

**Marie-Aude Murail**

**L'Ecole des Loisirs**

# ***Sauveur and Son***

**Full Synopsis**

## Week of January 19<sup>th</sup> to January 25<sup>th</sup>

Sauveur Saint-Yves is a psychologist who runs his practice from his own home. He is a tall, handsome black man from Martinique, and he lives in Orléans, France with his 8-year-old son, Lazare.

Sauveur opens the door to his waiting room and invites in a young girl named Margaux. She enters with her mother and he notices a tension between them. Margaux is visiting Sauveur on orders from the school nurse who discovered that Margaux cuts herself. Sauveur, sensing that he won't get much out of Margaux with her mother there, asks Margaux's mother to return to the waiting room so he can speak with Margaux privately. Once alone, Margaux attempts to strike a deal with Sauveur, asking him to write her a letter saying she's not crazy so she can attend a much-anticipated school trip to Rome. Margaux believes that the cutting isn't her problem, rather it's her mother's overbearing nature. He agrees to help Margaux attend the school trip on the condition that she continues seeing a psychologist, whether it be him or someone else.

After the appointment he traverses the divide between his home life and his work life, leaving his office space to check on Lazare in the kitchen. Lazare asks his father if he can use his computer to research skin, which strikes Sauveur as interesting given the session he just had with Margaux. What Sauveur doesn't know yet is that Lazare has developed a habit of listening in on Sauveur's sessions from the hallway.

The next day after Lazare returns from school, he eavesdrops on one of Sauveur's regular clients, Ella. Ella deals with a crippling phobia of attending school, at least that's what it seems like on the surface. However, there is more to Ella's phobia than meets the eye. She tells Sauveur that she recently got her first period, a turn of events that she describes as terrifying. It's not just the advent of a bodily change that has disturbed her, it's the sense that she doesn't want her period at all, this coming of age moment associated with the onset of womanhood. She confides that she doesn't want to be a girl. In her time spent alone at home, away from school, Ella tells herself stories in which she is Elliot, a knight in an imaginary kingdom. She then explains that school forces her out of these reveries where she inhabits the body that feels right to her, and as a result she doesn't want to go. Sauveur advises her to try to take Elliot the knight with her in her backpack, to guard that part of herself.

Hearing the session coming to an end, Lazare assembles himself in the kitchen, pretending he'd been there the whole time. Once his father joins him, he asks how old he was when his mother died. Sauveur tells him he was two and a half years old when his mother was killed in a car accident. Feeling tears coming on, Sauveur sends Lazare to bed, hoping to save his tissues for his clients.

In bed, Sauveur reads a scientific paper on transgender children. The paper compares two children, a transgender boy named Nils and a transgender girl named Leila. Nils' breasts have begun to grow and he feels disgusted by this bodily development. Leila, on the other hand, would love to develop breasts naturally. Sauveur reflects on the look of revulsion on Ella's face as she revealed that she had just had her first period. He thinks that if she were in the US, she would have more options as a gender non-conforming child. However, the paper concludes that France is behind when it comes to addressing children who are gender non-conforming, with psychotherapy being the only option available. Despite his lack of knowledge on the topic, Sauveur seeks out information to support his clients in the best way possible.

Suddenly, Lazare bursts in his room and interrupts him to say that his friend Paul has invited him to play at his house the next day. He gives Sauveur the phone number of Paul's mother, Louise, to confirm the playdate. Sauveur calls Louise. She answers abruptly, in a rage after discovering that her ex-husband and his 25-year-old wife are expecting a baby. Once she realizes she's speaking with Sauveur, she's delighted that he called and agrees to a playdate.

Nicole, Lazare's nanny of the past five years, takes Lazare to Paul's house in the afternoon for their playdate. Unbeknownst to Sauveur and Lazare, she initially hesitated to take on black clients based on her unfounded belief that black people smell bad. She was surprised to find that Lazare smells like his father's

aftershave and is beloved by other mothers and nannies wherever they go. When she arrives, Louise is disappointed to see that it isn't Sauveur and enquires as to whether Nicole is his wife. Once the kids are settled in to play, Louise searches for more information from Nicole who tells her that Sauveur's wife passed away and that, happily, Lazare isn't particularly villainous and that he isn't "too black." Taken aback by Nicole's statements, Louise volunteers to drive Lazare home. This means Nicole doesn't need to return and Louise has an excuse to see where Sauveur lives. Lazare takes Louise through the back gate to the garden, the front door is reserved for Sauveur's clients.

Sauveur deals with an endless revolving door of clients. They do not seem to fully grasp the concept of boundaries when it comes to Sauveur, nor is he able to adequately set them.

He meets with the Augagneurs, a couple that's struggling to manage their teenage daughters after separating. They have each moved in with new partners, the father with his girlfriend, and the mother with her girlfriend. Sauveur requests that the daughters come back with each new couple to sort through their feelings separately.

Later, Sauveur receives a call from Gabin, one of his regular clients who is addicted to video games. Gabin tells Sauveur that his mother has disappeared, she went out for bread two hours ago and hasn't returned. He says that the night before, she came into his room and didn't recognize him. Sauveur calls around and finds out that she's been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. He tells Lazare he is sorry but he has to go and take care of something. Lazare asks 'Gabin?' and, in a state of distraction, Sauveur says yes. He lets Gabin know where his mother is and advises him to stay home, but when Sauveur arrives at the hospital he finds Gabin there. In the end, he feels he has no choice but to let Gabin sleep on the couch in his office so he won't be alone. At the end of the evening, once everything settles down, he realizes that Lazare knew Gabin's name, despite Sauveur never mentioning it.

The next day at school Paul tells Lazare that his nanny is racist, relaying the information his mother told him. After school Louise and Sauveur finally meet in person. Louise blushes as their sons draw them together to ask whether or not they can have another playdate over the weekend.

That evening Lazare tells Sauveur about Nicole's racist comments. The conversation evolves from a discussion of racism into the story of Sauveur's birth parents. Sauveur was adopted by a white family after his biological mother died during childbirth, and his biological father was never in the picture. Lazare then asks after Gabin, and Sauveur assures him that he will be the one to worry about Gabin—one *sauveur* in the family is enough.

The next day Louise brings Paul over for his playdate with Lazare. While Louise has a coffee with Sauveur and discusses Nicole's racist comments, the boys research hamsters. The following day Sauveur takes Lazare to buy a pet hamster, it's black and white so Lazare decides to name it 'Oreo.' Sauveur remembers that he was called 'Oreo' when he was young, signifying that he was black on the outside, but white on the inside.

### **Week of January 26<sup>th</sup> to February 1<sup>st</sup>**

The second week begins with another encounter with racism. Sauveur is treating a woman with anorexia, however she doesn't believe anorexia to be her problem, she's more concerned with her inability to conceive a baby. She asks if Sauveur is African, assuming he might possess some kind of "African witch doctor magic". He realizes that she doesn't really want a therapist, she wants a fairy to magically give her a baby. He wants to scream that he is not an African mystique. He closes the door to his office, remarking that he does not have the nerves to help people today. He opens the large window in his office and takes in a few slow breaths to prepare himself for the rest of the day.

Once school finishes, Lazare sees Paul's mom and tells her his dad thinks she's pretty, causing Louise to blush once again.

Back at home Sauveur has an appointment with Margaux. Her little sister accompanies her and wants to speak with Sauveur first and alone. She talks about her friends and their varying sexualities, declaring herself ‘poupédophile’—someone who is attracted to dolls. Sauveur delights in this little girl’s originality, unsure of exactly how to handle her but winning her over with his kindness and enthusiasm.

Margaux’s session begins well. She admits that she would like to stop cutting herself. However, things quickly spiral out of control when Sauveur suggests that he would like to meet her father. She tells him that she doesn’t want to bother her father with her problems, stating that she’s the only person that he can rely on. The situation escalates and Margaux runs out of the session. Before Sauveur can call Margaux’s mother to let her know, he realizes that Lazare isn’t in the kitchen. He panics before finding Lazare with Oreo the hamster, who has not moved since Sauveur and son brought him home. Oreo’s lethargy worries Lazare, but Sauveur assuages his fears by telling him he read an article about hamsters and learned that they are nocturnal creatures from the desert. Even though Oreo has never lived in the desert, he is genetically predisposed to sleep during the day and come alive at night. This puts Lazare’s mind at ease for the time being.

Sauveur realizes he missed a call from Gabin’s school. The school says that Gabin didn’t come to class and does not have any family to care for him currently with his mother in hospital. The school asks if they should get in touch with social services. Instead Sauveur drives over to Gabin’s place and brings him back to his house once more. When Sauveur arrives home Lazare calls out for him, giving Sauveur a heart attack, but when he finds Lazare, he realizes it’s finally some good news—Oreo has sprung to life and is running around his cage!

The next day Lazare takes a school field trip. Lazare starts shaking the hands of each of his fellow students once he arrives. His friend Océane approaches, but when he goes to shake her hand, she avoids him. He notes this as a potential racist gesture, thinking he would not have realized were it not for the issues with his nanny Nicole. Louise chaperones the field trip with the boys and flirts with one of the other chaperones, Océane’s father. She rediscovers the pleasure she feels in attracting a man’s attention, and scolds Paul for interrupting her conversation. Paul leaves to join Lazare and gives the man monopolizing his mother’s attention a dirty look. Lazare asks if the man is Paul’s father. Paul responds with a look of disgust. On the way back from the field trip Louise learns that he is divorced and is also free every second week when his ex-wife has the kids. She turns her head to look at Lazare and wonders if Sauveur has taken an indefinite vow of celibacy. Lazare is excited to get home as it’s Tuesday, the day of school phobia.

Ella comes to see Sauveur later that day. At home Sauveur places Oreo in the waiting room down on the children’s play table. Oreo is of course sleeping, his favorite past time. Ella comes in for her session and tells Sauveur she’s had a good week. She barely missed any school and had a good talk with her mom. She asked her mother if she’d ever hoped for a son as she has two daughters. At this question her mom began to tear up and said that before Ella was born, they lost a baby boy. Coincidentally, his name was Elliot.

Ella reflects on what this means, she feels like a poor replacement for her lost brother, and the arrival of her period serves as a cruel reminder that she will never be this lost little boy for her family. Her and Sauveur say a prayer for her brother, while Lazare, always listening through the door, finds himself in tears. Lazare tries to cover his tears, but when Sauveur sees him in the kitchen after the session he lies and says that he’s crying because he’s been thinking about his mother.

On Wednesday Sauveur usually meets with Cyrille, a 9-year-old boy who wets the bed. On this particular Wednesday, Cyrille’s mother calls Sauveur to tell him that her son doesn’t want to come to his appointment and it will just be her instead. When Sauveur suggests that Cyrille needs to continue the sessions to understand why he still wets the bed, she says that she is only interested in him stopping. She is resistant to Sauveur’s methods and only wants a quick fix so she no longer has to wash wet bed sheets every day.

In the afternoon Nicole comes to look after Lazare. Sauveur’s presence surprises her, and he fires her immediately for her racist comments. After she leaves he takes Lazare to a pet store to buy hamster

paraphernalia for Oreó. That evening Lazare calls out to Sauveur. He tells him he doesn't want to sleep because Oreó is running in his hamster wheel.

At school the next morning the kids are divided up into groups. Lazare is placed with Océane and he gets upset. He tells his teacher that he doesn't like Océane, and the teacher reprimands him in front of the class for being cruel. His teacher writes a note asking Sauveur to come in to discuss Lazare's behavior.

In the evening Cyrille's mother comes in for her session with Sauveur. She tells him she's found a solution for the bedwetting problem—she's put Cyrille in diapers. Sauveur is stunned. He attempts to reason with her but Cyrille's mother refuses to listen.

Sauveur meets with the Augagneur family next. Nicolas, the father, and his three daughters arrive. When Sauveur asks where Nicolas' girlfriend is, he argues that she does not need to be there. He admits that he only began seeing her to give the impression that he was doing okay after splitting from the mother of his children. He says he thought their life was going well, then it all fell apart. The fact that she left him for another woman upsets him even more. He has not yet fully confronted the pain he feels over their separation. Sauveur allows Nicolas the space to talk and to process these emotions.

After the family leaves, Sauveur receives a phone call from the psychiatric facility where Gabin's mother is staying. They inform him that she attempted suicide and is now under close surveillance. Sauveur contemplates how to deliver this information to Gabin.

Meanwhile, Gabin and Lazare are in the kitchen. Lazare shows Gabin the note from his teacher. Gabin tells him he's gangster and offers to forge Sauveur's signature for him. Lazare notes that the plan won't work as the teacher demanded a meeting with Sauveur and Gabin isn't black.

When Lazare does show Sauveur the note, Sauveur asks why the teacher said that his behavior was unacceptable. Lazare explains that when Sauveur fired Nicole, he told Lazare that he should tell him when he doesn't like someone. Sauveur realizes that never accounted for his words being misinterpreted by his over-enthusiastic son. Lazare took his suggestion as a sign that he should loudly declare his dislike for Océane during class. Sauveur reasons with Lazare that he doesn't know exactly why Océane avoided shaking his hand. It could be that she has sweaty palms or that she has a crush on another boy and doesn't want him to see her holding someone else's hand. He tells Lazare he needs to speak with her before jumping to conclusions and potentially categorizing a shy young girl as racist.

The next day, Sauveur and Lazare find Oreó the hamster dead. The night before, Oreó took too heartily to the wheel they bought and ran himself to death. After performing a burial for him in the garden, Sauveur, Gabin and Lazare return to the pet store to get a new hamster. This time the clerk promises them that the new one won't commit suicide by acrobatics. Lazare wants to call the hamster 'Gustave' and Gabin prefers 'Mustafa,' so they land on the hybrid name Gustave-Mustafa.

Afterwards Sauveur takes Gabin to see his mother at the psychiatric hospital. She still seems confused. They leave without Gabin properly interacting with her. The experience of seeing his mother so disconnected from reality rattles him.

Elsewhere, Louise goes on a date with Océane's dad. He tells her that Océane came home devastated after a boy told the whole class that he doesn't like her. He says it's funny because it was said by a black boy with a comical name, the name of a train station in Paris—Saint-Lazare. He then proceeds to say that a lot of black people are uneducated, and it falls to those around them to make up the difference. Louise doesn't tell him that Lazare is Paul's best friend, the son of a hardworking psychologist, who has been raised well despite the adverse circumstances of his mother's death. She tries to reassure herself that she isn't racist even though she does not defend the Saint-Yves family in the moment. Louise thinks about the first time she saw Sauveur. She was in a bakery when she spotted him leaning against a wall. She lets herself daydream and imagines him coming up to her, his grand stature, his luminous eyes, his thick lips and warm voice. Letting a sigh escape, she tilts her head up for him to kiss her, just like in the movies.

## Week of February 2<sup>nd</sup> to February 8<sup>th</sup>

This week Margaux's mother comes instead of her daughter. She believes that her ex-husband is a narcissistic psychopath, and she's concerned that he's turning Margaux against her. Her younger daughter, Blandine, tells her the terrible things he says about her when they're at his place. Sauveur says that the girls are caught between the two parents and that they are both suffering for it. Once she leaves Margaux arrives. She tells Sauveur she knows she missed her appointment and that her mother came instead to bad-mouth her father. She plans on bringing him to therapy with her the following week.

Back in the house Gabin asks Lazare where he's been. Lazare admits that he eavesdrops on his dad's therapy sessions and Gabin promises not to tell. Sauveur enters the kitchen and Gabin tells him that the new hamster will be twice the size of Oreo as he has not stopped eating. Later, they come to realize that Gustave-Mustafa is in fact pregnant, so they rename her Gustavia.

At school Océane tells Lazare that she doesn't believe his mother was white. She believes that white women can't have black children. The teacher reminds Océane that Lazare recently wrote a story where a black and a white wolf fall in love and have a gray son together. She suggests that maybe Lazare wrote this because it reflects his own life and when a white person and a black person have a child together, the child will be biracial.

After school, Paul convinces Louise to drive Lazare back home so they can continue to discuss Paul's new half-brother and Lazare's new hamster. Paul asks his mother if they can have one of Gustavia's babies, to which Louise says no.

Ella arrives for her session along with her parents. Elliot, the baby her mother lost in the womb at 8 months old, comes up, causing the session to escalate quickly. Emotions flare and Sauveur feels powerless to intervene. Ella's father doesn't understand why this tragic event needs to be discussed. As he points it out, it happened, it's over, they've turned the page. Her mother says she never had the space to mourn, to cry or process the death of her child after carrying him for 8 months. She thinks that their marriage was buried along with the baby. Ella covers her ears as her parents fight around her. Sauveur slowly manages to regain control and calms the parents. He then asks Ella if she has a question for them. She asks if her name was modelled after the name Elliot. Her mother tells her that the name Ella was her father's idea. He says that she was named after Ella Fitzgerald, and that Ella and Elliot have nothing in common, one being a girl's name and the other being a boy's name. Sauveur points out that Ella's father is named Camille, after his older sister who died of meningitis when she was one. But her father is adamant that this situation isn't the same as Elliot versus Ella.

Lazare, listening in on the conversation, feels deeply affected by the story of the still-born baby. He begins to think about his mother and wonders why he has never seen any pictures of her. Up until now, it had been enough for him just to know that her name was Isabelle, that she was blonde, and that he has her eyes. He had imagined her as a Disney princess, but he begins to understand that a real mother is more like Louise. She might have wrinkles around her eyes and her nose might turn red in the cold. She is real and fallible, not a perfect image like the one he guards in his mind.

One morning Louise is daydreaming before her day begins. In her imagination, everything begins to seem possible. She decides that her daughter can have the bag she's been yearning for. Paul can have a hamster from Lazare. She can have a baby with Sauveur Saint-Yves. She's pulled from her reveries when she remembers that her own mother is coming to visit. Just before her mother arrives, she realizes that she's in love with Sauveur.

Sauveur receives a phone call from Cyrille's mother. She says his school has told her that two older boys, Cyrille, and a girl from Cyrille's class were caught playing "sexual games" in the bathroom. She's in a panic because it seems that the young girl, Cyrille's girlfriend, was forced into participating in these games. She thinks her son might have joined the older boys in forcing her involvement. Sauveur tries to calm her, suggesting that it's possible that Cyrille was also forced. He says there's no need to panic right now and for Cyrille to come in with his mother for a session the next morning. The next day, they don't show

up for their session. Eventually Sauveur receives a phone call from Cyrille's mother, Cyrille ran away the night before and she'd been up all night searching for him in a panic. She ultimately found him at her sister's place. She tells Sauveur that it often feels as though her son likes her sister more than her. Sauveur reminds her that Cyrille isn't dangerous, he is in danger and that she needs to prioritize his wellbeing. He advises her to allow him to take some time away from school to spend the day where he feels safe, at his aunt's place. The other kids have been bullying him and it's in his best interest to recuperate. He recommends they come for their session the following evening, sacrificing time with Lazare to ensure his availability.

Later in the day he finds a young girl named Charlotte in his waiting room, the girlfriend of the Augagneur girls' mother, Alexandra. She tells Sauveur that Alexandra is on her way with her youngest daughter, but the two older ones didn't want to come. Sauveur invites her in to talk, unintentionally opening the floodgates for all her stresses and anxieties. Charlotte tells him she's a 28-year-old intern who only makes 300 euros a month. She despises being stuck in such a low paid position despite being highly educated. She says no one she works with even knows her name and wonders if there's any difference between an intern and a slave. A year ago, she fell in love with Alexandra and after she came out to her family, they disowned her. Before Sauveur has much of a chance to break down what he's just heard, Alexandra and her youngest daughter Elodie arrive.

Sauveur brings Gustavia in to help occupy Elodie during the session. Elodie is the first to notice that Gustavia has given birth to five babies. Excited by the discovery, she asks if she can have one, and Alexandra and Charlotte concede. They tell Sauveur to save them a male baby as they're less aggressive. Lazare, listening in the corridor, is appalled that Sauveur would just hand them out to anyone, let alone a girl who has the nerve to have two mothers when he doesn't have any. He thinks to himself that Paul needs to get his mom to hurry and come and choose a baby before there's only ugly ones left.

Sauveur meets with Lazare's teacher at school. The incident with Océane refusing to believe that Lazare's mother was white has caused her to think that maybe she was wrong in her assumption that Lazare was being cruel for no reason. She admits to Sauveur that in fact she believes that Océane has been cruel to Lazare.

Afterwards Sauveur returns for his session with Cyrille and his mother. She has stopped making Cyrille wear diapers, but he still wets his bed every night. Sauveur tries to get beyond the endless talk about bed wetting to understand the sexual games at school and what other issues might be lurking beneath the surface. Cyrille tells Sauveur about a game called "trap trap." In this game he must escape from the "wolves," who are the older boys. Sauveur asks if he ever succeeds in escaping and Cyrille says no, the wolves are always stronger. Sauveur can tell that this is hinting at the sexual games. Unfortunately, the session comes to an end, and Sauveur realizes that they'll need more time to get to the heart of the problem. Cyrille's mother agrees to continue bringing him in for therapy. Cyrille says he has other games he'd like to talk about, not just at school but at home. With this hanging in the air, his mother ushers him out of the office.

When Sauveur arrives back in the kitchen he finds Gabin, who tells him that one of Gustavia's babies didn't survive. Sauveur has a look at the cage and lifts the baby out to confirm it. Lazare asks if they'll all die and Sauveur tells him no. The pizza delivery arrives, fortunately breaking up a tense moment.

At dinner, Sauveur broaches the subject of Océane and her comments about Lazare's parentage to check in with his son. Lazare asks why he has never seen any pictures of his mother. Sauveur tells him that photographs were hard to come by in the Antilles, but he goes upstairs and finds a picture from his wedding day and shows it to Lazare. Lazare focuses in on a black woman in the photograph. When he asks his father who she is, Sauveur tells him that she's his half-sister, Sauveur and her share a mother but not their father.

Later in the evening, Sauveur finds Gabin playing a videogame on his computer. He questions him about his schooling and says he received a call alerting him that Gabin hasn't been attending. Gabin says that the school is exaggerating, he's only been skipping math. Regardless, Sauveur asks if he wants to waste his

life in front of a screen and asks if he has any ambitions for the future beyond videogames. Sauveur finds himself thinking about Charlotte who, despite her best efforts and a college education, is still stuck working as an intern. He tells Gabin that his mother is doing better and that he'll take him to see her the next day.

Back at home the following day after confirming that Gabin is no longer on his computer, Sauveur pulls his wedding photo out again. He thought about destroying it but realized that one day Lazare would want to know what his mother looked like. He reflects on Lazare's reaction to the photo, he only asked the one question about Sauveur's half-sister. Did he not see the young woman in the electric wheelchair? The alcohol ravaged face of the bride's father? The little Mongolian boy? The young albino man trying to disappear from the photo?

### **Week of February 9<sup>th</sup> to February 15<sup>th</sup>**

The week begins with Margaux's father, who comes to see Sauveur. He's a businessman with an intense demeanor. He accuses Sauveur of not being a real doctor, saying that psychology is a pseudo-science. Sauveur politely reminds him that he receives his patients via referral from a general practitioner, but this does nothing to dissuade Mr. Carré's low opinion. He says that Margaux cutting herself is her mother's fault and that it's just a phase of adolescent rebellion. According to him, Margaux is doing very well. He says that his ex-wife is manipulative, implicating her as the source of the family's problems, the same way she implicated him. He says his youngest, Blandine, is a lost cause because she's too caught up in her mother's side of things.

Sauveur suggests, as he did when Margaux's mother came in, that the trauma of the divorce is contributing to Margaux's cutting. Her dad continues to chastise Sauveur, telling him that he only came to let Sauveur know that Margaux will no longer be coming to therapy. Sauveur attempts to explain to him the importance of finding her a doctor who can help with her destructive impulses. Her dad isn't interested and leaves, telling Sauveur that he refuses to pay him for the session.

This week Paul and his older sister Alice stay at their father's place. Alice is impatient to find out when they'll be able to get Paul's hamster and calls their mother at home. When Louise doesn't pick up, Alice panics, suddenly recalling that her mother has been acting a bit strange lately, like someone in love. She calls Louise on her mobile and she tells Alice that she's at home and only missed her phone call because she was taking a shower, but Alice can hear that she's lying. She jumps to the conclusion that Louise is on a date, and decides that it must be with Sauveur Saint-Yves. Louise is just out to dinner with her friends, but Alice doesn't know this and is upset. Her father has already betrayed her by getting a new girlfriend, and she doesn't want her mother doing the same.

At Ella's next session with Sauveur he remarks that she cut her hair short. With this newfound confidence in her own identity, she finds that her fears of school have dissipated. She tells Sauveur that she wants to become a writer and would like to publish books under the name Elliot. This reminds Sauveur of George Sand, a writer from the 19<sup>th</sup> century who published books under a man's name. He loved her books growing up and gives them to Ella to inspire her. Although Sauveur might not have dealt with transgender or non-gender conforming children before, his patience and kindness with Ella shines through and in giving her the space to express herself freely, she grows more certain of herself. Ella-Elliot tells Sauveur that she thinks her parents are going to divorce, but she seems detached from it. Feeling at ease with her identity seems to have put her at ease with the world.

Louise meets Paul at the end of the school day to hand him his flute, since he forgot it at her house. While she waits for Paul to come out, Océane's dad sees her and approaches. He asks her out again, and she rejects his invitation, claiming that she is busy. He insists and asks if she's free another day. Frustrated with his persistence despite her rejection, she tells him she's seeing someone else. He's shocked but she maintains that there's someone in her life. At the same time, Paul and Lazare come out of school. As they walk towards Louise, Lazare tells Paul he likes his mom, and Paul tells Lazare he likes his dad.



Alexandra and Nicolas Augagneur return for a session with Sauveur, accompanied by one of their daughters, Marion. Alexandra begins to explain the reasons why she had to leave. She was 17 when she fell pregnant with her first child, she had believed she was in love with Nicolas. From then on, she never had the chance to really live for herself. Her children were ungrateful for everything she did for them. They never cleaned their rooms or thanked her for anything, always complaining. Marion asks, “is that why you left? Because we didn’t clean our rooms?” Alex responds that it’s her personal life and she doesn’t need to answer. Sauveur notes that it’s a shame she doesn’t want to answer, because it’s a good question. Nicolas then says that he has separated from his girlfriend because his daughters were uncomfortable, though Sauveur knows their relationship was a front to hide Nicolas’s devastation at the separation. Nicolas says that although he can sometimes be childish, he’s still a good father.

Lazare listens out in the corridor when it occurs to him that he would rather be playing videogames with Gabin than listening in on the suffering of adults.

After the session with the Augagneurs, Sauveur checks on the hamsters and sees that one of them is no longer moving. He thinks that maybe they’ll all die and feels himself become overwhelmed by sadness.

The next morning Louise drops in on Sauveur to choose a hamster for Paul. Sauveur tells her that one more has died and that he’s worried all of them will die. He did some research and apparently some kinds of hamsters shouldn’t be bred together because their children won’t survive. Sauveur thinks this might be the case for Gustavia. Louise replies saying that mixing colors isn’t a bad thing, and that Lazare is a beautiful child. She feels embarrassed after saying it, but Sauveur thanks her and invites her to sit down.

Feeling overwhelmed by everything that has happened recently, he opens up to her, telling Louise about his childhood. He tells her his mother was born into a large family with lots of children, all with different fathers. His mother was the favorite amongst them because she had the lightest skin. Eventually she became pregnant and gave birth to Sauveur’s half-sister, Évelyne.

She began working as a cook for a popular restaurant in town, run by a white couple who couldn’t have their own children. She fell pregnant again and there was speculation that the owner of the restaurant was the father, a rumor immediately disproven by the dark color of Sauveur’s skin. Sauveur’s mother died of an arterial embolism during childbirth. Afterwards, he was raised by his grandmother until she died when he was three years old. He was then adopted by the owners of the restaurant and went from being Sauveur Bellerose, his mother’s name, to Sauveur Saint-Yves, the name of the restaurant owners.

Growing up he suffered from an identity crisis. He didn’t like fraternizing with anyone with darker skin than his, this resulted in the nickname ‘Oreo.’ His grades were good, and his parents sent him to a school in Fort-de-France where he lived with a white family and was educated amongst white people. He denied his ethnicity for a long time and actively avoided confronting his black-ness.

His adoptive family cut ties with his birth family out of possessiveness. This wasn’t done maliciously, but contributed to his estrangement from his own culture, his own skin.

When his adoptive father died, his mother sold the restaurant. They then moved to Fort-de-France where Sauveur opened an office for his practice. As a black psychologist many people came to see him assuming that because of his ethnicity he traded in voodoo magic, rather than practicing legitimate psychology.

He trails off and Louise then begins to ask about his wife, causing Sauveur to change the subject back to hamsters.

After she leaves, Sauveur goes upstairs to find Lazare. He proposes that they take a vacation during Easter break to Martinique. There they can visit the place where Lazare was born and his mother’s grave. After Sauveur leaves, Lazare pulls out a piece of paper that he found earlier in the day slipped underneath their front door. It reads ‘You wanted to whiten the race, she is dead.’ Lazare wonders if the ‘you’ is his dad and the ‘she’ is his mother.

## Week of February 16<sup>th</sup> to February 22<sup>nd</sup>

Sauveur awakes in the middle of the night from a nightmare where Gustavia ate all of her remaining babies. He goes to check on the babies when the phone rings in his office. That means it must be a patient. He answers the phone and hears Margaux's voice. She tells him she wants to die. She's at her dad's house and Sauveur asks where her father is. He's at the theatre and has left her home alone with her younger sister. She says that her father has forbidden her from seeing Sauveur again. She understands that her father had rotted her brain when it comes to her mother, now she sees clearly that it wasn't her mother's fault. Sauveur tells her to remember that she can get better, that she's on the right path by going to therapy. She says she is going to die. He responds that she isn't going to die, she's going to grow up. Sauveur believes he has some time to talk her around, until she tells him that she's already slit her wrists. He calls an ambulance and tells Margaux to find something to compress her wrists and stop the blood. He calls their mother and explains what happened and races to the house. The EMT stopped the bleeding and she's regained consciousness, though she hit her head. Margaux's mother arrives and Sauveur tells her that Margaux is going to be okay. Her little sister Blandine remarks that her dad is like King Midas, but instead of everything he touches turning to gold, everything he touches dies.

Back at home the following day, Sauveur learns to distinguish between the three surviving hamsters. He notes that Bidule, the hamster reserved for Paul, is the most adventurous of the three. He claims the calmest hamster for Elodie, Alexandra and Nicolas' daughter. Then there's the third hamster, which seems to not be quite certain what to do with itself. Sauveur saves this one for Gabin but hasn't told him yet.

Ella arrives for her appointment and asks how the hamsters are doing. Sauveur asks her how she is, and she tells him that she's been reading one of the books Sauveur gave her called *François le Champi* and asks if she might also be a found child. Sauveur almost laughs, but she insists that she's serious, she doesn't look like either of her parents. Sauveur asks if she resembles her sister and Ella responds that her sister is a girl, that she spends all of her time watching makeup tutorials and learning how to do the perfect smoky eye.

As Sauveur enjoys Ella's sisterly anecdotes, he notices a movement from the curtain that covers the door. He suddenly senses something and tells Ella he'll be right back. Sauveur catches Lazare in the hallway and, despite Lazare's best efforts to cover up his eavesdropping, Sauveur sees right through him. Lazare fears his father's reaction, but Sauveur is simply shocked. Lazare promises not to spy anymore and flees back to the kitchen where Gabin waits. He tells Gabin that Sauveur spotted him and asks if now his dad won't love him anymore. Gabin, jokingly, tells him that of course his dad won't love him anymore. Once he realizes that Lazare is panicking, he tells him not to worry, that fathers always love their children. Lazare then asks Gabin about his dad, remarking innocently that Gabin's father doesn't love him. Gabin swears, saying that's what he gets for being kind.

Lazare waits for his dad to finish work, wondering what horrible punishment awaits him. At 8:00pm Sauveur emerges. Gabin asks how many hamsters died today and Sauveur reports no fatalities. He asks Lazare to go and retrieve the cage from his office. While Lazare retrieves the cage, Sauveur tells Gabin that his mother will be out on Monday and he'll be able to return home. Gabin gives an almost imperceptible head nod, not pleased at all at the prospect of returning home. Lazare returns with the hamsters and Sauveur says he is going to put them into separate cages. Lazare asks if it's to punish them and Sauveur explains that for hamsters, living with their families is more of a punishment. Gabin remarks that it's the same for him. Sauveur tells Gabin that he will find a cage for his hamster and asks Gabin what he'll name it. He says 'Sauvé' (saved), remarking that it's better to be saved than to be the savior.

Later that evening, Sauveur is about to read his book when he decides instead to pick up a newspaper, *La République du Centre*, where Louise works as a journalist. He is searching for her work when a headline grabs his attention; '*She Poisoned Her Neighbors' Cats.*' He realizes that the article is about one of his patients, Madame Huguenot, who has been a regular patient of his for reasons he previously couldn't quite figure out. During one session, she told him that she had a great aunt who killed cats by feeding them meatballs filled with rat poison. She told Sauveur that this great aunt is the person who gave her the

taste for it. At the time, Sauveur failed to understand that the taste she was referring to was for poisoning cats. He rereads the article in disbelief at his own naïveté having missed what she was trying to tell him. He thinks to himself that he's a terrible psychologist.

In Cyrille's next session, Sauveur talks to him alone. Sauveur finally manages to get Cyrille to gently open up, helping him feel safe enough to admit that his mother's boyfriend Joachim sexually abuses him. He tells Cyrille that he needs to explain this to his mother so that she can report Joachim to the police.

Sauveur brings Cyrille's mother in and attempts to lead her to the correct conclusion. He wants her to realize why Cyrille would wet the bed at home but not at his aunt's place. Or why he acts strangely when Joachim is around. She has the preconceived notion that Cyrille is just jealous of Joachim and the prospect of sharing his mother with someone else. It takes her a while, but eventually she realizes what has been happening. When it dawns on her, she looks at Sauveur, her face tortured with doubt, pain, fear, and rage. She goes back into the waiting room and takes her son in her arms, wrapping him in a hug and whispering in his ear that she won't let anything bad happen to him again, that she will defend him and that she loves him more than anything.

Lazare is no longer eavesdropping, Sauveur has forbidden him from hanging around in the hallway. Instead he waits in the kitchen. He looks out the window and sees a strange albino man out in the garden. Unbeknownst to Lazare, the man in the yard is his uncle, his mother's brother. He left the racist note that Lazare found and now he lurks around the Saint-Yves residence, waiting for his moment to exact revenge. The strange man blames everything bad that happened to his family—his father's bankruptcy, his sister's death—on Sauveur. He wants to hurt Sauveur, obsessed with figuring out the perfect move. Attacking Lazare seems like the perfect way to truly devastate Sauveur. The brother decides to break into the house when Sauveur isn't there, and force feed pills to Lazare in order to cause an overdose, mirroring the cause of his sister's death. He sees this as poetic justice and the perfect crime.

Upon entering the home and confronting Lazare, he realizes that he forgot one vital component—a glass of water for Lazare to swallow the pills. He manages to hold Lazare at knifepoint whilst getting a glass of water, and then forces him to take a morphine pill. Lazare begins to choke on the pill and Gabin arrives just in time to scare off the attacker with a ladle. Gabin then performs the Heimlich on Lazare until he spits up the pill.

When Sauveur returns they explain what happened. As they describe the man, Sauveur instantly recognizes this albino man as his brother-in-law. A confusing realization for Lazare, who wonders why his mother's brother would want to kill him.

### **Week of February 23<sup>rd</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup>**

Louise arrives on the Monday to collect Bidule, Paul's hamster. The Saint-Yves residence is a chaotic mess. Workers are installing a reinforced front door on the house and a surveillance camera on the side entrance to the garden.

On Tuesday, Sauveur tells his patients that he will be away the following week as a family problem requires his presence in Martinique. He leaves his mobile number for those who might need it while he's away: the Augagneurs, Margaux, Ella, and Cyrille. He then proceeds to cross the next week out of his schedule: ~~Week of March 2<sup>nd</sup> to March 8<sup>th</sup>~~

It's the second week of the school holidays and Louise has collected her kids from their father's place. She is unsure of what exactly happened at the Saint-Yves residence, she only knows what Paul has told her—a story about an assassin that Gabin scared away with a ladle. What she knows for certain is that Sauveur has gone to the Antilles, left Gustavia with her, and that she would have filled her house with hamsters if he'd asked her to. When she collects Gustavia, Sauveur asks how Bidule is doing, noting that he's not an easy man to tame. Louise assures Sauveur that she is patient. On the drive back to her house with Gustavia, she thinks that Sauveur could be talking about either Bidule or himself.

Back in Sauveur's office, he finds himself daydreaming, having caught a whiff of Louise's perfume. Another blonde, he thinks to himself. He fears that he might repeat the same mistakes, the same unhappiness as in his past with his wife. He knows that it's a trap often encountered by the heart.

Sauveur takes Lazare to Martinique. It's only the second time Lazare has been on a plane—the first time was when they moved to Orléans when he was 3. Once they board, someone calls for a doctor, a little girl has a fever. Lazare looks at Sauveur and he reminds his son that he's a psychologist, not a medical doctor with an air of annoyance. To console him, Lazare replies that, regardless, he still cares for people. The plane takes off and Lazare watches as France gets smaller, appearing like a Monopoly board or a children's game from such a distance. After a while, Lazare falls asleep, awaking as Sauveur puts breakfast in front of him. Disgruntled, Lazare begrudgingly eats his breakfast, wishing he could spend his vacation back in Orléans with Paul, Gabin, and Gustavia.

Once they touch down, the process of collecting their bags and getting the rental car puts Lazare in a terrible mood. When they leave the air-conditioned airport and enter the tropical warmth, he loses all sense of reality. In the car, Sauveur finds the air-conditioner and turns on the radio. He begins to sing along with an Antilles song when Lazare tells him he is going to sleep. Sauveur apologizes and turns the radio down, continuing to sing, overcome with joy to be back in his home country.

Lazare doesn't feel Sauveur taking him from the car to his bed, he continues to sleep until he's jerked awake by a snickering. He calls out for his dad, but the house is pitch black and he isn't sure where he is. He feels the noise following him. Sauveur, asleep in the bed beside him, wakes up. Lazare tells him there's someone in the house, Sauveur replies that it's coming from outside. Lazare asks if he can make it stop but Sauveur tells him it's not possible, it's an insect. Lying back in bed, Lazare listens to the night, he hears an orchestra of insects chirping, frogs croaking, wind flowing through the trees, the distant barks of dogs and the crow of roosters who haven't learned to distinguish the sun from the moon. Next, Lazare hears the snores of his father next to him.

At 7:00am, Martinique time, Lazare wakes up alone. He opens the mosquito net that covers the bed and walks out to find Sauveur. He finds his dad almost naked out on the terrace, under the already hot sun. Sauveur tells Lazare that they have everything for breakfast: bread, milk, and banana compote. He says that Miranda has thought of everything. Lazare thinks to himself that he knows his dad doesn't want to be annoyed with a million questions on vacation, but he needs to ask who this Miranda is. Sauveur tells him that she was Lazare's nanny when he was little, and asks if Lazare doesn't remember her. Lazare responds that he has Antilles amnesia. Lazare returns inside to get dressed when he sees a giant cockroach in the bedroom. Sauveur tells him it won't hurt him. Lazare notices that his dad has rediscovered his Créole accent. He's a different dad to the one Lazare knows from Orléans, he's become Island Dad.

On their first day together in Fort-de-France, Sauveur and Lazare visit Isabelle's grave. Dazzled by the glittering sea across from the cemetery, Sauveur tries to hold back his tears. Lazare calculates how old his mother was when she died. Her grave reads 1979 to 2010, so he asks if that means she was 21. Sauveur tells him that she was 31. Is that old or not old? Lazare asks. It isn't old, Sauveur replies. Lazare asks if he can say a prayer for her. He tells her that he doesn't really remember her, but he's seen her photo and she's beautiful. He adds that although he didn't cry when she died, it wasn't because he didn't love her, but just because he is brave like his dad.

Sauveur asks if Lazare would like to go visit Miranda. She's a joyful woman who delights in their return to Martinique. She welcomes them into her home, where she still works as a nanny. She asks Lazare how he feels about Martinique and he tells her he doesn't like "rapiers," Sauveur corrects him to "ravets." He is referring to the large cockroaches that he found in his room that morning. Miranda delights at this error, laughing loudly and clapping her hands, reminding Sauveur why he chose her as their nanny.

The next day they visit Fort-de-France and Sauveur shows Lazare the home he lived in when his parents sent him there for school. It was the home of Isabelle's aunt. Sauveur explains that after he finished school and they were a bit older, that was when they fell in love. Before then he was too young and

enamored with the life of Fort-de-France. He was so distracted by everything that he fell in love with people all the time just walking down the street.

He teaches Lazare about racial tensions between black and white people in Martinique. Black people used to be slaves to their white owners, the French settlers, whose descendants are called *békés*. Isabelle's family, the Tourvilles, are descendants of the settlers who arrived in Martinique during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Lazare worries when Sauveur tells him about slavery in Martinique, thinking that his mother had slaves herself. Sauveur tells him that she didn't, reassuring him that slavery was abolished in 1848.

He asks Lazare if he remembers what he told him about Oreo. Hamsters are desert animals and although Oreo never lived in the desert, he has the genetic memory of the desert, which may have contributed to his distress at being kept in a cage. He then tells Lazare that it is similar for him. Although he himself wasn't a slave, he still feels the intergenerational trauma of his ancestors who were taken from their homes in Africa and brought to Martinique to be sold as slaves to cut cane on plantations for colonists. Despite the abolition of slavery, race relations are still difficult in the Antilles. He helps Lazare understand that marriage between the descendants of slaves and the descendants of colonialists can often cause controversy. As a result of this stigma, many *béké* families engaged in incest for generations to keep the bloodlines pure.

The Tourville family's fate is evidence of the consequences of *béké* inbreeding. Isabelle's great aunt finished her life in a psychiatric hospital, her mother believed she was an island sorcerer and lived out her life amongst them. Her father's alcoholism destroyed their family, and now her brother is in jail in Orléans for his attempt on Lazare's life. Lazare asks why his uncle attempted to kill him, and Sauveur explains that the brother blames Sauveur for all the terrible things that befell his family.

Afterwards, he drives north up the island with Lazare. He wants to take him to the place where Isabelle died. They stop at the Grand-Rivière, described by Antilleans as the end of the world. Sauveur tells Lazare that the day Isabelle died, she stopped in that spot. Lazare asks if he (himself) was with her and Sauveur tells him no one saw him, deciding that the moment has not yet come to tell Lazare the whole truth. They continue to drive in silence. After crossing the second bridge Sauveur points out a ravine, he tells Lazare that that's where the car was found.

Sauveur takes a moment to arrange his thoughts before telling Lazare that now he is old enough, there are things he should know. Sauveur admits to him that Isabelle crashed because she'd taken too many pills and was either confused or had some kind of cardiac incident. In the Tourville home there was a range of pills available—antidepressants, morphine, etc. Multiple empty bottles of pills were found in the car after the accident.

Lazare asks why his mother would do that. Sauveur explains that she suffered from depression. He tells Lazare that when they first met, she was already sad. He imagined that her sadness was because she was stuck with her family and that he would be able to save her. He could take her away and make her happy. But it was no use, he tells Lazare, someone has to save themselves. You can be there for someone, support them, comfort them, but it's out of your hands, they have to want to save themselves. Sauveur says that sometimes he felt guilty for what had happened, at other times he felt angry at Isabelle for not being happy with him. Afterwards, her family blamed Sauveur for Isabelle's unhappiness. Her brother began spreading a rumor that Sauveur had beaten her and forced her to kill herself.

Night falls and the route becomes dangerous. Sauveur, overwhelmed by emotion, stops paying attention. Lazare quietly says that he couldn't make her happy either. Sauveur stops, his vision blurred by tears, sadness suffocating him. They find a safe spot to pull over. Sauveur feels his heart beating fast and a buzzing in his ears. He asks Lazare if it's okay for them to stop there for a moment, if it doesn't bother him too much. Lazare says no, they can stop. Lazare pulls his knees into his chest, curling into a ball. Sauveur tells Lazare he has something to say but he isn't sure that he should. He thinks of his patients, Cyrille, Margaux, Marion, Gabin, and wonders if the secrets that surround you when you're young can stop you from growing, from living, from loving. Do we need to know everything?

He ruminates on this for a moment when Lazare tells him that it's okay, he can tell him what happened. Sauveur admits that Lazare was in the car with Isabelle during the accident. When he was found, they thought he was dead, but he was just sleeping. Isabelle had given him drugs to ensure he would be asleep, but Sauveur leaves this detail out. Lazare tells Sauveur that he was lucky.

He then tells Lazare the story of his birth. Lazare was showing signs of cardiac failure, so they decided to perform a caesarean section. Afterwards, when Isabelle awoke from the surgery, the nurse brought Lazare into the room to meet his mother. Isabelle said that it wasn't her baby and when the nurses went to get Sauveur to help, she didn't recognize him either. She was taken to see a psychiatrist who belittled Sauveur when he asked if Sauveur didn't understand post-partum psychosis. Lazare asks what it means, Sauveur takes a moment and realizes that he is about to tell an 8-year-old that his mother, in a fit of psychosis after giving birth, rejected him, her own baby. He wants to swallow everything he's just said. He simplifies it and tells Lazare that it's an illness that strikes after giving birth. Lazare says that it was because she was white, she didn't recognize her baby because Lazare isn't white. Sauveur assures him that his mother wasn't racist, that she loved him and she loved Lazare. He says that she returned to normal three days later, but was ashamed of what had happened.

Lazare says that she was like Oreo. She wasn't racist, but she has the memories of her ancestors who had been racist since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. So, he postulates, as a result of the shock of giving birth, she said things she didn't mean. Lazare then tells Sauveur that when he's older he would like to be a psychologist as well. Sauveur tells him it's an excellent idea, but says he shouldn't forget that even if he's smart, which he certainly is, he isn't all powerful. Lazare rests his head on his dad's shoulder and replies that he isn't Sauveur.

The next day they go to see Évelyne, Sauveur's half-sister, along with their uncle Ti-Jo and everyone's kids, most of whom are girls. Unhappy that he's heading to a place with mostly girls, Lazare tries to change Sauveur's mind about attending. Sauveur explains a bit of the family's history to Lazare. After their mother died giving birth to Sauveur, Évelyne was sent to live with their grandmother. Once their grandmother passed, she lived with Ti-Jo, their mother's older brother. Ti-Jo, somewhere in his 80s now, lived a colorful life and has three children from his wife and four from his mistress. Évelyne grew up in the midst of endless marital disputes and fighting siblings. As a result, Sauveur doesn't share many memories with his half-sister.

While there Sauveur asks Évelyne if she ever discovered who her father was. She tells him yes, that she bumped into her father at Monoprix. She called him "papa" as a joke and he told her that he had 17 kids but didn't raise any of them. She tells Sauveur that her father resembles him, similar skin tone, similar height, bringing them to the conclusion that they are actually full siblings. Sauveur's adoptive parents never told him because they didn't want to lose custody of him to his father.

In the end everyone, including Lazare, has a good time at the gathering. Sauveur drinks too much and they nearly miss their flight home. When they arrive back in Orléans, Sauveur isn't quite sure why he returned. At the baggage claim he turns on his phone and receives a stream of text messages from his patients with news and requests for advice. Gabin asks what time he'll be back, Margaux is out of hospital and wants to see him tomorrow, Elliot is excited to see him on Tuesday. The reason why he needs to be in Orléans is right in front of his eyes.

Just as he realizes that he is disappointed to not have received a message from Louise, Lazare suddenly sees Paul. He's come to the airport to surprise his best friend. Sauveur looks around for Louise and sees her with Alice. He asks Lazare who Louise is standing with and he tells her that's Paul's older sister.

As they leave Sauveur separates himself from Louise, Alice, and Paul, singing to himself the song he heard on the radio in Martinique. He knows now not only why he has returned to Orléans, but for whom.