

The Mistral Winds

The old woman dutifully swept the cobblestone street in front of her family's home, just as she had done 10,000 times before. Just as other members of her family had done ever since they were one of the few surviving families of the great plague.

The winds shifted.

She paused in her tracks and glanced toward the flag outside of the gothic cathedral. It was blowing southeast. She could already see the air clearing. She could feel the temperature dropping. She set her broom against the side of the building and sniffed the air.

Mon Dieu.

She had experienced the mistral winds before. Everyone in the remote town of Manosque had. Everyone knew their power. They could come from out of nowhere and reach 90 kph in a matter of minutes. In the winter, they could cause the temperature to drop 40 degrees; and in the summer, they could spread wildfire and decimate an entire region. They were said to be able to drive a person crazy. The old laws provided that a man could not be convicted of murder for killing his wife during the mistral winds.

But this was different. Something was coming with the winds.

She sniffed again.

There it was. The same sickening sweet smell she had encountered once before as a little girl. The one her family spoke about in hushed tones after they thought she had gone to bed. The one that was never discussed with outsiders.

It had returned.

She felt cold sweat form on her neck and run down her back. Just like before.

She stumbled briefly, knocking over the broom. She didn't stop to pick it up. She didn't even turn around to look back. She knew there wouldn't be enough time.