

The Disappearance of the Lilac Tiger

Episode 5 – "To the Boy Across the Hall"

written by

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Cast

Narrator	Annelise Bianchini
Michel Dupont	Guido Mogni
Fabienne Borde	Natalie Beran
Madame Cloutier/Madame Belmont	Margot Richardson
Bernardette Deschamps	Lily Whiteside
Algernon Goss	David McMaster
Montague Roche	Chad Phillips

NARRATOR

There was an old lady from Nice,
Who kept all her pearls in a
fleece,
When asked if a sweater,
Might indeed be better,
She screamed and called the police.

5.1

FABIENNE

The night of my fifth birthday I
went to bed later than usual. Not
because it was my birthday, but
because of the noise. The people
who broke into our apartment kicked
the door until it cracked, then
splintered, then broke completely,
leaving only the doorknob and a
jagged tab of wood still attached
to the frame.

A man with a huge toolkit stuffed
with different types of hammers,
screwdrivers, saws and levels with
little bubbles in them, came to our
apartment. My dad liked to make
this joke that the bubble in the
level was a goldfish fart. I wasn't
in the mood.

The man with the toolkit used a big
metal hammer to bash out the
remaining fragments of wood, then
he used a rubber mallet to pound on
the frame... I don't know why. I
remember standing in my pyjamas
watching them talk - my parents and
the man - and wondering why we
weren't out looking for Marlon.

Turns out the man with the toolkit
didn't have the part he needed, so
we slept that night with a bookcase
in front of the door. I pleaded
with my parents to leave enough
space for Marlon to come back in.
They said that it wasn't safe and
that we'd go and look for him in
the morning. I don't think that we
ever did.

5.2

NARRATOR

If by day the apartment building is a pastel pink block of marzipan, and by night a sultry pink sponge cake, then by day on the *inside* it is a cool, dark refrigerator.

Yes, I know that I once said it smells like the ghosts of a thousand bowls of vegetable soup, and it does, in my opinion, but... what the building lacks in good odour, it more than makes up for in a steadfast ability to keep secrets. Secrets it will keep without judgement, or prejudice. Secrets it will keep until someone comes along and uncovers them fair and square.

Late on this afternoon, the person to uncover our secret fairly and squarely, is the electrician. Oh, here he comes now.

White-haired and white-bearded, and dressed in rather old-fashioned blue overalls, the electrician might well have been the electrician here for the entire time the building has existed. He treads softly on the carpet as he goes, muttering to himself and touching the walls lightly with the tips of his wrinkled fingers. He does this with a fondness for the building, as if it were not just his forever workplace, but his forever home, too.

These old buildings aren't wired up like buildings today. It takes a special kind of savoir-faire to keep things running smoothly.

Today, though, it's just a checkup. A simple checkup on the electricity meter of floor nine-and-a-half. Purely routine, but something in which the electrician takes great pride.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He approaches the electrical cupboard and with a few creaks and cracks, slowly lowers himself to one knee. The electrician places a large, leathery hand on the cupboard door as if feeling and listening to the heart of some enormous, silent beast. He opens the door and sees... the Lilac Tiger. Ten kilos, or twenty-two pounds of moulded soft purple resin in the shape of a Bengal tiger, it is...

...not supposed to be there. Residents are told not to use the electrical cupboards, or any communal space as private storage. It's against the rules, and the electrician knows this all too well. It's a simple rule, and when it's broken, though he is not a malicious man, the electrician does not suffer fools.

He hauls the tiger from its hiding place and stands it next to him while he works. Just a routine check. He takes a small notepad from a small toolbag by his side, and with his glasses perched on his nose, reads the numbers on the meter and writes them down. When he's done, the electrician closes the door, and with a few creaks and cracks, stands up.

The Lilac Tiger isn't something the electrician much cares for. But, he doesn't have anything against it either. A man his age has seen all sorts of things made out of plastic, coloured in all sorts of unlikely ways. To him the Lilac Tiger is just an object.

With considerable effort -it's heavier than it looks- he scoops up the tiger and carries it to the elevator. The elevator he knows well, too. He knows precisely how long it will take to go from one floor to any other floor, providing it doesn't stop on the way.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Once at the ground floor, the electrician leaves the building and carries the Lilac Tiger around the side, to the dumpsters. But he doesn't put it in the dumpster. He knows that sometimes artists come along and make use of these sorts of things. Instead, he leaves the tiger next to the dumpster, just poking out a little, as if it were there to keep guard.

Job done, he doesn't click his tongue or complain or shake his head. He just goes back inside, humming a tune as he goes.

(Music interlude: Lily Bentley - Ploughboys in the Gloaming)

5.3

SFX: Voicemail beep.

MONTAGUE ROCHE

Madame Deschamps, this is a courtesy call to let you know that I am on my way into town. I suppose that you're busy with last minute festival preparations, although I am aware that the tiger is yet to be found.

I must say, Bernardette, that while your late husband's ending was tragic, and evidence of a serious lapse in judgement and care, in the years that I knew him, I knew him as a thorough and efficient man. Take from that what you will but know this... I... Hmm, perhaps I should have thought of something more scathing to say before... Well, you see the point. This is a courtesy call. I will see you soon.

SFX: Beep.

5.4

NARRATOR

Have you ever wondered where all of those little nik-naks and oddities you see in boutiques come from?

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Maybe that's too specific of a question, but you must have been on holiday before and wandered into some cramped shop, tightly nestled into some bustling city street and thought... where does it all come from?

All of these trinkets and delicate things, presided over by a single shopkeeper as if they were her own personal possessions. You wonder: Does she make them herself? Have them shipped in from China?

Mostly it's somewhere in the middle. Mostly the shopkeeper has trusted, local connections, who make *versions* of traditional pieces. Not everything is as legitimate or *crafted* as you might think, but supporting local sellers is a good and decent thing to do, so... you know, good for you.

Madame Belmont, on the other hand, finds many of the things she sells. Antiques, old furniture, discarded and upcycled artworks. She has a good eye, and often turns a profit on things you or I might step right right over.

It is now night, and as Madame Belmont passes by Michel's apartment building, her eye is caught by what looks like the silhouette of a cat, only, an incredibly large cat. The silhouette pokes out from behind a dumpster with such stillness that it looks as if... yes, maybe it's hunting, getting ready to pounce.

Madame Belmont stops to watch. She waits... and waits... and waits. Boutique owners like Madame Belmont are curious by nature, but not always up on current events. You know, personal preferences and all that. She takes a few steps toward the large cat. It does not move.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

She takes another step, and finally, realizing that it is indeed made from plastic, walks all the way up and touches it on the head.

Smooth. A single solid piece of molded soft purple resin... this thing could fetch a tidy sum. Madame Belmont picks up the Lilac Tiger, and struggles a bit - it's heavier than it looks. She grasps it underneath the belly and then, like a raccoon, is gone.

5.5 (*the only time the Narrator speak at the same time as another character other than M. Belmont*)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

There's this idea that memories are recorded and then stored like old video tapes, and that like video tapes, memories only degrade with time. We see memories as final - either they're there, or they're not, and if we don't remember whether the car was blue or green well, that's just too bad becau-

MICHEL

Uh, I don't feel so good.

NARRATOR

As I was saying, memory doesn't always work the way we think that it does an-

MICHEL

I think I'm going to throw up.

NARRATOR

(sighing)

Michel is walking along the beach right now - clearing his head, I suppose, although he never seems to have a problem with that.

He passes the spot where the Lilac Tiger used to be, where the empty stand had been until Deschamps had it removed. He's been taking more and more aspirin lately, but... tonight he took something else.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He thought that they were aspirin but then again, he never checks anymore.

What he took wasn't for him, or for anyone else for that matter... anyone human. When Michel handed over Jacques Pistache's special food to Madame Cloutier, he failed to also hand over Pistache's medication.

Pistache is a fickle creature, you see, with lots of peculiar physiological... Anyway, Michel took several of these pills and is now beginning to look a little... well...

MICHEL

I've been here before... to this spot, I know it. There was something here, I... I touched it, something big, I-

(gasps)

What is that? Something's watching me. It- it's coming closer. God, why's it so bright all of a sudden? It hurts my eyes, my head is pounding but, I... I feel kind of...good.

Ha! Oh. Ha-ha! There's a tiger on the beach, a real tiger. Aaah, it's so beautiful. They're way more purple in real life than they look in movies. Ah, I guess that's just a camera trick or somethin- oh, hey, hey big guy. Wow, you're so soft like... wow, this must keep you really warm in the mountains. Is that where you live? In the mountains? You must be so hot down here. Yeah, you're a long way from home-

Oh-woah, okay! Hey, easy, okay. You want me to get on your back? I mean, I've never ridden a tiger before, but...

(laughing)

Never ridden a tiger before! Who's ever ridden a tiger before? Not this guy! Although- oop! Ha-ha!

(MORE)

MICHEL (CONT'D)

Hey, this is kind of-
WOOOOOOOAAAAAAHHHHH!!!

Hey! Slow down! Where are we goin-
ha-ha-ha! Hey, easy, I- What do you
know the way to my apartment or
something, big guy?

Woah! Woo-hooooooo!

Oh, wow! The city looks incredible
from the back of your very own
tiger! They should put that on a t-
shirt, am I right?

Oh, hey, turn! Turn! It's the pink
one! Yeah! Okay, easy! You wanna
take the eleva- nope! Stairs it is!
Go, go, GO! Almost there! Thanks a
lot! Wow, this was so much fun I-
no, no, no, not there! Not there,
that's where the electricity metre
lives- we won't fit! Slow down!
Slow down! Stooooooooooooop!

SFX: Clunk.

5.6

MADAME CLOUTIER

Can I help you, young man?

5.7

NARRATOR

Michel stands in the corridor
between his apartment and Madame
Cloutier's, the door to the
electrical cupboard flung wide
open. He drops onto all fours and
thrusts his head into the space.

5.6 (cont.)

MICHEL

(muffled)

Was there a tiger in here?

MADAME CLOUTIER

A what?

MICHEL

I just rode him in here-

MADAME CLOUTIER

Are you drunk? What's the matter with you?

MICHEL

He's fast, a predator. Close your door. He's king of the jungle, and if he gets into your apartment he'll-

MADAME CLOUTIER

Get out of there!

5.7 (cont.)

NARRATOR

Michel backs out of the cupboard, and still on all fours, comes face to face with Jacques Pistache. The two eyeball one another, Pistache's tail wagging furiously.

5.6 (cont.)

MICHEL

Hmm... Yeah, kind of like this one, but a little bigger. Hold on, maybe if I try and ride him.

MADAME CLOUTIER

Pardon me?

5.7 (cont.)

NARRATOR

Michel attempts to mount Jacques Pistache, much to the dog's surprise.

5.6 (cont.)

MADAME CLOUTIER

What are you doing!?

MICHEL

Stay back!

MADAME CLOUTIER

Stop that!

MICHEL

Almost got it-

MADAME CLOUTIER
Get off of my dog!

MICHEL
Here- hold on - I-

5.7 (cont.)

NARRATOR
Pistache breaks free and skitters
away back into Madame Cloutier's
apartment, leaving Michel in a heap
on the floor.

5.6 (cont.)

MADAME CLOUTIER
Shame on you.
(distant)
Pistache! Jacques Pistache! Oh,
come here my darling.

SFX: Door closing.

5.8

NARRATOR
Early the following morning -
opening day for the 38th Coloured
Lights Performing Arts Festival-
and Madame Deschamps sits in Goss's
office, staring into an empty paper
cup.

5.9

DESCHAMPS
Goss, what time is it?

GOSS
Uh, Seven o'clock. Why?

DESCHAMPS
I'm supposed to open the festival
in exactly five hours time.

GOSS
Don't you think that you should
over there?

DESCHAMPS
Do you ever feel like your life is
one big joke?

GOSS

Sure-

DESCHAMPS

But that you're the one playing the joke.

GOSS

Is this still about the tiger?

DESCHAMPS

You carve out a niche doing something that makes people happy. It's going great and then...

(scoffs)

A woman half your age wearing leather underpants chokes your husband to death with some rubber tubing and a lemon wedge.

GOSS

I'm sorry-

DESCHAMPS

Erotic asphyxiation. He never once mentioned it to me.

GOSS

I'm sorry-

DESCHAMPS

After that someone steals your plastic tiger and you think, *this* is the worst thing that can happen to me right now. *This*.

GOSS

Life goes on. You know I once knew a woman who stabbed her husband after she-

DESCHAMPS

I wonder who they'll get to replace me.

SFX: Phone ringing.

GOSS

Excuse me. Hello?

(beat)

You're kidding? In the window? *In* the window display? We're on our way.

DESCHAMPS

Tell me.

GOSS

A couple of officers found the tiger. It's center stage in the window display of some boutique.

DESCHAMPS

Do they have it?

GOSS

Boutique's not open yet. But we should go- Hey, wait!

5.8 (cont.)

NARRATOR

On the way out the pair pass a man in reception with baby soft hair, wearing a bright yellow cravate. This man is the multi-millionaire art collector and associate to the man with the ebony cane, Montague Roche.

5.9 (cont.)

MONTAGUE ROCHE

Bernardette! There you are! Hold on- Madame Deschamps, wait!

Transition.

5.10

NARRATOR

Michel Dupont forgets things. Names, faces, events, introductions. He forgets them in a way and a rate that you or I would find remarkable. But Michel is not a fool or a charity case. He lives, as most of us do, by routines. His routines may be interrupted from time to time, but that's life.

It's breakfast, and by now Michel has forgotten all about his little trip, about riding the Lilac Tiger through the city and diving headfirst into a magically large electrical cupboard.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Honestly, you should see the security camera footage of him during that trip - it's hilarious. There are no cameras on the section of beach where the tiger was, but you can imagine that part, right? Him caressing an imaginary Bengal tiger with purple fur.

But then, if you know what to look for, you see this guy running through the streets, ducking and twirling. If nobody noticed when he took the tiger and carried it home, they definitely noticed him this time. Aaah... I guess you really had to be there.

Anyway, Michel is making breakfast, unaware that the Lilac Tiger has been found -actually unaware that it was ever stolen, or even existed- and that it's on display in the window of Madame Belmont's boutique!

Breakfast is the usual. An aspirin. Espresso, a croissant, flaky and golden, baked and folded with real French butter tha-

5.11

MICHEL

The juice!

5.10 (cont.)

NARRATOR

And here we go again. This time there's no Madame Cloutier, no Jacques Pistache. Michel passes the electrical cupboard without even a glance, and makes it all the way to entrance where... this happens.

5.12

FABIENNE

Oh, hey neighbour.

MICHEL

Hey. Fabienne, right? I'm Michel, I can't remember whether I told you.

5.13

NARRATOR

(excited, like a gossipy kid)

He remembered her name!

5.12 (cont.)

FABIENNE

Right. Where are you rushing off to?

MICHEL

Oh, I forgot to buy juice.

FABIENNE

Is that what happened last time?

MICHEL

Last time?

FABIENNE

Never mind. We have good juice at the cafe where I work. Better than anything you can buy in the supermarket.

MICHEL

Yeah? Are they nice seats at your place?

FABIENNE

(laughing)

Oh my god, you really don't remember, do you? Was it really that bad?

NARRATOR

And so they walk, fumble together with some understanding of one another... but mostly no understanding of much at all.

MICHEL

Do you smell coconut?

FABIENNE

Yeah, it's my sunscreen. Sorry. Working outside all day, it's-

MICHEL
No, I like it.

FABIENNE
Only the best!

5.13 (cont.)

NARRATOR
They walk with the sun rising over the mountains east of the city, until they see a crowd. Well, not really a crowd, it's still too early for crowding. It's more of a huddle, a handful of people, gathered in a rough semi-circle around the window of a small boutique.

5.12 (cont.)

MICHEL
Wonder what's going on there.

FABIENNE
Mind if we take a look?

5.13 (cont.)

NARRATOR
Michel and Fabienne join the back of the gathering and as the huddle parts, there it is. A single piece of molded soft purple resin in the shape of a Bengal tiger. Its permanently wrinkled snarl is unchanged, unscathed by recent events. For thirty-eight years the Lilac Tiger has traveled the world, a beloved icon, only this time, well... it just wasn't properly screwed down, that's all.

5.12 (cont.)

FABIENNE
You have got to be kidding me.

MICHEL
I feel like I've seen this thing before.

FABIENNE
Let's get a photo, come on.

MICHEL

What?

FABIENNE

Something to remember this by. Come on!

MICHEL

Why would we- Hey!

FABIENNE

Trust me. Just get in here.

5.13 (cont.)

NARRATOR

Fabienne, phone in hand, pulls Michel along with her as she leans into the window. She snarls, just like the tiger.

5.14

DESCHAMPS

Excuse me, young lady. This is not the time for-

GOSS

Wait, don't I know you? Both of you! You! You were supposed to make me some flyers-

FABIENNE

Oh, hey!

MICHEL

Flyers? What are you talking abo-

DESCHAMPS

Goss, when does this damn place open?

FABIENNE

Wasn't in the building after all, hey?

DESCHAMPS

Goss!

GOSS

Yes, I- Madame, one moment-

MICHEL

What's going on?

GOSS

Could you stand over here, please-

DESCHAMPS

Break the door, Goss. My festival opens in four hours!

FABIENNE

Do you have any tickets left?

MICHEL

What's going on?

FABIENNE

We're huge fans and we would love some tickets-

DESCHAMPS

Goss, the door!

GOSS

Alright! Alright! Everyone, just calm down!

Gradually fading out voices.

5.15

NARRATOR

And so, there you have it. The festival went off without a hitch, of course. Johnny Depp was there. He appeared to be wearing some sort of disguise which... I don't know. Interesting guy.

When Madame Belmont arrived at her boutique that morning she was at first surprised, and then thrilled to find so many people eagerly waiting outside - you could just see it on her face, the way she lit up.

Most likely she anticipated a bidding war for the Lilac Tiger, this thing she had found fair and square. Instead, she was offered a token sum in exchange for the tiger by, of all people, Montague Roche. He can be quite the charmer when he wants to be.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The money was enough that if Madame Belmont did want to say, oh, I don't know, completely reimagine her boutique's interior-

MADAME BELMONT

What exactly is your problem?

NARRATOR

I'm just saying, there are better ways to use the space that you have. It's not that complica-

MADAME BELMONT

You just mind your own business.

NARRATOR

Fine. Fine. Madame Deschamps remained as festival director, quickly recovering from her temporary malaise, as soon as the tiger was back in place - on the beach, in between sand and sky, properly attached this time. Madame Deschamps is a good festival director - passionate, organized. We are lucky to have her.

The man with the ebony cane never did buy the Lilac Tiger. Don't know why. The extremely wealthy can also be extremely fickle.

As for Brigadier Algernon Goss, well, he got nothing. Fact of the matter is, he just did his job. I know that that sounds unfair, but people don't receive medals or promotions for almost finding stolen plastic tigers. He's a good man, not much of a non-linear thinker but who knows? Maybe he learned a thing or two along the way.

Michel, he got that juice. He even remembered Fabienne's name, and kept on remembering it. She, meanwhile, took that photo of the pair of them with the Lilac Tiger and made two copies - one for her, one for him. He might never know or understand the story behind it, but then, maybe that doesn't matter.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

That photograph is the symbol of a fresh start, a visual reminder of the point where things finally started to make sense. Or maybe that's just my view of it all. Michel, he's a romantic... and so am I.

(Beat)

But it wasn't all happy endings. Madame Cloutier, bijoutière to the stars and... just a fine person, really. She was found in her apartment by one her clients, next to an empty bottle of sleeping pills, and a fine white envelope addressed to 'The boy across the hall'.

Michel and Fabienne read it together.

5.16

MADAME CLOUTIER

To the boy across the hall. I'm sorry that I don't remember your name. I'm not sure we ever even met, although we must have done because I'm writing you this letter

The time has come for me to down tools. Not just because my hands don't work like they used to, but because my mind is gone... or going. For over forty years I made little things that made people smile, but now... most everything I knew by heart is a mystery to me.

Look, I'll get to the point before this becomes a sob story. If you're reading this, then I hope that you can see my Jacques Pistache. I need you to take care of him. He's a stubborn beast, but he will love you. He needs regular brain medication and special food for his unique intestinal flora. Oh, he is such a good boy. Don't tell him where I've gone, okay?

(MORE)

MADAME CLOUTIER (CONT'D)

I've enclosed enough money to cover both his food and medication for the remainder of his life, plus a little extra for your trouble.

I'm going to sleep now, and so, what can I tell you? Nothing lasts forever - not diamonds, not broken-down old ladies, nothing. So, find something that you love to do, and make memories, lots of them! Keep them all, too, the good and the bad. Hold onto them for as long as you can, share them and please... if nothing else, just... take care of my dog, won't you?

Sincerely,

Edith Cloutier, bijoutière to the stars and now... stardust!

5.17

FABIENNE

Did you know her?

MICHEL

I don't think so, but... What do you think I should do?

FABIENNE

About the dog?

MICHEL

I've never had a dog before. Have you?

FABIENNE

Yeah, I have...

MICHEL

But?

FABIENNE

Nothing, it's just... kind of a sad story.

MICHEL

Oh. Sorry.

FABIENNE

It's alright. I can tell if you like, as long as you don't mind being bummed out for a while.

MICHEL

I don't mind. As long as you don't.

FABIENNE

Yeah? Well then I guess one of us better ask the question...

MICHEL

Which is?

FABIENNE

Who wants to go walkies?

THE END