

## Look with your heart

Cecil Elliston Ball

Yann Thomas is a remarkable man. Who, who did you say? Who on earth is Yann Thomas?

OK, so you have no idea who he is and why he is remarkable, but just stay with me on this one and I will tell you!

One day in Paris, a twelve-year-old boy was running late on his way to school. Maybe his mum didn't wake up in time. Or he was halfway down the street before he remembered the exercise book with last night's homework in it. Boy, would he be in trouble if he didn't hand it in today!

He ran along the street, fell almost headlong down the stairs into the Metro station, ticket twice through the barrier before it would open, dashed down the platform after the departing train, tripped, and fell on the tracks.....

Yann Thomas is a young man in his twenties, working as a museum attendant with one of the world's greatest art collections at The Louvre. His job consists mainly of telling tourists not to take photographs.

"No, no pictures please! Look, there are notices all over the building, it's all very clear. Don't take pictures, look at them!"

Yann Thomas is passionate about pictures. He thinks: why do people travel from all over the world to look at great art, but spend all their time taking photographs?

"Yeah, and here's the *Mona Lisa*. Great picture huh? And this is Linda standing next to the *Mona Lisa*, pity about Mona, a bit of reflection from the flash..... oh! and here's me next to *Venus de Milo*. Linda had to wait ages to get this! All those damned little Japanese getting in the way. Mind you, dunno quite what people see in her. No, Venus not Linda! Personally, I reckon she just looks like any old Greek goddess with her arms knocked off!"

The tourists have gone and the Louvre is closing up for the day. Yann pauses in front of a picture by Gericault called *The Raft of the Medusa*.

"My whole life is in this painting" he says. "Look at the figures on the raft. Some of them are dead. That one there; see that face? It's just despair, and that one there, completely exhausted. But some of them are looking at the man standing there with the flag, the flag bearer, and can you see what he's looking at? Very few visitors notice this unless I show them but, in the distance, on the horizon, is another ship coming out of the sun. Most people see only a shipwreck. I see hope."



When Yann Thomas was picked up off the railway track, one of his arms and one of his legs had been completely severed from his body. Yann remembers the moment he died and looked down on his body and the medical team labouring to bring him back. He remembers the despair and the exhaustion. "Now", he says, gazing up at the Gericault, "I am the flag bearer".

Time to go home, and Yann directs his wheelchair towards the exit, passing by the *Venus de Milo*. "Now look at that! She's so damaged isn't she, but she is still beautiful and so powerful don't you think? Sometimes I try to imagine her with her arms, but I don't think she would have the same effect on you. You know, if she did have her arms, maybe people would then see just another ancient Greek goddess. But she isn't; she's a one!"

Yann is on his way home but will be back again tomorrow.

"No, no! Don't look with your camera; look with your heart!"