly see Clara’s silhouette in the rain on the balcony. Nurse Lee ran down the corridor, panting, screaming. She wasn’t used to running. The silhouette on the balcony stood perfectly still even though the alarm shrilled through the building. Nurse Lee threw herself against the door and grabbed the girl’s hand. It was as cold as ice.

„Sweetie, what’s going on here?“ Her voice was shrill as she shook the girl’s arm and put her hand on her wet face. „What’s going on?“ she repeated, but the girl was only smiling and nurse Lee could see that her eyes were filled with tears.

„There was a boy.“

„A boy?“ One could hear a lot of running feet coming closer. The alarm was still screaming. „What boy?“

The girl pointed towards the moon that somehow seemed to shine a lot brighter than just a few minutes before. „He was flying.“

Nurse Lee took a quick look down into the courtyard, but there was no one to see. With the alarm, all the lamps had been lit at once. She shook her head.

„There is no one here except you and we have to get you inside, love! You’ll catch a cold!“

„Of course he is not here. He was flying.“ The girl smiled at her again. „Don’t be afraid. Timothy is alright.“

„Timothy?“ Nurse Lee whispered and took a deep breath. „Let’s get you inside sweetheart. Come on.“

The girl left wet footprints on the laminate floor as the nurse guided her down the corridor. Soon after, some other nurses and a security man came running up to them. The girl kept on smiling and repeating „He is alright. Timothy is alright.“ Over and over again.

„What is she saying?“ one of the other nurses asked.

„She keeps repeating the name of a boy who used to be a patient around here.“ Nurse Lee answered. She was pale.

„A patient?“

„Yes, but that was a long time ago. Almost twenty years.“

„So he did go back home after some time?“ The nurse, who was asking so many questions was very young.

„He died jumping off that balcony.“

„Died? Good Lord.“

Nurse Lee nodded her head and her voice didn't sound shrill anymore.

„Timothy was only eight.“

„May the good Lord save us.“ the nurse whispered and ran down the corridor.

It was still raining and Nurse Lee went back to shut the door of the balcony. Next to the door, she found the key in one of the puddles on the floor. Tomorrow they would have to replace the lock. She was sure that the balcony would not be used by the nurses again. Maybe it would be best to replace the door by a solid wall. Then, the only thing remaining would be a balcony without doors and without any key by itself in all the nights to come. He was flying. Nurse Lee took the key and locked the door. But before she finally turned around to leave, she put her hand on the wet glass of the balcony door and took a last look outside into the night. The rain clouds were gone and the black sky with all its stars seemed to sparkle like a polished obsidian.

But apart from this sudden stop of the rain and the disappearing of the clouds, the most obscure thing was this extremely bright moonlight that was shining up there like a silver shaded sun.

Nurse Lee smiled and put one hand on the wet glass of the door.

„Good night, Timothy,“ she whispered. Then, she turned around and slowly went down the wet corridor.

And maybe there was a little boy sitting out there on the balcony watching Nurse Lee walk away.

Maybe he was smiling.

Or maybe he was just flying up into the beautiful night and letting the moonlight kiss his fingertips, feeling light as a feather and free as a bird.

Birds are brave. They are not afraid of burning their wings. They just fly.

It's people who are afraid.