

TITLE: Mistranslated Magic
WORD COUNT (excluding title): 997
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“Devils of light . . . mend the moon,” Ryu repeated aloud, one long, black nail trailing words, a fleshly sentence-ninja of sorts. The edges of some of the book’s pages crunched like a chip, where others disintegrated or sent up a geyser of dust that made Josie think of dead people’s skin. *Cellular confetti*.

Josie, Ryu’s friend since first grade, had her doubts. “Are you sure that’s what it says?”

“Positive. Remember, I useta live in Canada.”

“Yeah, but only for a couple years. When you were a little kid.”

He tapped a finger at his left temple and drawled *steel trap*, whose action reminded them both of a shared bonding experience: dredging up a spliced copy of the “Terminator 2” movie scene where the T-1000 shape-shifts its arm into a steel blade to casually spear the man’s skull.

Both teens erupted, with Josie just managing to croak out “Aluminum, maybe” amid snickers.

“Seriously, Ry, what does that mean? I **don’t** think it’s French.”

“It’s a magic book, I’m certain of it. Anyway, let’s take it for a spin, shall we?” A black eyebrow quirked.

Josie knew better than to argue for reason when he had that green-eyed gleam. And that grin.

She instinctively dragged her dark purse closer, and it scuttled a path through the pebbles. The hinterlands behind the school bordered cornfields on two sides and several acres of semi-thick woods on the other.

It was unlikely any Fogues were around with a breathalyzer to check for magical utterings, but you could never be completely sure. So Josie was at the ready to ensconce the book within its labyrinth of fabrics.

In the waning sun, the *Magie ist verboten* sign creaked from the tops of the metal swings. Neither had a clear idea what the sign meant, but Ryu thought it probably

translated into permission to use magic as long as you were sitting in a boat whilst wearing fur.

“See, Joze, this part says *la petite mort*. . . . I think we can conjure some dead people. Possibly midgets!” His excitement evaporated. He looked furtively around. “But we need to go somewhere . . . secure.”

Simultaneous whispers of *the shed!* After triangling the corner of the decrepit page, Ryu grabbed Josie’s purse and shoved the book in. Soon, echoes of the slaps of their shoes could be heard as they cut across the solar ten-ball courts.

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About a mile in, just past where two hills mingled in a cove of blackberries, crouched their hideout: the thicket-smothered shed. Josie and Ryu liked to think of it as a shed, but it didn’t even approach a shack. It was more a collection of boards, many pried open by time and barely held up by a tent of tangled brush and thin tree trunks. The only sight marker, a nearby decoy, was a purple brick with lettering approximating gold. Ryu had painted “not all those who wander are lost,” along with an arrow pointing away from the secret hideout, in art class when he should have been doing robot animations.

“OK, let’s get started,” he said over cracking knuckles. Both scrunched under the awning and let the remainders of light that splintered through the air-dancing spiderwebs be their guide.

“This one about Hannibal looks good, Ry,” Josie offered, pointing to a picture of an animal she’d seen only on the extinction lists. She thought she remembered it was called an *elephant*.

“It seems like the spell might be voice-powered.” So Ryu began to chant, in what he thought was French.

Nothing happened except the flinty chirping of a nearby bird.

“Try it again,” Josie urged.

“Still nada.”

“Can I try it?” she asked, gesturing for the book.

After stumbling over the accents a couple times, she got the line to where she

thought it sounded right.

A burst of some kind of creatures engaged in either a chase or a speedy seduction crashed through the nearby thorns.

It could just be the Adderlees' dog, Josie turned to meet his fear-stretched face.

"Or it could be me," a male voice calmly informed them from a few feet ahead.

Cornflower-blue eyes seemed to make apparitions of Josie and Ryu's lupine forms as they emerged cautiously from their haven.

"You British?" Ryu questioned, faking toughness.

"Oh, rahther," the man in what seemed to be a finely tailored suit and bowl-style black hat, responded, not bothering to smile. "But the pertinent question is, who are you?"

"We live nearby." Josie jerked her head to the east.

"Yeah, real nearby." Ryu quickly added.

"I suspected as much. Pleasure to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Live-Nearby. I am Doctor Lecter. Hannibal Lecter." He offered a hand so spotty and bone-bound, Josie felt one would be unwise to take her eyes off the man.

"Wait. *The* Hannibal Lecter?" Under his breath Ryu side-mouthed to Josie, "he's a cannibal. Saw it in a graphic once."

"Young chap, I am merely an *a-flesh-ionado*, and, by the prick of my thumbs, I think at least one of you might be likewise."

Did he just call me a prick, Ryu thought. The guy just wouldn't shut up.

"You might have heard that I ate people, but that wasn't spot-on. I in fact ate their livers with pork'n'beans and beer-flavored lollipops, not any chianti rubbish."

Slurp, slurp, slurp.

After the doctor whipped the skull-and-crossbones tutu from an inner pocket, it all got too weird, and both teens turned and sprinted out of their now-unsecreted place.

His “Apres moi, le deluge” thundered in their ears, but as Ryu glanced back through the receding trees, it seemed the clone . . . ghoul . . . whatever was not attempting to follow.

What being an ape in the rain had to do with anything, Ryu didn’t know.

Damn, we’ve got to widen our spheres of reference, was all Josie could think as a crepuscular rain began to pulse salt-and-water rivulets down their strained faces.