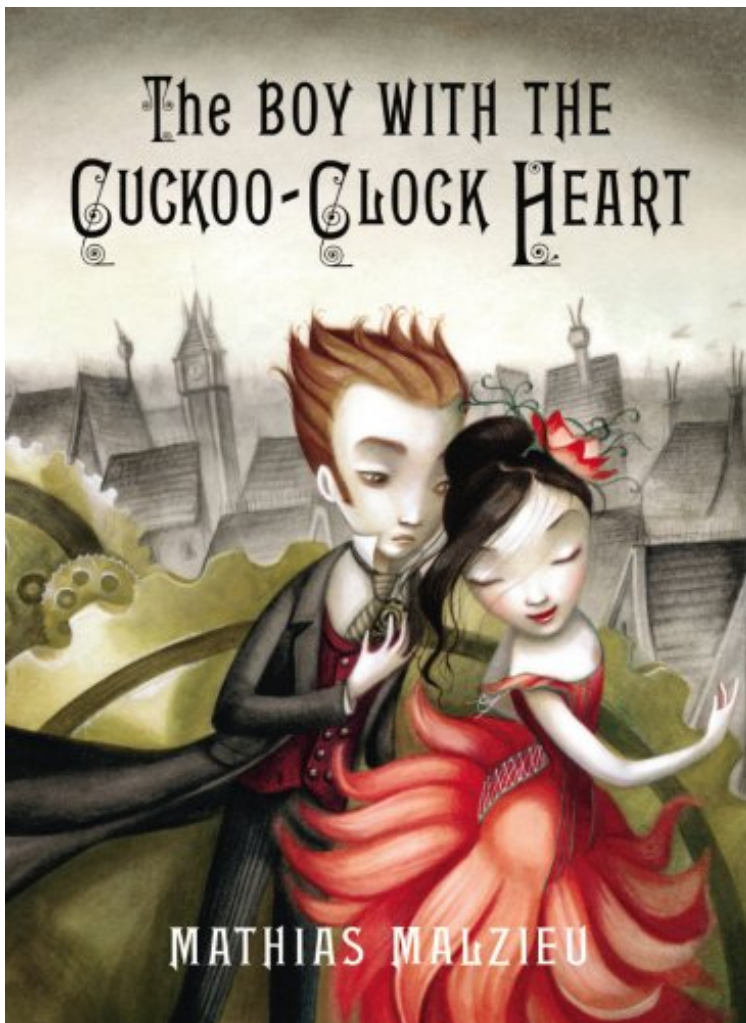


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The Boy with the Cuckoo-Clock Heart



Par Mathias Malzieu

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurEdinburgh, 1874. On the coldest night the world has ever seen, Little Jack is born with a frozen heart and immediately undergoes a life-saving operation. But Dr Madeleine is no conventional medic and surgically implants a cuckoo-clock into his chest. Little Jack grows up different to other children: every day begins with a daily wind-up. At school he is bullied for his 'ticking', but Dr Madeleine reminds him he must resist strong emotion: anger is far too dangerous for his cuckoo-clock heart. So when the beautiful young street-singer, Miss Acacia, appears - pursued by Joe, the school bully - Jack is in danger of more than just falling in love... he is putting his life on the line.ExtraitChapter OneIn which Little Jack is born on the coldest day on earth and miraculously resuscitated Its snowing over Edinburgh on this 16th day of April, 1874. An eerie, freezing cold gridlocks the city. Old people wonder whether this might be the coldest day on earth. The sun seems to have disappeared for good. Theres a biting wind, snowflakes lighter than air. WHITE! WHITE! WHITE! A muffled explosion. This is all we can see. Houses resemble steam engines, as the gray smoke exhaled by their chimneys sparkles in the steel sky.Edinburgh and its steep

streets are being transformed. Fountains metamorphose, one by one, into bouquets of ice. The old river, usually so serious, is disguised as an icing sugar lake that stretches all the way to the sea. The din of the surf rings out like the sound of windows smashing. Miraculously, the hoarfrost stitches sequins on to cats bodies.

The trees stretch their arms, like fat fairies in white nightshirts yawning at the moon, as they watch the carriages sliding over the cobblestone ice rink. It is so cold that birds freeze in midflight before crashing to the ground. The noise as they drop out of the sky is uncannily soft for a corpse. This is the coldest day on earth. And Im getting ready to be born. The scene is an old house perched on top of the highest hill in Edinburgh, Arthurs Seat; that Kings remains are supposed to lie at the top of this sleeping volcano set in blue quartz. The roof of the house is ingeniously pitched and pointy. The chimney, shaped like a butchers knife, underscores the stars. The moon sharpens its quarters here. Theres nobody around, just trees. Inside, everything is made of wood, as if the house had been carved from an enormous pine tree. Its like walking into a log cabin: ruggedly exposed beams, tiny windows rescued from the train scrapyards, and a low table hewn from a single stump. Woollen cushions stuffed with dead leaves complete the nestlike atmosphere.

Numerous clandestine births are carried out in this house. Here lives strange Dr. Madeleine, the midwife otherwise known as that mad-wife by the citys residents who is on the pretty side for an old lady. She still has a glint in her eye, but her smile is just a twitch, betraying a loose connection in her facial wiring. Dr. Madeleine brings into the world the children of prostitutes and abandoned women, who are too young or too unfaithful to give birth the conventional way. As well as helping with new life, Dr. Madeleine loves mending people. She specializes in the mechanical prosthetic, the glass eye, the wooden leg . . . Theres nothing you wont find in her workshop. As this nineteenth century draws to a close, it takes scarcely more to be suspected of witchcraft. In town, people say that Madeleine kills newborns to model slaves from ectoplasm, and that she sleeps with all sorts of birds to conceive monsters. During her long labor, my mother watches distractedly as snowflakes and birds silently smash their faces against the window. Shes very young, like a child playing at being pregnant. Her mood is gloomy; she knows she wont keep me. She can scarcely bring herself to look down at her belly, which is ready to burst. As I threaten to arrive, her eyelids close without tensing. Her skin merges with the sheets: as if the bed is sucking her up, as if shes melting. She was already weeping on the climb up the hill to get here. Her frozen tears bounced off the ground, like beads from a broken necklace. As she walked, a carpet of glittering ball bearings sprang up under her feet. She began to skate, then found she couldnt stop. The cadence of her steps became too quick. Her heels got caught, her ankles lurched and she went sprawling. Inside her, I made a noise like a broken piggybank. Dr. Madeleine is my first sighting. Her fingers grab my olive-shaped skull a miniature rugby ball and then we snuggle up peacefully. My mother prefers to look away. In any case, her eyelids no longer want to function. Open your eyes! Look at this miniature snowflake youve made! Madeleine says I look like a white bird with big feet. My mother replies that if shes not looking at me, then the last thing she wants is a description. I dont want to see, and I dont want to know! But the doctor seems preoccupied. She keeps palpating my tiny torso. The smile disappears from her face. His heart is very hard. I think its frozen. Mine too. Theres no need to make a fuss. But his heart really is frozen! She shakes me from top to bottom, and I make the same noise as someone rummaging in a toolbox. Dr. Madeleine busies herself in front of her worktop. My mother waits, sitting on her bed. Shes trembling now and, this time, it has nothing to do with the cold. Shes like a porcelain doll that escaped from the toy shop. Outside, the snow is falling more thickly. Silver ivy climbs over the rooftops. Translucent roses bend toward windows, lighting up the streets. Cats become gargoyles, their claws stuck in the gutter. Fish are pulling faces in the river, frozen midswim. The whole city is in the clutches of a glassblower, who exhales an ear-biting cold. In a matter of seconds, the few brave people who dare to head outside are paralyzed; youd think some deity had just taken their photograph. Carried along by the momentum of their own scurrying, some start gliding to the rhythm of a final dance. They almost look handsome, each assuming his or her own style, twisted angels with their scarves sticking up in the sky, music-box dancers at the close of their performance, slowing down to the bars of their very last breath. Everywhere, passers-by already frozen or on their way to freezing impale themselves on the rose garden of fountains. Only the clocks continue to make the heart of the city beat, as if none of this were out of the ordinary. They warned me not to climb to the top of Arthurs Seat. Everyone said the old lady was mad, thinks my mother. The poor girl looks like shes dying of cold. If the doctor manages to mend my own heart, I reckon shell have an even bigger job with my mothers . . . Here I am, lying stark naked, waiting on the workbench next to the worktop, my chest clamped in a metal vise. And Im starting to feel seriously cold. An ancient black cat, with a servile manner, is perched on a kitchen table. The doctor has made him a pair of

glasses. Green frames to match his eyes stylish. Nonchalantly, he watches the scene, all he's missing is a financial newspaper and a cigar. Dr. Madeleine starts scouring the shelf of windup clocks. She removes a number of different models: severe-looking angular ones, round ones, wooden ones and metal ones, showing off to the tips of their clock hands. With one ear she listens to my defective heart, with the other to the tick-tocks of the clocks. She scrunches her eyes, apparently unsatisfied. She's like one of those dreadful old ladies who takes a quarter of an hour to choose a tomato at the market. All of a sudden, her face lights up. This one! she shrieks, stroking the gears of an old cuckoo clock. The clock measures approximately four centimeters by eight, and is made entirely from wood with the exception of its mechanical parts, dial and handles. The finish is rather rustic, sturdy, thinks the doctor out loud. The cuckoo, tall as my little finger bone, is red with black eyes. Its beak, fixed open, gives it the air of a dead bird. You'll have a good heart with this clock! And it'll be an excellent match for your birdlike head, Dr. Madeleine says to me. I'm not so keen on this bird business. That said, she is trying to save my life, so I don't quibble.

Revue de presse A fantastic voyage . . . A whimsical fairy-tale of a book for adults . . . Its like a dark version of Alice in Wonderland or Pinocchio . . . A quick and entertaining read that people who like fantasy-fiction and folk tales will appreciate. Jenny Dial, *Houston Chronicle* The brilliance of this gothic-punk novella, sparkling with imagery filtered through the prism of French film-makers Jeunet and Caro, is in the telling: Malzieu's prose is distinctly original, spitting and fizzing with unique similes and striking metaphors, wonderfully translated by Sarah Ardizzone. Eric Brown, *The Guardian* (London) A little literary miracle. *Glamour* (Paris) [A] fantastical European journey of love and discovery. Billy Heller, *New York Post* Required Reading Malzieu has a gift for unexpected and strong images. *Elle* (Paris) Malzieu sketches European landscapes and crafts figurative language with irresistible relish . . . Calling to mind a host of cultural touchstones, from Pinocchio to The Wizard of Oz, this kaleidoscopic picaresque will enchant many adults and young people alike. *Publishers Weekly* A dreamlike and spellbinding novel. *Le Figaro Littéraire* (Paris) Malzieu uses vivid metaphors and fantastical inventions to craft a beautifully written tale of love, both maternal and romantic . . . The prose style is simple and fluid, and the setting is not unlike a Tim Burton film dreamy, dark, and magical also its no surprise that this novel is being adapted into an animated film. For fans of magical realism and fairy tales. *Library Journal* A fairy tale jeu desprit, but charming all the same. *Metro* (UK)