

AYLCEE TARHA

TALES OF YESTERYEAR 2

Tale 1

Tale 2



Éditions Aylcée-Tarha@Aylcée-Tarha Éditions

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Children: (under parental supervision)

- Clara, a Witch's Love, fantasy tale
- Clara and the Stone Circle, fantasy tale
- The Feudal Trio, The LMJ1, fantasy tale
- The Elemental Peoples, collection of tales

Teenagers: (under parental supervision)

- Dualities, romance novel
- The Elemental Peoples, collection of tales

Adults:

- Dualities, romance novel
- Epidamos, fantasy novel
- Feudalities, heroic fantasy novel
- Liberties, heroic fantasy novel

Free

Children

- Tales of Yesteryear 1, collection of 3 stories
- Tales of Yesteryear 2, collection of 2 stories
- Advent Farandole, calendar
- Little Stories, collection of stories
- Cocotte's Great Adventures
- The Unwanted

Teenagers

- Tales of Yesteryear 1, collection of 3 stories
- Tales of Yesteryear 2, collection of 2 stories
- Lost Stories, collection of 5 short stories

Adults

- Lost Stories, collection of 5 short stories
- The Unexpected Dinner
- The Elevator
- Predictions
- Chemical Atmosphere

DEDICATION

These tales are taken from a collection of short tales: Tales of Yesteryear, intended to be free downloads for children (specifically ages seven to ten). Each tale is complete and unpublished.

These texts can be downloaded FREE of charge directly from my website by adults, parents, family members, friends, etc., who remain subject to their express responsibility in order to open the minds of their offspring (specifically ages seven and up, at the full age of reason).

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CLEMENTIA AND HER DONKEY

Once upon a time, on an island in the Mediterranean, there lived a little girl who had to work to earn a living. A neighbour of her parents took her in, saving her from the orphanage. She had been lonely since the death of her parents, who had died of a contagious disease. Every morning, she would go to the market to sell the citrus fruits her employer gave her. Despite her touching melancholy, she was happy.

'A beautiful summer is dawning, and joy is returning to my heart.'

She suddenly felt free. Four baskets were placed on either side of her donkey, two at the front and two at the back to balance the load as evenly as possible: on the way there, they were filled with beautiful yellow and green lemons, juicy oranges, golden and pink grapefruits, and small mandarins, filling the air with delicate fruity and floral scents.

'Dear parents, I miss you, I can feel you around me, carefree and loving, gone far too soon for me.'

This little girl was called Clementia and had brown skin and the lilting accent of girls from the south, with a dancing gait.

-Good morning, sir, how are you?

-Yes, my girl, and you, when will you come back to see me in the evening?

-I'd love to, believe me, but I don't have time right now, it's summer. The tourists are here, you see.

-Yes, I understand, but that's a shame for you, you've made a lot of progress. You mustn't lose what you've learned.

-Maybe it's just not meant to be.

-In the meantime, I'll take three kilos of oranges, two yellow grapefruits and the same amount of pink ones. For my wife, two kilos of those little mandarins and two of each variety of lemon. All your fruit is delicious, thank you.

-Thank you, sir. We'll see you again, won't we?

-Don't thank me, my dear child, it's only right.

-See you soon, maybe tomorrow. I'm going to get back to my reading.

Her donkey trotted along the paths that led to the town where the market was located. Every morning, she would hail the crowd to encourage passers-by to buy her fruit. She had her own loyal customers. She had a good sense of proportion and business. She looked pretty in her colourful summer dress and large earrings.

"My dear Liliana, here you are, shhh! It's just between us."

She charmed effortlessly and without artifice, so natural was she.

"Hello Julia, how is your son today? Fine? That's fantastic! Would you like this juicy pink pomelo? Yes?"

Her voice had a distinctive tone, with velvety accents and a melodious, captivating timbre.

"My friend, how are you? And your mum, still stuck in bed, her illness is dragging on, don't you think? It's unusually long."

A broad smile spread across her mouth, curling her shy lips. The picture she painted, despite herself, warmed the atmosphere around her cheerful and charming personality. She knew how to be conciliatory in certain circumstances and more harsh in others. Her distinctive trait was her ability to adapt to each customer who came to her. She remained courteous and always reserved.

-Madam, stop and smell my sun-ripened lemons!

-Yes, your fruit was delicious yesterday, I'll take some more today!

-A kilo of these beautiful clementines, miss?

-Yes, I'll try these little ones with two blood oranges.

-Hey, sir? Would you like these mandarins for your children?

-They loved them! I'll also take these two pink grapefruits and four green lemons for my cocktails.

-Here's your order, ma'am. I've added a few treats for your husband to cheer him up, and you too, no doubt.

-Oh, thank you, miss, you're too kind.

-I try to let God, my parents' father, guide me.

-Yes, it's very sad for you to lose someone so close at such a young age.

-Yes, that's how it is. I smile for them, offering them this.

When she had finished, her baskets empty of fruit but her pockets full of hard cash, she walked back up the hill, quietly eating a sandwich offered to her by the owner of the bar-restaurant. She straddled the animal, which obediently climbed the steep slopes, taking them back to their home, surrounded by meadows and fruit trees, on the heights of the port village.

'I am lucky to have a peaceful, if laborious, life.'

The animal adored her and did her every bidding. He loved her company and her gentleness and willingly let her guide him. He often rested his head on her shoulder, begging for attention, wanting a caress or a carrot. She flattered him and cuddled him, and the two of them formed a real duo. They understood each other without speaking, just through gestures or attitudes, the resonance of his vocal organ.

"You're helpful and hard-working like me, beautiful animal."

She took care of him, his coat, his hooves, his ears and his eyes. They loved each other very much!

'Come on, dear little Aliboron, I know you're eager to get back to your fresh, grassy meadow, your troughs of grain and cool water! I feel good there in my little room too... but I'm not there very often... unfortunately, to read and daydream... Here, my beautiful four-legged friend, here's your carrot. Look how good it looks, doesn't it? Yes, it will help you climb the hill, you'll see! One last effort, just around the bend a little further up and I'll finally relieve you of your wicker baskets. You'll be free to go and rest, galloping under the apple trees. We've worked hard together this morning: the sooner we get there, the better we'll be, at least you

will... because me, well, they'll find other jobs for me to do to fill the jute bags in the barn again.

He replied with an appropriate cry, according to his own feelings.

'Yes, I can see you're happy to communicate, me too.'

As soon as Clementia arrived home, she led her little donkey to the meadow, filled his trough with fresh water and rearranged his bedding in the shed. She gave her employer his money and told him the news of the day. She would leave for the orchard to fill the baskets for the next day, singing as she went. She would often sit on the edge of the well or under the fruit trees, daydreaming of another life.

"I am privileged despite everything, thanks to this protective bucolic environment, these generous people, this quiet life."

In the evening, she helped prepare dinner, ate with her benefactors, cleared the table, swept the kitchen and then quickly went to bed in the small room that served as her bedroom. This room was next to the kitchen, which was very convenient for lighting the fire in the morning. The boss's wife woke her up early so she could wash and get ready, and then the two of them prepared breakfast.

"Good morning, Clementia, come on, it's time! The boss will be back from the fields soon, he'll be very hungry."

They ate and then went about their business.

"Good morning, ma'am, I'm ready. What's the schedule for today, apart from the market? The raspberries, perhaps?"

A life punctuated by the passing of each day.

-Yes, Mrs. Yvonne. I'll do that when I get back in the afternoon.

-All right, Clementia. Did you sleep well? Didn't read too much last night?

-Yes, thank you. I just finished making my bed. I stopped after a few pages, too tired from my day to continue.

-That's good, did you wash and change? You have to be

clean!

-Yes, and I lit the fire too, brought in some wood and logs.

-That's nice, the coffee's ready and your cup of milk is warm.

-Thank you, I'll enjoy it then. Some stale bread too?

-I think so. I added some extra toast if you're hungry.

-Oh, you shouldn't have bothered, Mrs. Yvonne.

-You need to eat, young lady. You work hard, you need your strength.

-Yes, I know. Thank you for letting me stay here.

-Don't worry about it. We're happy to help.

-I try to make myself very small so as not to bother you.

When her parents had passed away, taken by the epidemic that was raging at the time, the little girl had been taken in by the landowners of the neighbouring farm. She had only changed houses, as hers had been sold to pay for the double funeral and other expenses. Old debts to pay... The buyer had allowed each remaining payment to be sent to the parents' home.

'I couldn't have got out of all that paperwork...'

Clementia had heard rumours from villagers discussing her unfortunate fate. They knew that her boss, Mr Georges, had bought everything for a reasonable price. He hadn't taken advantage of the opportunity, except that he made the little girl work without letting her go to school. 'It's criminal in a way. How will she ever be able to work later on? She's likely to be employed for life.'

'I know the alphabet, I can write and speak, count and do business, and maintain friendly relationships...'

Every Sunday afternoon, after the Sunday market and midday church bells, she would decorate her parents' shared grave with flowers. Two little angels adorned it: they had left so quickly and so suddenly... They left her with beautiful, tender memories, a kind of peace in the passing of time... She loved coming here: everything was peaceful in this open space, exposed to the four winds!

'Dad, Mum, I hold you in my heart with joy: you are now

happy and supported by God, far from earthly evils. Don't worry about me, I'm doing fine with a roof over my head, food and work. My only regret is that I can't go further in school. I'm not alone, I have my donkey Cadichon who accompanies me every morning to the village. He was your last gift before you left and I thank you for him: he is always so kind and protective of me. I brought you your favourite flowers, dear Mum, they are from your garden. I take good care of them; Mr Georges lets me look after your plants. He took me in and gave me a home. He and his wife are the owners of our house. Kisses and rest in peace. I love you.

Her childhood gradually faded away, and she grew up with values of kindness and love. She had never been able to go to school, not even for evening classes. It was impossible for her: she worked hard on the farm from morning to night. Twice a , the teacher came to teach her the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, science, geography, history and civics.

"You have a beautiful mind, Clementia."

With this little schooling, she managed to read the essentials, do basic arithmetic and write a letter correctly.

"I'm doing well for what I have to do," the teacher told me proudly. "The mayor says so too."

This allowed her to go to the library once a week to borrow novels for teenagers.

'These books take me to beautiful countries,'

She thought about things other than her daily chores, which left her with so many questions. Her lively and fertile mind opened up new horizons and different peoples to her. It filled her with feelings of travel, dazzling discoveries, diverse cuisines with different smells and tastes, and artistic and architectural talents that were sometimes brilliant. She was gradually blossoming!

-Good morning, Miss Arlette. Do you have any more?

-Hello, Clementia. Are you already bringing me your books?

-Yes, I'm devouring them in these autumn and winter days.

-Well! You must sleep when you can, otherwise you won't last long at this rate. You need to take better care of yourself.

-Have you received any other books? Any new ones?

-Not at the moment, but I think you'll like these. Literature can be helpful sometimes, believe me.

-Classics? Ah yes, Beaumarchais! The Marriage of Figaro! It's been sung and set to music, hasn't it?

-And I've kept this one especially for you: the latest biography of Jules Verne! You'll be able to discover all his novels.

-They're magical, and so are the ones by Victor Hugo and Émile Zola!

-Next time you'll get Molière, Racine, Pascal, Rabelais!

Over the years, Clementia grew into a beautiful young woman with a courageous and cheerful disposition. She sang as she went to market, selling her wares with her bright smile and friendly repartee to her many customers. Courteous and reserved, she was the perfect daughter-in-law. She was also courted by several young men, but her heart did not beat for any of them.

"I will only marry the man who makes my heart flutter."

Yet some of them were handsome and likeable, with a promising future ahead of them. It was probably because she had known them for so long that she saw them only as friends and not as future suitors. She had a choice: a sportsman, a hard worker, an artist, a craftsman... But she couldn't make up her mind or even start a fling; she was missing that special something that would make her heart race.

'Maybe I'm asking too much of life...'

She couldn't really confide in anyone because she didn't have any real friends. She had read several articles on this intimate subject.

-So, Matthieu, how are you this morning? Did you get any

jobs with your dad? Do you work with him all day?

-Yes, and I give him a hand, which he appreciates. I like the physical work of calculating the volumes done and to be done.

-You look happy, not like when you were going to school, eh? I'm glad you've found your calling.

-Yes, you're a clever girl! I feel good on the building site, free to move around. Yes, you're right, you're a clever girl! And you?

-Hello, Gilles! Everything okay? You're smiling! It's nice here.

-Hi, Clementia! Can you weigh three kilos of those colourful oranges for me? The blood oranges, of course, right?

-Of course. I bet they're for your paternal grandmother!

-Exactly, beautiful child. And when will you come with me to the Saint-Jean ball? I'm still waiting for your answer!

-Oh, you're not letting me out of your sight, are you?

-Well, what can I say, I'm sticking with you, I'm really tenacious!

-I can only say yes as a friend! Is that okay with you?

-No, and you know very well that I don't want to get married.

-Oh, that's not going to happen anytime soon. Go do your military service and then we'll see if you're still on my list, okay?

-You're incorrigible, elusive, but so original, I adore you!

And then one day...

Around a bend in the road, she met someone who would turn her life upside down overnight without warning. She was calmly walking back from the market, trotting alongside her donkey. As he was getting old, she lightened his load by walking beside him. He was grateful and nuzzled her neck. So they were walking home as usual. It was hot, and they stopped to drink at every turn in the forest.

"Come on, old donkey, we're almost there, just one more bend and we'll be home! Then you can rest..."

The sun was high in the sky: it was a hot summer's day and the water bottle was almost empty. They were walking side

by side when a car came speeding down the road. There was a loud bang and a crash! The little grey donkey jumped out of the way and ff into the ditch. The young girl tried to pull him out but couldn't. The driver then came over to apologise for his dangerous driving.

-My humblest apologies, Miss. I don't know how to express my regret. Can I compensate you in some way?

-Let's be practical: could you help me get him back in the car?

-Yes, Miss, I'm embarrassed I didn't think of that first. It must have been the sight of an angel on this road...

-It's the shock of the incident that's turned your stomach.

-Yes, you're probably right. Are you all right?

-I just hope my dear old animal will be all right. He's indispensable to me, you see, in my daily life.

-I'll pay you for another one, it's no trouble for my wallet. It will be younger than this one and can replace it.

-It matters to me. He's my friend, you see, more than just an animal! It's a part of my life that's been taken away.

-You're moving me, Miss. I'm embarrassed in front of you.

The man was a good ten years older than her: he had beautiful brown hair, clear hazel eyes behind intellectual-looking glasses, well-manicured hands and an energetic build. Clémentia looked at him, annoyed by his select appearance and refined language. He was not part of her world. Her discovery of a different milieu made her wary, distant, questioning.

'I don't want his money! I didn't ask him for anything, especially not charity. Who does this weirdo think he is?

What's more, the idea that money could buy everything filled her with horror. She tried not to judge him, but she saw him as an inconsiderate man with no heart for animals. For her, it was inconceivable! 'This guy really has some nerve. Money is everything! I'm furious, but I have to calm down or I'll turn into a tigress! He's getting me out of myself, out of my element, which is rare. What's happening to me?'

-Miss, I apologise for my lack of judgement. I understand the inconvenience caused. Perhaps you need a tow truck?

-It wouldn't be a problem if it hadn't landed in such a deep ditch. I don't know how to get it out now.

-I'll give you a hand. I can't leave you in such a predicament. I'm really sorry, I'm getting clumsy, I don't know what to do. Let's think about it.

-All right. Since your clothes are clean, stay here and pull the rope when I ask you to. Okay? It's easy, isn't it?

-Are you planning to go all the way down? Um, do you think so? Well, if you say so... But you could scrape yourself!

-Yes, of course. You have to push it from behind, don't you? I'll go right now. And you, don't forget to pull the rope when I give the signal. I'm counting on you! Don't go, okay?

She climbed down carefully, without further ado, found her panicked donkey and coaxed him gently. Then, very slowly, she positioned herself behind him and urged him to climb up, while ordering the gentleman to pull. After a few unsuccessful attempts, the two protagonists achieved their goal: they got the frightened animal back onto the steep road!

'Phew, that's a job done!'

When she finally climbed out of the ravine and back onto the paved road, she was in a terrible state: her corset was stained, her skirt was muddy, her legs were scratched by brambles, her flat shoes were smelly, and her curly hair was tangled! But she had achieved her goal, and she couldn't have done it alone... That was the main thing! She stood tall and proud of having succeeded, with the help of this stranger, in the perilous rescue of her friend!

-Excuse me for my appearance, she said, laughing at herself.

-You're even prettier like this, believe me." He was very serious as he smiled and held out a helping hand. You're incredibly charming, we'd love to give you a hug.

-You're just trying to be generous. But I appreciate it. Being natural doesn't kill you, as long as you're not ridiculous.

-Where do you live, so I can give you a lift?

-It's very close by. At the next crossroads, turn right: the Cocorico and Co property, where I work. Actually, I'm very late. My bosses are going to be angry with me.

-And your home? Your parents? Are you an orphan? Do you have any siblings?

-I've been an orphan for a long time and my neighbours and bosses took me in so I wouldn't end up in a care home.

-Can I visit you there? At their house? In the yard?

-If you'd like, of course. But I work every day except Sunday afternoons, when I visit my parents at the cemetery. They loved life and flowers.

-What's your name? Clementia? What a pretty name! Here's my card. Let me introduce myself: Ernest du Forest, theatre and film director.

-You're in the film industry? Are you famous?

-You could say that. I'll come back to see you, I promise.

-You'll forget me very quickly, dear Ernest. I'm sure of it.

-Don't be so sure, you'd be losing out, Miss.

-We'll see what the future holds, sir.

-A face and figure like yours are not easily forgotten.

-You flatterer: like all women, I appreciate your compliments.

He walked to his car, parked further down the side of the road. He turned the ignition and revved the engine. The little animal trembled from its ordeal and Clementia stroked its neck to reassure it. She waved goodbye as he drove past and continued on her way as if nothing had happened. When she arrived at her destination, she recounted the incident to explain her delay and said nothing personal.

"I don't want to come across as a liar, a snob, a slut, or a tease. I'm just me."

Her bosses looked at her strangely but said nothing about the incident. She preferred to keep certain details to herself. She spent the whole afternoon working in the orchard and doing her various chores... just like every other day, as if nothing had happened. When evening came, she was very tired and finally went to bed. She dreamed... of a man who came to take her away... far away... so far away from her

current life.

'I am an intellectual romantic, an idealist.'

The following days, daily life resumed its routine. On Sunday afternoon, as usual, she went to place flowers on the double grave of her young parents. Speaking tenderly to them, she recounted her encounter earlier in the week and prayed for them. It was then that she sensed a presence behind her. She turned around and saw him, standing slightly back, in front of the entrance to this place of remembrance.

'He has come, keeping his word, a kind of promise.'

He watched her come towards him with her distinctive gait, moving discreetly, almost weightlessly.

'My God, what an air, what a queenly bearing!' he thought. 'She'll be a huge success, that's for sure. She's so natural and naive.'

They smiled at each other instinctively, already understanding each other. He walked ahead of her and opened the passenger door of his convertible, inviting her to get in. She was surprised by his silent request: how astonishing for her! Her first instinct was to run away. Why not run, he couldn't catch her. Her second was to listen to him and consider the consequences of their actions.

-Come on, to make it up to you, I'll take you to the harbour for a drink or an ice cream. Whatever you like. I'll take you away for a few hours! Come with me, Clementia.

-That's very kind, but the gossip... Ernest, there's a lot of it around here.

-Listen to me, I'm not trying to hurt you, I just want us to be together, that's all. And I want to take your picture. You'll be immortal. You'll be a star.

-What? No way! I'll get fired, or worse!

-But... I want to give it a try and offer you work if it's successful! As an actress! You're the perfect young girl... Sign a contract with Ernest du Forest.

-You're going mad, dear Ernest. And who says I want it?

What if it's just a fluke? I'll lose everything!

-Any young girl would want your place, take my word for it...

To everyone, you'll be Gina Clémentine!

-Well, I don't necessarily aspire to that role.

-And I'll marry you, right away! You'll be mine alone!

-Excuse me? Are you serious? Really? You and... me?

-Of course! Here, this is what I wanted to give you during our conversation over a drink at the harbour. Open it, I tell you! It's a token of our future... Er... Collaboration. I'm absolutely sure of myself! I want you in every aspect of our married life.

-Aren't you ashamed to propose marriage to me?

-Not at all, I know exactly what I'm doing: I love you!

-That's not possible, we don't know each other well enough to take such a major, official, administrative, spiritual step. You're from another world, a virtual sphere.

She opened the small square box, white and gold with a satin finish, which contained... a ring... made of gold and diamonds! A little marvel of goldsmithing: finely chiselled in the shape of a C and an E, the two initials intertwined with their first names... with a stone the colour of their eyes on each one! Apparently, he had thought of everything positively, certainly not of her refusing him! She was overcome with laughter!

'If we don't get along, we'll get divorced: my heart will be broken.'

Clémentia clung to the door as if to escape.

'If I say yes, it will be for the rest of my life...'

He sat down in the driver's seat while she opened her unexpected gift. She was flattered and happy, but... she still hesitated. It was all happening too fast for her. She felt like she was on a fast-spinning merry-go-round, going round and round and round... Ernest then took her chin and moved closer to her half-open lips, where he placed a light but meaningful kiss. He was in love.

"I, Ernest, take you, Clementia, to be my wife, and will you

take me, Ernest, to be your husband before God and man?" Quiz.

He squeezed her hand and slipped the engagement ring on her finger. He was moved. A tear of joy rolled down her cheek, completely overwhelming her.

-So, little flower, do you want to take your first steps into adulthood with me? Do you trust me as I trust you? Together, we can conquer the world.

-Oh no, you're not going to bore me with that again!

-You're terrible, you haven't answered my questions! What more can I say or do? Come on...

-Yes, I trust you, but... isn't it too soon... to make such plans? Are you really sure... about yourself... about your feelings... about me... about us...?

-More than I've ever been in my whole life, oh yes.

-But come on... it's very... it's too... fast?!...

-What do you need to believe me? Oh, I know!

-Nothing but everything! It's very confusing in my head...

-Come with me, come on, get out of my car!

He took her hand, pulling her towards him and dragging her towards the wrought iron gates of the place so imbued with spiritual serenity. They stopped at the spot where Clementia's parents slept for eternity. He knelt down, turning towards her, and asked them for their silent approval. He then said to his future wife in a loud, clear voice, but with intense emotion:

'Here is your beloved daughter, and here I am, Ernest, who has come to ask for her hand in marriage. Will you give her to me?' No sooner had he uttered these meaningful words than a bird began to sing. Ernest looked at Clementia and smiled, pointing it out to her. She was more than a little flustered and smiled back at him. He saw this as a favourable sign and put his arms around her shoulders.

'We will be the most beautiful couple and the happiest duo! I love you, give me your life to love me.'

He seemed in love and kissed the girl's neck, making her

blush instantly. They returned to the car, hand in hand. They had just agreed to a solemn pact with a vow of eternity. He respectfully led her into the best inn in the marina, where their table was waiting for them. He was recognised and celebrated. Ernest never left her side and made her an international star.

'I'm intimidated by this exclusive world: some of them are so artificial, he'll have to keep them at a distance, I don't want them.'

That evening, their engagement was celebrated in style, and Ernest's private connections spread the news throughout their shared circles of friends and professional contacts. It spread like wildfire, and journalists and photographers flooded the port and its surroundings. Soon, Clementia was forced to lock herself away in Ernest's property to get some peace. It was there that their photographic rushes began.

'Don't look at me or I'll break down, my beauty. Ignore the camera, stay natural, you'll see later.'

He gave them to her the next day at breakfast, which they ate together, and teased her to wait a little while:

'Eat, or you'll lose your appetite, Clementia.'

Once they had enjoyed their breakfast together on the shaded terrace, she opened her future professional e-book and there she had the surprise of her life: this young woman was so pretty, she couldn't compete with her in this top. She looked at him with tears in her eyes. He misunderstood the reason and said cheerfully: 'This is who you really are, my darling! You are and always will be my heroine. I discovered you, and I'm proud of that.'

'But Ernest, that's not me in that wonderful photo, you must have got the wrong pictures. I don't see myself like that at all!'

Ernest quickly realised that this woman had a strong character despite her affable and spontaneous personality.

She readily sorted people into good and bad, and only gave her sympathy to a very few people in his circle. This allowed her to be more wary of individuals who crossed her path: fame, success, money, loyalty, business, emotions, hypocrisy. Over the years, he asked her for her opinion.

'Be careful, this guy isn't as reliable as he says he is. He's using your influence to get around you and deal with me directly.'

She was only sexually intimate with him on their wedding night in the middle of the Mediterranean on a cruise ship with close friends. She invited her former bosses, who didn't come, her old teacher and his wife, the young librarian and her partner, the priest and his sacristan from her parish who had married them discreetly, the mayor and his wife, and her childhood friends, Gilles and Matthieu

'And my donkey Ernest? We need to find him a cool place to live out his days. I want to be with him until the end, please.'

Clémentia became a woman in his arms: he loved her tenderly all his life, was her mentor and manager. He made her a huge star of French and Italian cinema, then international: they walked hand in hand up the steps of the famous Cannes Film Festival, then went on to the Venice Film Festival, the Berlinale in Germany and flew to the United States for the Oscars, which she won.

'I dedicate this award to Ernest, without whom I would be nothing, my husband, my mentor, my agent, my friend and my confidant.'

Everything was perfect except for one integral part: children. She was unable to give him children following an unfortunate car accident that left her limping and sterile, as the impact had damaged her reproductive organs. They adopted ten children from all over the world (Indonesia, China, Nepal, the Philippines, Brazil, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Guadeloupe and Madagascar). They raised them with love and they all went on to have successful careers.

'We are proud of your university studies, degrees and careers, your future and your private lives!

Their romance lasted until Ernest's sudden departure following a heart attack at their home in Los Angeles. With the children having recently come of age, Clementia divided Ernest's fortune among them, sold the house and retired to Europe, where she travelled extensively thanks to her talent as a professional photographer renowned for her portraits of famous personalities.

'Children, I am retiring far from the hustle and bustle of life and I plan to write a few books about my life.'

Towards the end of her life, she bought an island, living alone by choice with several donkeys in her twilight years, surrounded by her ten children and their families during their holidays, among olive trees, citrus fruits, vineyards and aromatic herbs. She finally rested her aching limbs in the Mediterranean sun... forever, alongside her beloved husband who had travelled with her until her last breath!

GENEVIEVE AND HER MISSION

In a very deep forest, there was a small house. It was built of logs, under the cover of the trees. There was a well there, near a stream. A solitary woman lived there by choice. Few people walked to this dead end, located at the top of this semi-mountainous corner. Only the wind whistled through the branches of the fir trees on the other side of the cliff.

'I have curled up here, it is my greatest victory in life. I have absolutely no regrets about this clear decision!

People from the surrounding villages would come to this spot at the end of the year to choose their Christmas trees, transporting them diligently, dragging them behind them , back to their homes. They were greeted by crowds of happy children and curious women. Everyone gathered in the centre of the hamlets and formed circles, shouting cheers and applauding wildly.

-Good morning, grandmother, still alone with your memories?

-Yes, you rascal, and you, another offspring, another on the way?

-News travels fast, I see! How did you know?

-It's the four elements whispering in my ears!

-Or the village constable whispers them to you... witch...

-Believe what you like, but I know everything about all of you.

-Yeah, right, you're just changing the subject.

There, hidden away in the middle of the greenery, lived a very old lady named Geneviève. She was not like the other matrons who flirted with their old age: she was an original! She preferred to live alone, isolated from others: the villagers

didn't visit her, each staying in their own homes, enjoying their freedom to come and go as they pleased or to think, without having to answer to anyone.

'There is a beautiful serenity around every day that God grants us.'

She didn't bother anyone, even though everyone knew she was there! Her presence was reassuring.

-Geneviève, do you have any more of that cough syrup for my father-in-law? It worked really well last winter.

-Yes, of course, Odile: come in, you must be thirsty, aren't you?

-Yes, but I have to get back quickly, I still have the animals to bring in to the barn! The cows from the mountain pastures can be impatient sometimes.

-I can imagine: those beasts work you too hard!

-That's how it is, it's our job to support them... as long as we can.

One spring day, a young girl, barely out of her teens, came to ask her for advice. She had seen her climbing the steep path and Geneviève knew why she was knocking at her door. It was for a private matter that everyone would judge harshly, leaving her out, judging her, rejecting her, insulting her. Her kindness would do this young girl good, but farewell to her cherished solitude!

'A good deed must come from the heart, not from reason...'

Geneviève was convinced that she was doing the right thing by offering her a place to stay, if she liked the idea.

-Hello, young lady, you're new around here, I've never seen you in this neighbourhood before. What's your name?

-Hello, I'm Ariane. Are you Mrs Geneviève?

-Yes, that's me. I'm listening. Would you like to sit down for a moment? Perhaps a glass of water? You look so pale!

-Yes, thank you for your hospitality. I'll be direct. I'm pregnant and I don't know what to do. There, I've said it, madam.

Around her, the leaves rustled in the breeze.

'I'll give her a challenge, one she'll be able to handle.'

Geneviève studied her pretty face, her drawn features, her extreme fatigue, and heard her pain and perceived her distress.

'Why don't you stay here and think about it?'

She had done something that was very serious at the time: she had loved a young man and was pregnant. She was expecting a baby! But instead of being happy about this gift from heaven, she wanted to destroy it! The tiny, very old lady told her that she shouldn't see this little baby as a mistake, but rather as a joy. Like a true blessing from heaven.

'I'm not here to lecture, but to help you do the right thing!'

Life was meant to be celebrated, not destroyed!

-Dear Ariane, love has entered your life through this extension of you and him, and now you must accept it.

-You don't think I'm being frivolous or worse, do you, Geneviève?

-Why would I? Sometimes on our path, there are unexpected surprises, obstacles to overcome, that's all!

-Yes, that's the least you can say. And you're not asking me anything? You're welcoming me into your home like this?

The elderly lady replied confidently:

'It's your story. If I can help you through this ordeal, I will be

there for your experience of motherhood.'

This future being must have felt wanted in order to live happily. She refused to listen to the girl's allegations and ramblings such as 'I don't know where to go to get rid of it' or 'I'm alone, my future will be ruined by this mistake of my youth'. A child is never a mistake, especially when they come like this, without being truly expected. It will be nothing but happiness!

'Everything has been said, done and decided to move forward positively!

She invited her to stay at her place while she waited for the baby to be delivered.

-Here's your room and the baby's room. Make yourselves at home! Be full of energy and joie de vivre.

-Are you sure, Geneviève? You won't mind? Children make noise, they cry at night...

-It will bring joy to this cottage, which is too big for just one person. Sharing still exists a little.

-You're my guardian angel. What would I do without you?

Geneviève reminded him of a fundamental principle:

'You'll have to take care of your future too...'

So that no one would suspect that Ariane was expecting a baby, her eldest daughter took care of the mail and parcels to help her find work. This would give the young woman time to think about her professional situation. Ariane thanked her and went home to quickly pack her bags. She told everyone that she was leaving to find work in the city, which seemed plausible, and they wished her good luck.

'Thank you, I will feel less alone in such a diverse place thanks to your kind thoughts. I will bounce back.'

She received a few gifts that warmed her heart and would be useful in the near and distant future.

-Thank you for each of your gifts, which will remain dear to me. I realise how much of a change this will be.

-We will miss your singing, your talents and your kindness very much. Keep in touch from time to time.

-We may see each other again one day; life is so full of wonder, amazement, and astonishment...

-Yes, you're certainly right. Take care and good luck!

Before she became pregnant, she had a job as a seamstress in a shop renowned for the quality of its work.

-Yes, you deserve it. Don't forget us in your prayers!

She returned to the woods and began to make a layette for the baby: she was very skilled with her hands, creating beautiful designs with very little. They were so beautiful that her landlady and friend advised her to show her creations to a well-known fashion house: she would have a professional future while staying at home during her pregnancy.

'It will make you independent of this society that judges your actions and will protect you and your child.'

The young mother-to-be spoke to herself, almost reluctantly, thinking dreamily:

-I hadn't really thought about it, because I'm so happy here with you.

-You need to broaden your horizons because I won't always be here.

-Geneviève, come on, you're in great shape and at peace!

-Yes, but you never know! At least for the baby...

-You're more thoughtful than I am! Your wisdom definitely guides my steps. You always have a solution, it's crazy. My young generation is so inconsistent compared to yours.

Ariane followed her friend's wise advice and sent her most beautiful pieces of children's lingerie by post, using the little money she had saved. The haute couture house sent her a return order for a wealthy American customer to be completed within thirty days, followed closely by a parcel

containing the different fabrics required by the customer.

'Cotton, taffeta, muslin, satin, rhinestones, ribbons, pearls: what an artistic project this is!'

Reassured about her immediate future, the young girl set to work with determination. She was passionate about fashion.

-Here's their reply, it's very positive, thank you Geneviève.

-Listen to me and you will be respected professionally.

-Yes, dear friend, with caution and great attention.

-That will go well with your child, even if it means saying you're a widow. A small deviation shouldn't interrupt your rise. I'm sure your talent will be confirmed.

-Oh... Your protection is enough for me, just the two of us.

She put her heart and soul into this difficult task and achieved wonders. She had nimble fingers and was soon inundated with orders. She was always in a good mood, quick to hum or smile. It was a true gift from heaven for the old lady to see the young woman working from morning to night, sitting quietly by the fire, waiting for the arrival of a baby.

'What a wonderful opportunity to gain independence as a woman!'

Geneviève had no regrets about taking her in. Quite the contrary! She added a caveat to this ideal:

-Ariane, working for others honours you, but don't forget your own family. Work and well-being. Take a breather, will you?

-Yes, Geneviève, don't worry, I'm thinking that with the scraps of fabric I have, my baby will be happy and well dressed.

-You need to rest, though. Your condition requires good

health. I think a walk would do you good. Go out and pick some flowers to take your mind off things. Look at the sky and dream."

-With your meals, I have everything I need, and so does the baby. You pamper us and make delicious herbal teas.

-You have a rather fatalistic side that confuses me. Try to be more realistic... Be more down-to-earth, for yourself and the child.

-Yes, I know, and I'm trying: counting, saving, looking beyond the end of the month. It's really hard for me. I'm trying to follow your advice, but I don't always do it well.

The months flew by at breathtaking speed!

"We'll make arrangements for you to give birth here."

Protected by nature, they were lucky and delighted with their lot. The last days of autumn arrived, and so did the end of the pregnancy. The belly grew thanks to the devoted care of Lady Genevieve, and the mother-to-be grew heavier. On a starry night, with the moon shining brightly, the cries of a woman pierced the cool air. Ariane was in labour and gave birth to a little girl.

-Well, my dear, you were very quick! Tell me!

-She came out at the same time as the waters, she slipped out!

-What a pretty little thing you've made! All rosy and chubby!

-I hope she's fully formed! I think I've gone to term. My God, she's already wriggling!

-Don't worry, I'll take care of her! She's in great shape. There, I've just cut the cord. I'll wash her and dress her.

The two women leaned over the makeshift cradle: an old sewing basket found in the back of the attic, varnished and repaired. Inside lay a beautiful little doll with blonde curls,

like her very young mother, with soft blue eyes, an angelic smile and delicate limbs. A little angel had just been born in an atmosphere of calm, femininity and intimacy.

'Is that okay? Let me help you. She's nice and warm and needs to recognise you. Let her feed.'

It was a cocoon of gentleness that would accompany part of the life of this cute, delicate and blossoming child.

-She's settling into a routine, with meals and rest, and sleeps peacefully through the night. She's finding her place...

-Yes, that's what I've noticed. She has an instinct to let you work in peace. She has grown up sensing your needs.

-Thank you for dissuading me from giving her up, I don't regret it. Geneviève, I owe you so much!

-I'm glad you made that choice, it's brought this house back to life.

Winter came very quickly that year and snow covered the forest: soon the men would stop their journey. The baby's cries would not be heard from the path leading to the village. The two women, taking turns at the baby's bedside, felt at peace. Her profession as a children's fashion designer and seamstress was becoming increasingly demanding, and her future was almost mapped out. Ariane could have run her own shop...

'My sweet girl, you could have been my daughter. I love and admire you. I am proud of you, you are doing so well, well done.'

Orders were flooding in in such quantities that she was forced to either turn them down or give longer delivery times.

-Look, more orders, and not just any orders!

Her business was taking shape, gaining strength and coming to life. Her designs were unique, with lower costs for supplies, lighter for children and less bulk for mums, making a fortune for the haute couture house and providing Ariane with a decent salary. The whole company found its norm and her intuition was ahead of the designs themselves.

'You know what mothers want for their children, even more than their own aesthetic desires.'

Ariane had this intuitive understanding of the future of these upper-class women and mothers-to-be, simplifying their daily lives: the bourgeoisie was evolving, re-evaluating its principles, playing at being more autonomous and independent. A wind of freedom was blowing through the literary salons, inviting everyone to get involved in politics and study subjects such as biology, medicine and law.

-Ariane, all you had to do was believe in yourself and take action, you see! You too have filled my life.

-Yes, but without self-confidence, I didn't dare, and then you came into my life and everything changed!

-Solidarity did the rest. I'm having a blast with this little sweetheart.

-I'm proud of my work right now. I've made progress.

-You can be, it's excellent and people really like it!

One day, she received an invitation to visit the capital, with all expenses paid by her employer. Geneviève urged her to accept, saying she would look after the little one while she was away. The young woman left, buoyed by her recent success. For this business trip, she had chosen matching suitcase and handbag to make a good impression. Ariane caused quite a stir!

'Geneviève, I'm so happy, it's spectacular here! I've been sparkling with wit and skill: my designs have been accepted.'

She shared her success with her friend by letter, but on the appointed day, no one showed up! She didn't come back. What was going on?

'I'm isolated: I can't leave Marjorie alone or take her with me, what should I do? What bad luck! I haven't heard from her, this isn't normal. Ariane must have had something come up or an accident. Maybe there's an article in the newspaper? Let's wait until tomorrow, the newspaper will be out then. I feel stuck for the first time. I'll look after the little one for a while, but I can't wait for her to come back!'

On her way back, the train derailed and the young mother was found crushed by a pile of heavy trunks. Ariane was clutching a medallion between her delicate artist's fingers. The cameo contained a small miniature she had had made for her child: a lock of hair with her mum and dad together above an intertwined initial A.

'Poor little girl with such a tragic fate. It's so unfair, she was so talented and so young, Ariane had her whole life ahead of her!'

The emergency services carried out a search that led them to Geneviève, at the address in her black handbag.

-We're so sorry. She was so young and pretty.

-It's a great emotional loss for me and... the little girl.

-What are you going to do with the body? Didn't she have any family?

-I'll take care of it. I'll call the mayor, the priest and the undertaker to bury her. She had been living here for a short time.

-Yes, that's good, otherwise she'll end up in a mass grave, which would be doubly sad... Thank you, madam, for doing this here.

Her old friend found herself alone with this young and beautiful child: she raised her with the love of a grandmother, protecting her as much as possible and giving her all her attention. She enrolled her in a reputable school and she grew up like a normal child. Geneviève paid the bills and maintenance, told her about her mother, the hard-working and brilliant little Ariane, who had a sure and pronounced artistic and aesthetic talent.

'You have good manners, but your attitude sometimes leaves something to be desired. Pull yourself together, my pretty girl!'

Marjorie was the spitting image of her mother, but with a more assertive, direct and frank character, a touch rebellious but very loving.

-Young lady, please stop your inappropriate rebellion immediately.

-I don't like injustice, Madam, I will always fight it!

-You're becoming impertinent, young lady! Stop right there, I'll have you know. You'll be punished this weekend!

-You can punish me! I won't budge an inch.

-Fine, go see the headmaster immediately!

-I'll go, no problem, Madam! I'll explain myself.

That winter, Geneviève recovered poorly from a bad bout of flu, which quickly turned into pneumonia. She went to a solicitor and left her entire estate to her young friend, asking a detective agency to track down her father using the little information she had found in her young friend's papers after her death. A name was written on a passionate love letter: Monsieur Arnaud de Montcalm.

-Please send me a full report on this man. Thank you, this is confidential! For his daughter at my home.

-Our agents and services will be discreet, I assure you, and I personally vouch for this situation.

-I need results quickly because I am very ill and I am

responsible for this delightful child. I need her.

-I fully understand your request and your predicament. Don't worry, it's to your credit. She's lucky...

-Thank you for your support, dear sir. I don't want anything for myself.

-Yes, there are no strings attached and no intention of blackmail, I just want this child to be reunited with her biological family.

-Yes, absolutely, sir, and only because I am currently ill. Otherwise, I would not have taken this step.

-I understand perfectly, thank you for trusting my team.

Shortly afterwards, inside her forest home, she received a detailed and accurate report on the search she had launched to discover the identity of the father of the beautiful Marjorie, the child of the woods in her care. She learned that he was the last son of a bourgeois cloth merchant who owned multiple properties with horses, dogs, and farmland.

'Well, what a romantic and sad story!'

Piecing together all the information, she knew what had happened.

'I remain cautious in this delicate matter of the heart. I also understand better the predicament my little Ariane was in. Their infatuation had gradually turned into true love, taking them by surprise. Naively believing that this would be enough for Arnaud's father, they unwittingly conceived little Marjorie in a beautiful moment of tenderness. But they could not have foreseen the rigid attitude of this proud father. Only the father, proud of his success, wanted the best for each of his sons: Arnaud had therefore preferred to leave for a while to calm things down, thinking he would return very quickly, but then various commercial issues had decided to infiltrate the story. While writing passionately and enthusiastically to Ariane, he begged her not to forget him. He was determined to marry her when he returned, armed with his earnings. How heartbreaking!'

The two young people liked each other, then fell in love, but

were separated by the young man's family. He was sent on a business trip to China by his father's company and only returned a few days ago. She was happy about this and set about investigating the man to be sure she was making the right choice for her child. Geneviève was on a mission to rescue this misunderstood but still present love.

'That's very encouraging for the future!'

Imagine her surprise when she saw him asking for information about the young woman he had left behind before leaving for China! He still loved her! He couldn't be held responsible for everything that had happened in the meantime! Armed with this information, the old lady approached the young man as he sat gloomily on a bench, staring into the distance, completely helpless.

'Help, sir, why are you so sad? At your age...'

She asked him what could be causing such depression!

-Good morning, young man, why the veil over your eyes? Have you heard some distressing news? Pull yourself together!

'Yes, madam, I am devastated by a reality that I imagined would be completely different when I returned to France. I am stunned and angry.

-Ah? And what did you hope for that was so joyful or happy?

-To find and marry the love of my life, and she's disappeared!

-Was her name Ariane?" she asked, handing him the medallion.

He looked at her, defeated, and spoke to her in touching terms about the love he could no longer find, so afraid that he had lost her forever. She had replied to his first letters, then there was silence for many long months, turning into years. And now that he was back here, he couldn't find her. She had completely vanished, disappeared into thin air: no plausible explanation!

'Yes, Ariane, my flower cut too soon...'

She gave him all the information he wanted and concluded

with the young woman's death. Then, seeing that he was in despair, she added gently that he had a beautiful sixteen-year-old daughter, the spitting image of her young mother. He asked her if he could see her, and she took him to her home deep in the woods.

'My God, she's the spitting image of her!'

He was charmed by Marjorie, who reminded him so cruelly of his young love. He had regained his will to live and fight for this piece of love. He had just lost her mother forever, but now he had a father's role to fulfil. He told her that he would discuss it with his father and take this pretty doll with him. He had become a partner and director of the family firm.

-Thank you, Geneviève, for helping my Ariane find her way.

-I did my duty and I'm happy to know you.

-Don't worry, I'll take good care of my daughter Marjorie. You've given me back my life, you've really given me a boost, thank you.

-I don't doubt it for a second! Don't delay... I want this sorted out quickly because I'm very ill.

-I promise, see you soon Geneviève.

She thanked him between violent coughing fits, her chest tight with angina. He had to hurry because she was close to death. He understood the urgency and left, returning only three days later to the bedside of a very thin old lady. Geneviève was happy to see him again and breathed her last breath in the arms of the handsome man who had come to take his own child.

'Thank you, Geneviève, dear grandmother, I will love you forever...'

Marjorie lived the life of a princess, receiving a good education and going on to university, where she became a

renowned lawyer. Geneviève was buried behind her little house deep in the woods, where several times a year, a kind man and a beautiful young woman would walk side by side up the footpath to lay the wild flowers she loved so much on her grave.

'Dear friends, rest in peace in this beautiful spot...'

There was also a second grave nearby, covered with flowers and well tended: that of the young and pretty girl, the little fairy with delicate fingers, Ariane, whom her daughter and the man would never forget. The cottage remained well maintained and served as a refuge for Marjorie, where she could rest from the noise of the city where she dispensed justice. Her clients were ordinary people whom no one else wanted to defend.

'You taught me so much and loved me so much, Mum and Geneviève.'

She set up two associations, which she named Geneviève for the elderly and Ariane for young girls in distress. Marjorie attended many events and, in her forties, became a novelist whose first four books were critically acclaimed. She then met the love of her life at a book signing and had two beautiful children, whom Papy Arnaud took care of.