

AYLCEE TARHA

Predictions

*News three
of
'Lost news'*



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dualities, romance novel
- Clara, a Witch's Love, fantasy tale
- Clara and the Stone Circle, fantasy tale
- Advent Farandole, calendar
- LMJ, Feudal Trio, children's stories
- The Watchtower, fantasy novel
- The Elemental Peoples, collection of tales
- Lost Stories, text collection
- Epidamos, fantasy novel
- Feudalities, heroic fantasy novel

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On this beautiful spring morning, Viviane was happy to be alive: everything had been going wonderfully for her for almost two days. She had just graduated from her trilingual executive assistant program with a very respectable grade that bordered on perfection. Her father was returning to France after an absence of almost two years: an engineer in South America. Her mother had just remarried a remarkable man.

'I can say that my journey is punctuated by departures and arrivals, studies and certificates, joys and sorrows.'

The wedding had given rise to festivities where she had made

friendly and friendly encounters. Her life as a young woman was currently being decided: she had just applied for various positions without telling her family because she did not want to involve them in her professional life. Her ambition was to succeed on her own without any influence or intervention of any kind.

'I don't want to be labeled as the daughter of. That's why I used my mother's name, which happens to be very common.'

She possessed fine physical, intellectual, and mental abilities: her appearance was that of a discreet young woman, knowing how to dress, with the grace and gestural beauty of a dancer. Her exemplary student career and her go-getter nature made her sufficiently self-confident, without affectation. Natural and pleasant, she could hold her own against anyone. Her cell phone rang.

-Hello, Mom. Did your honeymoon go well?

-Yes, thank you, my dear. And you, how are you?

-Very well, thank you. I passed my exam. I'm meeting a friend of mine, Florence, do you remember her or not?

-Yes, but she hasn't come to see you for a long time!

-I'll explain later. I'll tell you yes. I'm almost there, I kiss you, my little mommy. See you tomorrow. Kisses.

Florence was a friend from her teenage years and had just

set up as a medium, astrologer, and tarot reader. She possessed extraordinary feeling, faith, and intuition. On his sixteenth birthday, she had drawn his cards taken from a Bohemian tarot, in which she had predicted, without dating, the events in order of arrival over the next ten years. She still remembered the smell of incense, of sandalwood.

'Here is your first destiny successfully traced as you see here, through these drawings and also by your astral theme.'

By the end of that period, she hadn't been wrong on any point. That's why Viviane had searched for him and found him again using the old school friends website online. She had arranged to meet under a pseudonym to create a surprise. For a moment in their lives, between middle school and high school, they were inseparable, then their paths had truly diverged, and now they were about to meet again. Incidentally.

'How will she receive me? Always so mysterious...'

As a consultant and professional, Viviane had prepared herself for the fact that she wouldn't recognize her because she had changed a lot since then. She pushed open the heavy front door and found herself in a lobby filled with greenery and ice. She went to the elevator and called it with a steady hand: on the outside, she was 'normal,' on the inside, it was a real upheaval. Curious and respectful.

'Florence, how many divergent paths we have taken to get to where we are today!'

After climbing upstairs on a lithe foot, she headed for her ex-friend's office. A plaque read: Fiorentina, medium, astrologer-numerologist, tarot reader. Beneath a button: Enter. She pressed it, and the door swung open automatically. She entered a hushed corridor that divided into three rooms. On the first, on the right, Restrooms. On the second, on the left, Waiting Room.

'The atmosphere is neutral, reserved, calming, secretive.'

The door being open, she walked in that direction, entered it

and chose a comfortable ergonomic chair, sitting down quietly. She looked around her, astonished. Viviane bent down, grabbed and leafed through a women's magazine, which she began to read. An article interested her and she became absorbed in her careful reading. The silence was serene and suited this old friend very well.

'This coming that I desire is so Machiavellian.'

After a moment, a door opened and closed with a soft creak. Quick footsteps approached where she was. Viviane closed her newspaper, placed it on the table, and raised her head so that she was face to face. Fiorentina reached for the door and, opening it a crack, smiled broadly. She was wearing a sleek black trouser suit and had a red scarf studded with silver stars on her hair.

-Hello Viviane. You look very beautiful. How are you?

-Well, thank you very much Fiorentina, and you, what are you doing?

-Like a charm you see, but quite tired today.

-I can come back another day, if you prefer, let's see!

-No, anyway, I was waiting for you and here you are.

-How so? I gave a nickname though.

-You forget that I'm in Clairvoyance, my dear, come on.

-So you know why I'm here? I can't hide anything from you.

-Yes. And I'll tell you your next ten years, for sure.

-Like the first time? I was sixteen, so young.

-I have progressed in the Occult Sciences since that blessed time of our post-youth. Our so jovial adolescence!

-You know very well that I've always had faith in you and in our friendship. Our paths have just diverged, that's all, believe me.

-Yes. It's the same for me too. I knew from the first moment I met your gaze that your heart was pure. It makes me so happy that you're here in front of me. It feels so good.

-I had a hard time finding you, but since I'm persistent, I finally managed. I sweated chasing you this month.

-I had a strange dream about two weeks ago where I saw you coming towards me again, smiling and perky.

-Why did you let time and circumstances separate us like this? It's sad and poignant.

-That's it. But the main thing is that you're here today.

-It was only by a thread that we didn't see each other again here.

-And if you were to accompany me to my workroom, confidentiality would remain between us.

-I'll follow you right away. I'm curious to see what you might tell me. I can't wait to learn the broad outlines of this destiny that belongs to me and that you hold in your hands.

-But know that this is about you. You alone. I am only the instrument that responds to your demands.

-I'll let you do and say. Just like in the old days. And your sandal?

-I'll skip over the past. The present, you've succeeded in everything so far and you have everything you need to succeed. You're waiting for one interview out of four sent out and you'll receive two invitations, one of which will give you the coveted position. Just be careful of the one who will be at the head of this multinational company. This man has a very strong charisma: work for him but don't succumb to his beautiful eyes. He will court you but cool him off right away; it really affects your professional and private life. Someone else will offer you the happiness you hope for. Don't be mistaken. This is crucial. Before you see this second man, who is a loyal and very important client for the company you will be working for, you will have a strange dream that will completely upset you. Come back to me then with all the details, I will give you its meaning and with my help, you will follow the right path.

-And when will all these situations be for approximately?

-Your answers will be in the coming week. For the summons, I'd say between ten and sixteen days approximately. For the hiring, you'll start on May 2nd. For your boss's courtship, a month later, at a work cocktail party. The dream will take place three days before. Come see me directly before the appointment takes place. For your formal meeting with this client (his initial will be a D for the first name and an S for the foreign surname) sometime in July at a so-called

business meal. Courtesy obliges.

-You're being very cryptic right now. You won't give me anything more, will you? It's essential to me, isn't it?

-Exactly, and I'll tell you the truth. It's not a strategy on my part. Simply method. If you do what I ask you, you will be able to have a life strewn with stars. If you choose the other path, here it is free will, you will have several very big worries. From this crossroads, I will tell you your definitive path. This will be inscribed before me and I will dictate your next ten years. With more details. As before. To close our paths.

-Is this a knot? Like you explained to me before?

-It's in your birth chart, yes. It changes only a little.

-Have you worked on it? What did you conclude? Is it dangerous?

-Yes, it was he who made me become an astrologer, among other things. He is both very handsome and becomes quite complex towards the end. Not your death or an accident for you. What I can predict is that you risk having a life full of richness and stress in the face of 'unusual' cases.

-What do you mean by 'originals'? Is it serious?

-That your life will be very creative, possessive, sentimental, relational. You will become a sort of éminence grise. You will remain in the shadows until the tragic but explosive death of your husband. You will only realize your true self after his death. After almost seven years of passionate community. And two children. An industrial empire to safeguard. And then, at the end of the third year of widowhood, you will clandestinely have a lover. This man will protect you until the end.

-And then I'll come back to see you? It'll be ten years, right?

-No, as soon as this man is in your life you will no longer need me because he will embody your guide, your mentor, your mentor, your lover, your other self. He will lead you down remote paths, parallel roads that will be beneficial and enlightening to you. But you are not there yet.

-I thank you Fiorentina for all these things of the future.

-Don't thank me: I'm just decoding your future.

-See you in about two months. Can't we meet up as friends?

-When you live this dream, don't omit any detail because everything will be important. Whether it's the atmosphere, the characters, animals, plants, minerals, decor, objects, words, scents, colors. Words too. Write everything down to remember everything as clearly as possible. Before writing it down, don't put your feet on the ground because you will forget everything instantly.

-Thanks again. However, you haven't told me anything about your personal journey to get here, to this very private office.

-It's a long, rather sad story. My mother, before passing away from a long, so-called incurable illness, made me promise to fulfill her own dream. My sisters had also serious health incidents. To assist them and give them the help they needed, I needed to find money quickly. I exploited this gift from heaven and I succeeded. In a nutshell, that was it. But I don't regret anything. My fate has always been very and too closely linked to that of my family, strange people.

-It's true: I never really understood them. Their reactions seemed strange to me even then, but I'm sorry for your troubles, and at such a young age. Why didn't you contact me again? I could have helped you, advise you, support you... What do I know? There would have been two of us!

-No, our paths had diverged, it wasn't the right time. I had to move forward on my own at all costs. It was my destiny, karma as they say... Not yours.

-The famous previous debt that we all carry around with more or less heaviness... success... sorrow...

-Yes, that's exactly it, but I was pleased that you reconnected with me on your own. I've been waiting for you ever since.

-But how could you know it was me in your waiting room? I didn't tell you anything.

-A simple intuition, a scent, a sixth sense, a dream... Everything in life is a story of signs, of symbols, we must know how to identify them, it is part of ourselves, of this universe or space that surrounds us. Be more attentive to your heart, to your body and you will then perceive certain things. Try it.

-Are you talking about personal development? About the

inner self?

-You react quickly and well: you would be an excellent student in private coaching... Maybe you will take this course one day.

-My famous memory and its secret drawers. Can you feel it?

-See you soon, Viviane. I'm really exhausted.

-Why don't you come to my place in the meantime? We could reconnect, we could go out to a restaurant if you prefer, I'll invite you. It would make me happy. Would you prefer to pick up the thread yourself?

-Give me your phone number, I'll call you one evening next week. I promise. Okay?

-Okay. Thanks again for everything. See you soon. Kisses.

Viviane went back the way she had come and walked confidently along the sidewalk. Fiorentina stared at her from her window until she was no longer able to see her, at the end of her street. She let go of the hem of her curtain and sat back down, devastated: her day had been hard once again. She was waiting for her 'master': the one who had installed her, who had trained her, who came every evening to claim her financial and emotional contribution.

'If you knew what I do to survive, you wouldn't look at me anymore, dear Viviane. I'm so ashamed of myself, my God...'

A loan shark of the worst kind. She'll have to go through this again and again, until her debt is paid off. She gave him her best years, offering him her body along with her financial debt: he was sixty years old and had some rather lewd ideas, she was twenty-six and wanted to end it all once and for all. Four more years and real life will begin for her. When she turns thirty, she'll be free!

'I will have the prospect of doing what I want, who I can see without involving them in this life of intellectual misery!'

Viviane felt her friend's gaze on her as she walked along the sidewalk: she was quickly reflecting on this interview outside of normal time, almost as if the hands of the clock had stopped. She had experienced strange sensations: her old

friend had a painful secret that she was hiding. This presentiment challenged her relentlessly, to the point that she almost retraced her steps.

'Fiorentina was a nod to a heroine from the novel *Fiora*, known as the Florentine, a historical saga by Juliette Benzoni that so rocked us during our young years of that happy and fleeting adolescence that we were leading. Ah, Fiorentina, you haven't changed much despite all your efforts at sophistication: makeup, jewelry, hair, high-end suit, chic decor, good kind of dream...'

Fatally, she shrugged, continuing on her way. Arriving home, she opened her mailbox and a confidential white envelope fell at her feet. She picked it up and saw that it came from one of her job searches. 'They were quick!' She turned it over in her fingers, unsure whether to open it. She pressed the button for the building's silent elevator.

'Calm down, my little Viviane, it might be negative.'

Landing at her front door, she opened it, stepping inside her studious bachelor apartment. The young woman poured herself a glass of fresh water and sat down in her armchair, the fold resting on the living room coffee table. The anticipation she was building up came from Fiorentina's enigmatic words. 'You'll get the coveted position at a multinational corporation, working for the CEO of that company.'

'I am very intrigued by your predictions, my friend.'

Viviane remembered a few more of his words: 'Be careful not to mix work and feelings. Cool him off immediately. It's not him, but one of his most important clients.' whose initials are DS.' And the acronym on it came from a foreign group! For them to summon her so quickly, it must be either an emergency or one of two negative answers. She smiled and took it back between her slender fingers.

'Have I become superstitious by any chance?'

She suddenly had the strange feeling that this was where

she would soon be working. It was a truly bizarre feeling. So she plucked up courage and unsealed it with a sharp jerk: she unfolded the leaflet giving her an appointment for next Tuesday, in exactly three days, at ten o'clock sharp, directly in the director's office! It made her legs ache and her breath short!

'I thought I would be interviewed by the head of personnel or an HR representative to take an assessment test, but I was so naive!'

This big league of the international business world was proving to be fascinating and apparently devilishly sharky! She stood there, thinking about this extraordinary challenge that had just fallen directly into her lap. She stood up and headed to her fridge in search of an impromptu meal when... The phone rang: she picked it up and heard a rather distant voice on the other end of the line.

-Hello? Hello? Miss Viviane Montagnard?

-Why? Yes, sir? Who do I have the honor to address?

-Commissioner Leonard. Miss, come to my office at the central police station. I'll expect you in thirty minutes.

-Hello, Commissioner. Why are you calling me? I don't understand. What do you want from me?

-Come and you'll find out. I'm waiting for you. See you soon.

Taken aback by the peremptory tone, surprised by this call, she smiled in spite of herself, looked for her handbag, checked her identity papers, fixed her hair and closed her door, took the elevator again and... bumped into two police officers who had come to get her! She followed them, rushed inside the double-parked car and, with all sirens blaring, she was taken in record time to the central office.

'I'm blown away, what's going on here with me?'

In less time than it takes to say it, live it, or write it, she was facing Commissioner Leonard. He was a small, plump man with a pale complexion, sparse hair, sly eyes framed by thin glasses, and full lips: in short, someone who intimidated her. He immediately grasped the young woman's unease and

decided to reinforce it unduly, taking pleasure in it, delighting in it.

'Your deputies simply took me on board!'

They stared into each other's eyes for a rather long time, like opponents in a ring. Then Viviane smiled frankly and uttered a resounding 'Good morning, Commissioner.' The other officers present turned as one to look at the one who had dared to raise her voice. They saw before them the image of a young woman who had just scored a point with her casual attitude.

-Hello again, Miss Montagnard, Viviane by name?

-Why am I here in this office facing you, Commissioner?

-Because I wanted to meet you very courteously, Miss Viviane, before perhaps questioning you.

-That doesn't answer my question at all. legitimate and clear, Commissioner Leonard. Question me?

-Good. You are here because people, neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the case at hand, saw you near the clairvoyance office of Miss Fiorentina, a certain Florence, well known to our services.

-What do you mean? My teenage friend Florence is involved in something shady? I don't believe you at all. She's a decent, honest, and very reserved girl.

-Was, I pray you, Miss. A friend, you say?

-What are you trying to tell me, Commissioner? Yes, a friend.

-That your friend has just died, Miss Viviane.

-But that's not possible, come on. I just left her. We chatted for a moment not two hours ago, and then I went back home. We were supposed to meet again one evening next week! I wrote down my phone number so we could renew our contact, which had been untied by life.

-So, dear Miss Montagnard, you maintain that you saw this person with the pseudonym Fiorentina this afternoon and that when you left her office, she was still alive. That's right, isn't it, Viviane?

-Yes, of course. Are you implying otherwise, sir?

-Approximately when did you leave her alone there?

-It must have been almost 4:30 or 40. His gaze followed me until I turned the corner. Then I went straight home. When you called me, I had barely poured myself a glass of water and opened my mail. I went down to the lobby where I was intercepted by your deputies and brought into your office.

-And you didn't notice anything unusual, a fear that she might have whispered to you, or met someone in the elevator?

-No. We were very close until high school, called the inseparables, then our paths diverged significantly because of our respective courses. It was only recently through the school friend search site on the internet that I managed to find her again. Quite awkward.

-Why did you want or care so much to see her again?

-First of all, out of friendship, and also for a very personal reason.

-And what was this very personal reason, Mademoiselle?

-On my sixteenth birthday, she read my cards and predicted the last ten years. She wasn't wrong. So for my twenty-sixth birthday, I wanted to do it again. It's as clear as that. There is no other, sir.

-Would you be willing to sign this report, Miss?

-Of course. I'm telling the truth. I'll read it and sign it. But first of all, how did she die? She just told me she was tired, before I left her in her workroom.

-Alas, your old friend was found by one of her faithful consultants some time after your departure. That's why we brought you here. To try to discover the motive for the terrible crime that occurred.

-What did they do to him? In such a short time, you say?

-She was tied up, facing the window, half-breasted, a dagger stuck in her heart. Blood all around.

-My God! It's disgusting! It's horrible! Inconceivable!

-I don't need you to tell me, Miss, that's why I thought you might be able to help us or that I might catch you! You could have been at least an accomplice of the criminal, you see? If not the killer.

The young woman was escorted back to her apartment by a

police officer at the bottom of her avenue. She finally entered her home calmly but internally stirred. Her cell phone rang and she sighed slightly. 'Yes? Oh, is that you, Mom? Do you want to come? Right away? Yes, please. Thank you, I'll wait for you both.' Viviane tidied up her pretty living room a little.

'I, who wanted rest, got it today!'

She prepared fruit juice cocktails with dry biscuits and sweets. The intercom rang, and she opened the door to her convivial mother and jovial stepfather. They embraced as soon as they entered: surprised by the lukewarm welcome, they asked her questions, which she answered and recounted her more than eventful afternoon. They listened to her, not interrupting, letting her unleash her overflowing emotions.

'Well, it's a good thing we came to you, little darling. Your mother smelled something nebulous.'

When she finished her story, she began to cry hot tears about herself, her surprising day, her friendship barely found and immediately lost, the confounding death of this friend. They were polar opposites: this difference had brought them together and brought them closer at an age when people were opening up to the world, blossoming. Her mother stroked her hair to calm her, as she had when she was little, affectionately.

'Sorry, Mom, I had to get that out. Thank you both so much for coming to visit me this evening.'

Her father-in-law, Jean, remained silent as usual, but he frowned; it was his personal way of thinking. He cleared his throat and declared that Viviane should pack a suitcase and come stay with them for a while. Viviane suddenly remembered her business meeting. She had to go in two days. Jean discussed it with the commissioner, and they agreed on the principle.

-Viviane, I've made arrangements with the police. If they

need you, they'll come get you from our place. If so, I'll come with you. Go grab your things, we'll leave as soon as you're ready. For your professional project, you'll come from our place; it's secondary. The police have all our numbers just in case, including phone and cell phone numbers, and addresses.

-Darling, would you like a hand, perhaps?

-No, it'll be fine, Mom, thank you. That's very kind.

-Don't forget your mail, your papers, your purse, your cell phone, a professional interview outfit, your makeup, your...

-Yes, I know. Mom, thanks. You're nice, don't stress me out.

-Well, in the meantime, we're going to taste these delicious fruit juices.

-Hmm, this one is really cool: lime, orange, carrot!

-Yes, it's your favorite with a stick of celery, mmm!

No sooner said than done. They piled into Jean's Mercedes, took the ring road without rush hour, and in no time, they were in the triplex they had occupied since their recent wedding. Several boxes were still lying around the living room, remnants of their honeymoon. They chose a bright room for her so she would feel comfortable and let her settle in.

'This is your safe space while you recover from all these somewhat overwhelming emotions.'

Jean silently invited them out that evening. He had reserved a cheerfully flower-bedecked table. At dinnertime, his parents escorted him to a Hindu restaurant to take his mind off things. Viviane was touched by this tender interest but couldn't help thinking about the predictions Fiorentina had communicated to him. Everything was mysterious, even mystical. She had spoken almost through parables.

'Mom, do you have a notebook or exercise book with a pen at home, please? I need to write things down.'

She will write down everything she remembers from this unique interview. As soon as she finds herself alone in her room, she will jot down scraps, words, sentences, a feeling.

This will help her understand better. From that moment on, the young woman relaxed, brightened up, and participated in the conversation. The night was secured and the atmosphere became lighter. Her memory spoke to her of the dream she would have.

'Oh, these little bouquets of violets are so discreet and fragrant. These little flowers cheer me up. Thank you, Jean.'

The dishes, spicy and flavorful, served with tact and skill, contributed greatly to the success. Late that night, Jean laughingly escorted 'his wives' back to the Parisian apartment on Avenue de Wagram. Viviane went straight to her room, preserving her guests' privacy. Her mother had handed her a notepad and a pretty black pen. She sat down at a desk and began writing down her memories.

'I remember my cheerful thoughts in a jumble, preserved and modulated as we move towards it, towards adolescence...'

Then came her friend's strange predictions, the route of her arrival, the approximate time, the waiting room, her wait time, her audience, and her departure on a note of hope. She wrote down the effect she had felt, ready to retrace her steps. She also noted the dream she would soon have. Viviane looked out the bay window at the city lights surrounding her.

'I hope heaven has welcomed you with dignity, farewell.'
She felt good, rested, and not sleepy: she lay down, however, and at dawn, her eyes closed. In the early morning, she entered the serene and lively kitchen. She absolutely had to relax: her professional meeting would certainly be difficult. She had breakfast with them and suggested they go to the sports center: sports, bowling, and wellness on the horizon.

'What do you think of the idea, it might be nice!'

They immediately agreed and brought her along to spend the day together. She headed to the pool and then the body treatments, while they went to squash and a couples massage. For lunch, they enjoyed vegetarian dishes featuring

fish or meat on a stone grill, raw, braised, or steamed vegetables, and fresh fruit. The couple enjoyed ping-pong, finishing off in the hammam.

'Me, fitness and padel, then shower and thalassotherapy! Yay for the rest. I feel much better, and it's thanks to you both!'

Having recharged their batteries, they returned to their fun activities at the video store. When evening came, they returned home. Wobbly and soggy, but entertained by their epic day. A light and colorful meal tray was served in front of the large high-definition screen in the living room. A comedy film cheered them up and their spirits soothed. They went to bed with relish and fell asleep like exhausted masses.

'A Sunday spent lounging in bed in your pajamas, sunbathing on the terrace, having an aperitif and letting yourself live!'

Monday passed peacefully for Viviane, who nevertheless went to her apartment on Avenue de l'Opéra to pick up any mail and stop by her hairdresser so that she would really feel at her best and reassured about her outward appearance. Mom accompanied her to the shops all afternoon to find an outfit appropriate for her brand image.

'Good chic, good kind, high-class professional! That's what you need, my dear: you'll bluff them!'

Viviane thanked her for her kindness by buying her a pretty costume bracelet. It brought tears to her eyes. For Jean, she bought him a clutch with a matching tie. the waistband of the pants. They ended the day in a tea room where Jean found them deep in conversation. He enjoyed a cappuccino and invited them to the cinema. A quick trip to a bistro where he received her gifts, very moved.

'Rest and you will win, we are sure of it!'

The next day would be decisive for Viviane, who, as soon as she arrived, retreated to her lair and fell deeply asleep. She got up at dawn, so adrenaline was pumping: after a full but light breakfast, Viviane set off on foot into the city. When she stood in front of the immense glass building of the company

that offered her a real opportunity, she felt very powerful and lasting positive sensations.

'I'm feeling refreshed despite everything, my life will begin here.'

Her intuition guided her and she was in front of the director's door very quickly. She had just under fifteen minutes left before the appointment: she sat down on the bench and closed her eyes for a moment. This was enough for a tall man to angrily accost her: 'Miss, you're not here to sleep, you're here to work! Go to your department, damn it! If I catch you standing there with your arms dangling...'

'Well, it starts with such a lunatic...'

Viviane didn't know what to say and preferred to maintain the appearance of an employee to the boss: the Zen attitude! With a smile on her lips, she stood up and went towards him, her hand outstretched. He stared at her, didn't take her hand, and stepped aside so she could enter. Her hand grabbed the shorthand notebook, which he placed in front of her, along with a pen. He began his entrance exam by dictating a text in French, which she translated into English and Spanish.

'I'll show him my striking power!'

When she returned to him with the typed letters within twenty minutes, he whistled with satisfaction. He read them carefully and then spoke directly to her in Italian. She answered him in Spanish. He smiled broadly and continued in German, and she managed to respond accurately in English. She was clearly in her element and would adapt by adopting a cautious air.

'I'm young, but you won't get me at your little game.'

The boss became a man in a brief instant, his eyes splitting into the piercing gaze of the feline he was. He scrutinized her from head to toe, looking for a flaw he didn't find or that threw her off balance. She pretended not to notice and waited patiently for the verdict. It came very quickly, in a

jerky voice, almost insulting because of his disillusioned accents about women:

-Miss, I am pleased to offer you this position as executive assistant: you will be solely responsible to me. It is up to you to adapt to my pace and my working methods. You will also have to accompany me by plane during my various international meetings. I require from you a great deal of flexibility in your schedule, rigorous organization, and reliable control of my schedule. Good luck and have a great start in our company. In addition, your salary will be adjusted according to flight movements: I will grant you a substantial fixed salary to which will be added various bonuses and a big one. Additional remuneration percentage. Travel is based on work performed, and all travel expenses are covered. Only my mood may change sometimes.

-Okay, sir. I've made a note. When do I start in the position? And what time as well?

-As soon as you're up and running: here's a credit card for the stores you'll need to go to to dress in the latest fashions: I appreciate women like you and I like them to look their best. I'll give you seven outfits paid for each month by my company, except when you're traveling: to be done there. Will you be ready tomorrow?

-Yes, I'll be there at...

-... no, at Orly Airport at 11 a.m., flight 113, to Corsica! Two days with me and a major client from the Provence Alpes Cote d'Azur General Council. We'll have some free time during which we will work on some delicate commercial and economic strategy issues. Okay?

-Yes, sir. I'll read them during the flight to refine them.

-Stop using 'sir'. My name is Hadrien. Except in front of clients and suppliers, of course. Okay? I'll call you Viviane too. Better that way between us. Got it?

-Good, Hadrien. I'll try this challenge tomorrow.

-See you tomorrow, Viviane. Don't miss your flight. Air France ticket office.

-Yes Hadrien, count on me, I'll be there with the suitcases!

-I only want to see two. Like me. Not one more.

She looked in surprise at the credit card he had given her with the list of stores that accepted it. Her watch showed 11:30, so she called her mother on her cell phone if she wanted to go shopping with her. She arranged to meet her half an hour later at an ice cream parlor where they enjoyed sorbets and exotic fruits. Jean would join them at their home after his dentist appointment.

'Like when I was ten years old in the tea room with Grandma.'

The afternoon flew by, and the young woman thought she was Alice in Wonderland. When they returned from their shopping at the triplex, Jean greeted them with surprise and gave a sardonic smile when he was informed. 'Be careful where you put your feet, princess. It's a minefield, apparently.' Viviane agreed and tried to reassure him with her strict gestures.

'He's damn right, Jean. It's up to me to put him in his place without offending him and save my job with my abilities.'

She packed her belongings, including a matching bag and suitcase. She packed light but with everything she could need for two full days, including swimming. She showered and then fixed her hair, exhausted by each mandatory fitting. She fell asleep suddenly and woke up for breakfast with her three friends. She arrived at the airport well before her flight, picking up her ticket at the ticket counter.

'Hadrian, where are you in this crowded hall?'

From a distance, she saw him approaching her: she admired his well-defined silhouette, his serene demeanor, or at least it appeared so on the surface, his features drawn with an axe. The women's faces turned as he passed, but he paid no attention: he smiled at her, taking her arm to direct her to the boarding area. He presented the tickets to the ticket inspector, then pointed to a seat with his chin, with a playful air.

-You wear clothes well, really. Viviane, I congratulate you on

this choice. You have very good taste.

-Thank you Hadrien. You show a side of yourself with this casual and classy sportswear set.

-Good. Do you have a pad and pen handy, Viviane?

-Yes, of course. That's what I'm here for. Here's my writing desk.

-Here it is: I'll give you the details of the header and the formula at the top of the page. 'Replying to your letter of...' blah blah blah... to be done in two copies then similarly in English, Spanish and Italian. (here are the addresses and other additional information). To be done as soon as possible. I'll sign and we'll post them immediately. Here is also my personal professional calendar, check it during the flight that I haven't made two simultaneous appointments, otherwise rectify it. Thank you Viviane. We will be a team, never forget that. Got it?

-It will be done as quickly as possible. To change your appointments, if necessary, I must do so upon arrival. I obviously won't be able to do so before then. Have a good flight, Hadrian.

-Why is that? You'll be at my side, not second in command, come on! You'll work with me. You're my pillar. I rely entirely on your shoulders. I also, of course, want your opinion on the matters I'm led to handle with some of my partners. You'll be with foreign diplomats who will try to extract information from you about me, and sometimes about you and me as well.

-My apologies, Hadrian. I thought...I'm just providing administrative support, that's all. That ends my role.

-Good. Viviane, let's go, we're being signaled. Follow me.

The aisle, the flight attendants, the plane, the seats: finally settled! The seatbelts were fastened, the engines began to roar, the landing gear was removed, and the plane took off. During the maneuvers, Hadrien took her hand and squeezed it tightly. Viviane let him, intrigued. He then whispered an anxious 'Thank you' to her. She couldn't believe he was afraid of flying, since he was constantly taking it. The same thing happened during landing.

'He has fears like everyone else, he's only a man after all. Yet it was so absurd!'

Upon their arrival on Corsican soil, a car was waiting to transport them to their suite at the 'Prestige Napoléon' hotel. At reception, everything had been organized, they just had to return to their reservation, their pass in hand. She had to type the mail, translate it at the same time, deliver it to him, and finally find someone to take them to the nearest post office. Not to mention showering, dressing, and putting on makeup.

'I have to be calm, especially during my stays.'

The few phone calls essential to the smooth running of the next steps were swift and civil. The evening risked dragging on in local establishments. Viviane had to announce the departure so as not to offend the political-industrial host too much: the company needed future contracts in Africa and Asia. He had to outshine the competitors, and she had to show the human side of the company, smiling and affable.

-Viviane, let's have a strategy for dinners like this: generally boring, not to say tedious, it's better to disappear than to appear too heavy. Without offending anyone, in the middle of the party, know how to slip away like a good sport. I sign my contracts and I leave, otherwise I'll drown right away with them if they get caught. Politics is a real basket of crabs, the trick is not to get splashed when there's a misdeal. Do you understand the stakes or not?

-Yes, Hadrian. Signing but not committing yourself: a feat of strength, or sleight of hand. Not so easy in reality.

-It's the only way we'll move forward. International football is terrible, you know? More vicious, more visceral than national football.

-It's a game of chess where all moves are allowed, yes.

-You have to know how to swim between two waters, even and especially troubled ones. Constantly and never show your back or your weaknesses. Don't forget these rules or you will lose.

-I will remember that in due time, Hadrian.

-Okay. This strategy has its merits, believe it. It offers freedom.

-Maybe or not in certain more complex cases.

-You study quickly and well. Have you been involved in politics?

-No, not at all, but I had a very good economics teacher!

Each of them was preparing to start a new match: clean, smartly dressed, professionalism accompanying them, they went to the Prefecture where they were expected. She in a suit with a messy bun, he in a Mao collar suit: a coupleThe perfect example of a solid company. Their desire: to succeed where others had failed! Ambition drove them, success guided them. The team was coming together.

'What a bunch of hypocrites and complete fakes!'

They performed beautifully as a duo, and he signed a lucrative and very promising first contract. But beware! They then decided to leave Corsican high society behind and found themselves in the winding, touristy little streets of Bastia, in search of that beautiful island identity. The vibrant heart of this very mysterious Corsica beat, palpitated, and grew warm.

'The stones of the houses merge with the arteries, it is an almost mystical story that this flourishing island...'

Full of nuance, full of joy, full of nostalgia, bistros opened where we heard very captivating, very sad, very thunderous songs, where everyone sang the refrains in chorus. They were all spoken in Corsican, which added even more light to them: they hid a whole ancestral symbolism to which Viviane showed herself and felt so close.

'They know how to perpetuate their treasures, their culture, their identity... How right they are! They are true!'

Mediterranean climate, sidelong glances, secret whispers... the young people invited themselves to certain tables, set aside so as not to disturb the regulars, to keep a panoramic view of the place, to recharge their batteries with true

human values, to enjoy a moment of rest, to de-stress as much as possible before returning to the arena... A small glass of blueberry or chestnut liqueur to sip with friends...

'You fascinate me, Viviane, you intrigue me just as much. YouYou are a star fallen from the sky...' Hadrian whispered to him.

Their entourage was waiting for them: they each entered their suite and went to bed together. The second part will be completely different: report put for signature on the breakfast tray, mail to send, notes and appointments to reconcile. Hadrien, who was up early, couldn't believe his speed of execution. Viviane smiled at his amazement. It was a practical mental exercise to assimilate.

'My administrative school had some good things going for it: excellent teachers, interesting subjects, rare methodical organization...'

The day began under good auspices and continued so until the end: significant meetings, positive leads toward other sources of possible contracts, beneficial conferences, business lunches and dinners with signatories. Their professional trip over, unfortunately, little tourism, but definitive signatures and expansions into other international markets were the key.

'I'm delighted I hired you, Viviane. Be faithful to me and you'll have everything with me. Just so you know, I'm tough!'

Everything was arranged for their departure. They could now ease off. Hadrien accompanied her back to her parents' house, returning from the airport, and submitted several texts to be returned the following day. He then left without looking back, not without kissing her fingertips and thanking her. Viviane entered with her luggage and her writing desk crammed with work to do.as soon as possible.

-Hey, I'm back! Tired but happy for now!

-Ah my dear, we would have come to pick you up when you arrived.

-No, he drove me himself and we talked about work on the way.

-Oh, oh, he hasn't bitten you yet, my beautiful Viviane?

-No, not yet, you see I am whole: it is unfathomable.

-I'm sure he wanted to congratulate you, to get closer!

-You're much worse than him, Mom was eaten by you, right?

And the professional, relational and personal routine offered a deep natural meaning to Viviane's existence: her impeccable organization, her irreproachable demeanor, her suitable interpretation, Her surprising speed, everything was positive, so much so that her boss Hadrien stared at her more and more, ready to get to know her better. He was attracted by her atypical and striking personality.

'This woman is taking up too much of my thoughts. Have I fallen into the trap of love? I must protect myself from her!'

He, the involuntary seducer, the seductive and astonishing businessman, let himself be taken in by the discreet but catchy of this young person. He felt her weakened by the emanation of a diffuse feeling but possessed a beautiful strength of character. He could not get rid of her precious presence: he realized that he missed her terribly both professionally and visually.

'I go crazy and she remains reserved, it frustrates me completely. She has great intelligence, she's explosive!'

The days gradually piled up one after the other. Viviane had received two negative reviews, and she had gone to the invitation for a publishing interpreter position during her break, but had declined the offer. She didn't fit the company's style; she was too young and classy to fit in well with the existing team: grumpy old men, beyond her brilliant skills.

'So, this first phase is definitively over. Thank you, Fiorentina, for your final advice. I wish I could have saved you...'

She had insisted on attending the funeral of Fiorentina, the friend found dead in her fortune-telling office: the police had

investigated and found an acknowledgement of debt that she had given to a notary, a debt contracted with a mafioso of the worst kind who loved her passionately and whose mutual aid pact she wanted to cancel. Unfortunately, she had told him this to calm his ardor: he killed her in cold blood.

-Here, Mademoiselle Montagnard, is the sordid end of this story mixing love, finances, crimes, and naivety.

-Yes, Commissioner Leonard. The sad thing about all this is the hope I planted in his head; perhaps I hastened his end, making a radical decision because of this emotion.

-It's quite possible, but you are not responsible for her choices, even if she made them under duress for her sisters.

Before his incarceration, he killed himself by swallowing capsules of cyanide. A sad end for these two beings of shadow and light: passion can be destructive at all levels of society. Viviane noticed in the procession of tearful women that her friend had been very loved by many anonymous people and people of her profession. She recognized them by their clothes and their way of moving.

'You should have and could have had such a brilliant life. I will remember you like a white candle lighting my way.'

A man came to join her at the coffin. He put a bright red carnation in it and Viviane caught a glimpse of a tear, quickly wiped away. He was dressed with a certain discretion and distinction: a black three-piece suit with barely visible fine gray lines that matched his shoes, a black hat, tie, and belt under a light gray shirt and pocket square. He looked at her and said:

-Viviane? Florence told me so much about you. I was her first guide in the profession. We remained friends even though I loved her. She half-predicted your next ten years; if you wish, I would follow in her footsteps. Here is my card. I'm doing it for her and for you, who found her out of pure friendship. I'm not a charlatan.

-Sir? Thank you, but... how do you know all this? I don't know you at all, apart from Florence.

-I am a true medium and your whole life has flashed before me, but don't worry, I'm not revealing anything. I remain a true pure. I know you think I'm an original. I remain at your disposal if that's what you want. I'm not forcing you into anything, you should know that. Just for Florence.

-Thank you for everything, Mr. Eugene.

-Florence had a certain gift that she didn't fully explore given her young age. Your dream will come true seven days from today. Furthermore, she will come to visit you in two nights. Listen to her; she will be the bearer of all her affection and will protect you from now on. See you soon, Viviane.

-Yes, thank you for these clarifications, Eugene. I will come to you if I need to put all this in order.

She was stunned by these furtive and anticipated approaches: Her logical and very Cartesian reasoning was colliding within her, battered. This evening, Viviane knew that a presence would come to speak to her: she prepared herself quietly. She was in her own apartment surrounded by objects that were close to her and found a stone that Florence had given her, a stone charged with her enigmatic fluid.

'My dear friend, I would have loved to be able to do something for you and now it's too late, I blame myself, you know...'

The mineral was a small, uncut lapis lazuli. Viviane held it in the palm of her hand, which she instinctively closed. Memories gradually flooded into her mind, in stages: her first encounter during the roll call in the courtyard, their sighs, their bursts of laughter... and suddenly, without warning, before her, a very clear image formed: Fiorentina was there!

-My dear, I'm here, yes thank you for your unfailing friendship.

-Florence, I'm sorry you left like this, believe me.

-You can't help it. It was written, only the date was unknown to me.

-I was contacted by Mr. Eugène, one of your friends.

-Trust him even more than you trust me, he's an angel, that man. He's always been close to me and will be for you, have

no doubt about it. He's a true earthly angel.

-Why didn't you stay with him then? He loved you, still loves you... It's sad... You should have walked together as a couple.

-That's another story. I came to warn you of this: when you need an essential answer, to make a choice or decide on the right path, proceed as you just did with the stone. I will be there for you, always. Safe travels, my dear. I must go to heaven to begin another life mission, to clear this blocked karma...

-Thank you, I will not omit any of your words and send you a big kiss.

-See you soon and go see Eugene about the dream... He is the greatest dream specialist still alive, he must find someone else to whom he will bequeath his infinite knowledge.

-Take good care of yourself, dear Florence. I will pray every day for the repose of your brilliant and generous soul.

As Mr. Eugène had predicted, Viviane had her dream on Seventh day after Florence's funeral. It was a magical, magnificent, and enchanting dream. Full of color, he managed to capture, capture, and absolutely integrate her mind at rest, her senses alert, her soul in redemption, and her memory alive. Florence was in hologram with Eugene's voice: and there was Hadrian with her, giving her his hand, withdrawing it.

'I have to write it all down before it fades, it's important, every sign, word, atmosphere, emotion felt, person.'

Viviane had had a very busy day, a very difficult one in terms of her various responsibilities, and a very stressful one as well. Hadrian had delegated significant authority to her, considerably increased her salary, which he paid her each week, along with numerous responsibilities, so that she worked hard from morning to night at his side. They were bound hand and foot.

'Viviane, you've put together such an organizational chart! It's clear, but I can't show myself everywhere, take some!'

She only had a private life on weekends when she wasn't traveling the world. They made an excellent professional team, even if Hadrian occasionally tried to lead her into more relational territory. She avoided any personal projects, keeping any confidentiality away from her, creating any possible intimacy. She stuck to her initial course of action and ultimately came out well.

And Hadrian was champing at the bit!

'Is she doing it on purpose? Is it a self-defense gesture on her part? Could she be a lesbian? No, she loves the man.'

Viviane skillfully branched off into high-performing subjects that had been keeping them busy for a long time. He tried jealousy and appeared with a model, but Viviane showed no embarrassment or aversion toward the young woman: she stared at her boss with a mocking smile, wishing him a very pleasant evening. He had been sick of it for several days and had found a very good ally in flight.

'My bad mood will inevitably resurface one of thesefour: acid, hard, bittersweet, mocking, fickle...'

Overcome by fatigue, invigorated by a nice, soothing bath, in front of a romantic film and a vegetarian TV dinner: fish, steamed vegetables and fruit, she finally relaxed peacefully. When she felt like falling asleep, she turned off the TV and went to bed. No sooner had she laid her head on her pillow than she drifted off to the kingdom of sleep and dreams, that of Morpheus.

'Oh, I'm still dreaming, I remember...'

Around dawn, her dream came to her, surprised her, carried her away, and captivated her. From a little girl in the fairy kingdom, she became a teenager and then a young woman. She was loved by a prince of darkness, gradually locking her away in a glass dungeon. She couldn't escape, and he was happy because he kept her for himself. The young woman, for her part, aspired to start a family but stayed there out of financial obligation. Yet at a precise moment, she met

another man in a maze of dungeon corridors who melted her at a glance, and she immediately said yes to him for life. The ring he offered her in engagement was a stone adorned with an intertwined D and S. The prince of darkness found himself alone and furious at not having been able to keep her and ended his life, alone and unhappy because he could not forget her. Then one day... Boom!

'My God, this brings me back to Fiorentina's prophecies! It's a metaphor told as a reality to be lived.'

She woke up completely, sweating, took out her notebook and pen, and wrote it down, omitting nothing. Every detail came back to her as she progressed. The atmosphere, the characters, the colors, the words flowed onto the paper with such ease that she almost wondered if she wasn't doing some kind of automatic writing. She showered, dressed quickly, and had a quick breakfast.

'I have a little time on my hands for once.'

She grabbed her bag and took out Mr. Eugene's card. Without thinking about what time it was, she called him directly.

-Hello, hello? Mr. Eugene? Hello, can I come?

-Yes, Viviane. Come whenever you want, I'll wait for you.

-Thank you, I'll be at your place in about half an hour.

-See you soon. We'll talk about you-know-who then. We're closely connected.

-Yes, I'm leaving home for several reasons: two dreams to decipher and a very pressing vision.

Viviane equipped herself with the GPS integrated into the dashboard of her metallic gray Mini Cooper and stopped her vehicle on Rue de Courcelles, looking for a parking space along the sidewalk. She closed her door and took a few steps, reaching the fourteenth, a Haussmann-style building. She pressed the intercom button she was interested in, and there was a click that opened the passage. She went up one floor and shook her host's hand.

-Hello, Miss. The dream was fantastic, wasn't it? You have to decode two of them? I only have one with you.

-Y-Yes, you know him? Am I telling you anything new? Oh yes, the first is juxtaposed with the second with many details and my vision closes everything to highlight them doubly.

-Of course, I connected with you early in the morning at the request of Florence, whom I received through telepathic channels.

-So I just have to listen to you, Eugene? Is that it?

-Yes. Your feelings. What did you deduce from that?

-The Prince of Darkness would be my boss. The dungeon, his business. The other man, one of his important clients.

-Good, you're on the right track. What are you going to do?

-Nothing, I'm just waiting for love at first sight in one of the corridors. Could you give me a rough date, Eugene?

-For an uninitiated young woman, your analysis is reliable and sure, your intuition extraordinary, your logic flawless, and you possess a real charisma! Bravo Viviane. You surprise me. Florence had warned me, but there...

-Thank you very much, Eugene. I have to get back to work. So when? You don't know? Surely?

-Have a good day. Keep your eyes open. See you soon.

Viviane went back to Hadrien who was already waiting for her despite the early hour: he was in a state because he had just received a fax that was astonishing in its brevity and its tone. The editor was laconic, he shoved it under his nose with a rather theatrical gesture: what was he supposed to understand? What was he supposed to do with it? How should he respond to this style of writing? This client refused any renewal of the contract that had bound them for a long time!

-Ah, here you are, princess? Here, what would you do with it besides get angry or stamp your feet? Tell me!

-I will calm down first, read it, looking for what it implies, then analyze it in depth, see where it is lacking: it is dry but explicit. The author knows what he wants, what he is looking for, he is a man of action and power. He is used to being obeyed to the letter. Everyone bends before him. I will

certainly be the referee who will prevent the confrontation! Cockfight, who will win?

-Okay. But who told you he's a man first?

-It's his intertwined initials and a simple, very feminine intuition coupled with a very masculine turn of phrase. He's in charge of very big responsibilities. This message is worthy of the character. You should appreciate him more than that; you have a lot in common, apparently.

-What? What do you mean by this allusion?

-Ambition, success, power... You are sharks!

-You're talking about a rapprochement. He's our biggest client, but also the most irritating. He knows I'm at his mercy.

-You can't have it all. He's arriving in two hours, so get ready to welcome him properly. With style!

-You have some good ones sometimes! If he comes, it's to bully me, to humiliate me, yes! He loves it! Last time, he hijacked my most beautiful secretary and offered her a position in his Miami offices! Two years ago, he took my right-hand man, an excellent engineer whom he propelled to the highest scientific positions in his industrial company in Quebec. What will he invent this time? Or who else?

-What's surprising is that he didn't offer you anything! Why, if he's looking for real professionals, does he let you stew like this? He sees the fruits of your labor, right?

-Fly, my dear! It's a very old sad story between two university fanatics! Centers of the world!

-Have you both known him for that long?

-Yes, and I stole a girl from our student group. Unfortunately, she died in a car accident I was driving. We were all drunk, and I lost control of the vehicle, it crashed into a tree, I escaped unharmed, and she didn't. He blamed me for her death. There, that's his revenge. A lifetime of revenge.

-He didn't get married? He hasn't had any relationships since?

-No, at least not to my knowledge. Same for me.

-Well, grit your teeth until he leaves. React on a case-by-case basis. Walk on eggshells without breaking one!

-Couldn't you welcome him? It would make me proud

and Huge service. Viviane, keep him in check and keep him at a distance.

-Good. I'll make arrangements with him if I dare to express myself like that.

-I won't be far, just inside the office.

-I'm going to receive it while trying to calm things down, okay?

Glancing at the faxed missive, she saw the sender's Ds and Ss. A very strong wind buffeted the glasswork from reception to the executive office when Donovan Sreakfields stepped inside the premises made available to him. He managed his entrance like a field marshal, as if everything belonged to him. 'What a hurricane!' Viviane thought, still impressed by all the hullabaloo.

"Hello, Mr. Sreakfields," she said warmly.

The gentleman in question turned quickly, surprised by this displayed femininity, and looked at her fixedly from head to toe. He stared at her calmly, without hurrying, sometimes emphasizing his gaze on this or that point, and what he deciphered must have pleased her because he smiled broadly. She returned it bravely. At once, her legs became light, her pulse quickened, and her cheekbones flushed prettily.

-Hello, Miss...? Who do I have the honor of speaking to?

-Viviane, responsible for welcoming you to these premises today.

-And? It's a short introduction, don't you think?

-I am the boss's executive assistant and interpreter.

-That's definitely good, I need an excellent...

-...trilingual executive secretary at least? Thanks, but I love my job here. I'm independent and manage...

-... all the day-to-day problems of a business? That's all well and good, but wouldn't you rather run a full-fledged company? That would be very useful for your career, wouldn't it?

-Dear sir, there is more to a woman's life than just the professional! I remain a conformist.

-Oh, and you'd also like to own your own house and have children? Are you married? I don't see any wedding rings...

-N-No. But... I have time to think about it and... find it!

-Who's the lucky one? I like you more and more...

-Me, dear Donovan. Hello, what brings you here?

-What? You? Hadrian is your... fiancé? Lover? Mentor?

-No! Um... Yes... Anyway, I'm still a confirmed bachelor.

-It's very recent, isn't it, darling? You haven't realized.

-That's the least we can say... dear Hadrian, thank you.

The day continued with a business lunch at one of the city's best restaurants: Donovan insidiously settled down next to Viviane. Hadrian found himself relegated to the wall. Things became considerably more tense between them the moment Donovan began courting the young woman in front of her pseudo-fiancé. Viviane was caught between two emperors, one Roman and the other Greek.

'So, dear Donovan, how do you like the capital?'

The latter knew how to be insistent while maintaining a normal attitude in which only words had any importance. The rest was convivial, and after this lunch break, they returned with their noses buried in the contracts and files to be reviewed for a new offer. It was Donovan who pretended to be very tired to leave first. It was eight o'clock. A real blow fell on their shoulders.

'Phew, what a day! Oh, quick, a Scottish shower!'

Hadrien breathed a sigh of relief as soon as Donovan S. left and gallantly walked Viviane back to her car parked in the parking lot. They wished each other a sleepover and they parted gently, smoothly, without any jolts. She started silently, drove carefully, and stopped her vehicle outside her building, inside her garage. She closed the door, taking out her briefcase.

'He's here, he's a handsome man. Fiorentina and Eugene weren't wrong. Everything that's happening to me is crazy.'

She pushed open the glass doors and stepped into the

entrance hall. Her hand on the light switch was stopped, and someone caught her mouth in the darkness in a long, sensual kiss. She managed to somehow free herself from the man's embrace and turned on the light. She found herself in the arms of... Donovan! She came to her senses and smiled at him, suddenly in control of herself again, except for her flushed cheeks.

-You? You're not short of air, are you?

-Ever since I saw you, I wanted to taste your lips... to hold you in my arms... for you to melt...

-Well, now that that's done, good evening dear sir!

-What a refreshing repartee! What aplomb too, Viviane! I adore you, dear young lady. Will I be the legendary Merlin?

-See you tomorrow. Dear Donovan. At the office. I want a shower.

-Where is your... fiancé? If that's all. I'm just improvising.

-At his place. But he'll join me later. Files to process... in this briefcase. I need to rest too.

-Good evening, I would have taken you to dinner, alone...

-I have a small appetite. I plan to relax tonight. Thanks anyway. We'll see next time. Tomorrow night?

-Did you know that I massage wonderfully? You would be delighted.

-N-No, thank you very much. See you tomorrow, Donovan.

-Do you really think I'm going to leave you there like this?

-Yes, because you are, despite everything, a well-mannered person!

-Well, with you, I want to become a real bad boy!

-Donovan, no, I hate them, come on! Stop this little game!

-It's not a peccadillo, I'm madly in love with you!

-I don't want to find myself between two rutting males!

The elevator opened its doors, and she quickly rushed inside. When she turned slowly, a major surprise fell upon her: coming face to face with Donovan, he pressed her against the wall and took back her lips offered with determination and desire. Viviane, tired of fighting, responded to this additional assault, all in all seductive, while the cabin led them to the requested floor.

'What fire this devil of a man puts in my veins!'

The click of the automatic doors saw them separate, somewhat disoriented by this adrenaline rush between them. The young woman was not lacking in apprehension, yet in this circumstance, she was partially losing her footing. The predictions were proving correct, but nothing was less certain about the future: if she didn't react immediately, she risked becoming nothing more than a pawn on their vengeful chessboard!

'I refuse this unhealthy situation: these two males, once friends, are now potential enemies. I forfeit!'

She decided to intervene at the crucial point: as she opened her door, she stifled a loud yawn that had the desired effect: Donovan didn't dare force his way in, and she was grateful, giving him a simple kiss with her fingertips, while nimbly slipping into her apartment. He nevertheless remained in the hallway for several more minutes, then finally left, a good sport.

'Phew, I've pulled off my coup, bordering on propriety. I like him terribly, but if I let him see this inclination too clearly, he risks not letting me go for an inch as easily as he did tonight. He's such a man! Yet, I must not relax my vigilance because otherwise I would be nothing more than a bargaining chip, a common pawn to annoy Hadrian. If he really wants me, he will have to offer me something far more than a lucrative position or a mistress. He will have to put a ring on my finger. Frustration will certainly make him more incisive. Be careful... Jean had well gauged this implacable and merciless universe. I must protect myself from the one-upmanship between Hadrian and Donovan on all levels. How can you come out white-collar when two eagles are watching you to swoop down on you?'

She had barely finished thinking, all this under an invigorating shower, that the doorbell rang with a crash without stopping and reverberated in her more than tired brain. 'Who allowed such an intrusion? Who could want to enter my privacy at

this ungodly hour? Who has the impudence to disturb me like this?' She said to herself, obviously annoyed and irritated by so much inconsideracy.

"Yes? Who's ringing that bell?" she said through the door.

"Miss Montagnard?" replied a half-muffled male voice. "I apologize for the commotion I made."

-What is it? Who are you? What do you want from me?

-Could you open the door for me, please? I'm the florist on the corner of your street, and I've come to deliver an order.

-But I didn't buy anything! I'll know otherwise. Good evening to you.

-Not you, but a certain gentleman does! He's waiting there.

-Is he with you? He's got some nerve, that one.

-No. He insisted on writing a note. You have to read it and respond.

-Okay, leave everything in the hallway, I'll look into it later. Thank you very much, sir. You may go home.

-I really can't. I need to report back to him on your reaction to seeing his order. It's vital.

Viviane put on a commercial smile and opened the door: she couldn't believe her senses! The store was coming to her house! The florist was laughing: she was wide-eyed in disbelief. A multitude of bouquets and wreaths were on the floor, blocking the entrance. She said to the florist, 'Well, one moment, please. Take a picture and send it to him.' Once the shock had passed, she reached for the message:

'Viviane, these flowers to remind you that I exist! D.'

Inside the pink envelope, another fold in which she could read this: 'I won't beat around the bush, we're both adults. I don't believe in an engagement between you and Hadrian. You are free to come to me, who also has no one. You want a happy home, you'll have all that with me. I will make you my international spokesperson. See you tomorrow, Donovan.'

She was blown away by so much confidence, arrogance, self-belief, positivity and frankness!

-Miss! Where should I put all this?

-In the entrance and living room, I will help you.
-Dring! Ring! Ring! The phone now!
-Yes? Hello? Who's on the other end of the line? I can't hear well...
-Hello! Viviane? It's Hadrien! I'm parked downstairs at your building. I'm coming to invite you to a restaurant. Just to develop another strategy against the 'dragon'.
-It's late Hadrian and I'm tired... We'll see tomorrow.
-Would you prefer if I came with takeaway?
-N-No, give me ten minutes to get ready, thank you. See you soon, Hadrien. Okay, I'll be there soon. Yes, yes.
-Okay, I'll book while you wait. Okay? That works.
-Is it almost over? I have to go, it's a call from my boss. Have a great evening, take this for your friend.
-Ah?! Miss, it's over. What should I say to the gentleman?
-That I was delighted and charmed by his overflowing attention, but that this will not be how he wins his case because I love my job here. I refuse his offer. Loyalty above all.
-Good. Good luck to you then. This is complicated...
-Oh yes, much more than you can imagine.
-See you next time, who knows? Thanks for my friend too. Nice.

A quick glance at her mirror and there she was, back in the elevator: at the sight of it, she blushed in spite of herself at the haunting memory of her sultry romp with Donovan. Would this kiss lead to others? She spotted Hadrian's car and rushed straight to his side. He gave her a smile, pleased by her presence. 'What game are they both playing? Watch out!' The wheel of karma was turning!

-Good evening, Hadrian. I'm very tired. Let's not stay here too long, okay? I need sleep. Tomorrow will be complicated.
-No worries, princess. We'll be quick. I promise. I'm sure.
-Where are we going for this quick dinner for two?
-Just a stone's throw away, in an Italian restaurant. A good Chianti.
-Especially a well-garnished homemade eggplant pizza.
-Yes, and an excellent tiramisu as a bonus to round off

dinner.

The next day was nerve-racking, so much so that the young woman left them in the middle of yet another argument. They had to find a real compromise that would combine convenience and market economy. The three of them found themselves in the meeting room, in the throes of a full-scale settling of scores. No one wanted to give up even a tiny piece of legislation:

-Gentlemen, since you have decided to enter the ring, I will not detain you. Your dispute does not concern me, I will leave it to you to settle between yourselves: I have more urgent matters to attend to, with all due respect, than to become the arbiter. A word to the wise is enough! I just hope that you can finalize your agreement, otherwise it will no longer be possible to work properly together.

The two men gasped in annoyance as they sized each other up. The afternoon remained calm: Viviane had ratified contracts and submitted them for signature. Dinner was hypocritically convivial: she eventually found the two protagonists who had laid down their weapons. Donovan was due to leave late the next evening for the United States to visit his ranch in Oregon.

'My God, how subtly everything comes together...'

Night enveloped Viviane, alone on her balcony, admiring the city spread out below. She gazed at the stars for a moment, then returned to her bay window when... She suddenly felt a sense of apprehension, a premonition: her throat tightened, she couldn't breathe, someone was wrapping a scarf around her neck! She tried to free herself and received a blow to the back of the head. She would suffer migraines for the rest of her life.

'Come Fiorentina, find me to be by your side...'

A veil came over her closed eyes and she felt herself falling. To the floor, to the carpet. 'It's so warm here, I'm not cold.' Nothing. Blackness. The hole. Nothingness. She was flying. Serene. She was leaving alone, happy. Then a hand grabbed

her, tapped her, spoke to her. 'Is it an angel?' A light suddenly blinded her and she came to. 'Where was she? Who was there?' She was... in the arms of... Donovan! 'But what are you doing here?'

-W-What happened? Oh my head hurts so much... Ooh la la...

-Viviane, you were attacked! I was so scared of losing you!

-You? Here? At my place? You? Oh my, I'm tired...

-Yes, fortunately otherwise... I wouldn't have been able to save you!

-But how...? You don't have the pass to get in here, did someone let you in? Are you my attacker? I'm rambling, I don't know...

-I'm an incorrigible thug. I wanted to taste your lips again and I went upstairs by the fire escape. I heard a strange shock and with a push of the shoulders, I opened the door: that's when I was jostled by a rather strong individual who then ran off down the corridor and there I saw you on the floor. The thief disappeared into the night and I then tried to revive you with whatever means were at hand.

-Haha... I have trouble... swallowing... he must have squeezed...

-Of course, my dear. I want to tell you this: I'm taking you away because I can't live without you. We're getting married tomorrow in Reno. I'll arrange everything. Once you've rested a little.

-S-Sorry? Like that? You decide and I say yes? Oh no!

-Yes, you heard correctly. You're marrying me. Simply.

-What if I say no? I'm free, I do what I want, right?

-It won't change anything. You'll be mine anyway, one way or another. I'll never let you go!

-Is it decided? Just like that, without my consent?

-It's a no-brainer. I know you'll be happy with me. We'll have lots of kids, and you'll run my business together. We'll be a team.

-Then it will be on one condition. Donovan, I am faithful.

-Which one? It will be yours. I give you my word.

-I ask you as a wedding gift to offer a prestigious position to

Hadrian who is champing at the bit here in Europe, he is worth much more than that, and you know it perfectly well. Do you still agree to this? I accept your proposal.

-It's a foregone conclusion. He'll just have to choose from all the proposals and opportunities I present to him: his professional destiny will be in his hands, just as you were in his. I never forget anything, rest assured!

-I don't suspect you of anything, but if I get married, I want my parents with me. I won't be able to say yes otherwise.

-Me, no one will be there, they are all deceased.

-I'll call them, they're retired but what do we need? Do you need a passport to enter your home in the States?

-If they have it, it will be fine, I just have to put them on the passenger list of my private plane, I will charter it for their return.

-And all the rest of a very discreet ceremony?

-One phone call and everything will be ready tomorrow. Directly to the jeweler for everything we need, and a stop at the milliner's shop for our formal wear. Arrange to meet them there, and we'll get to know each other in the private salon. By the way, I'm putting down roots here with you, no discussion possible.

She looked at him, somewhat dazed by the present situation. She whispered obediently to him:

'Tonight, yes, stay here, me in the bedroom and you in the living room if you like. Or both of you together, Donovan?'

She snuggled into his arms, a gesture she had made consciously for the first time. He noted it, delighted by her reaction.

'It fills me with hope, to be only positive! I desire only this goal: to keep nothing of the misfortune predicted in her, to believe and cling to hope, always in order to ward off fate! I am the only one to live this destiny in its entirety, which I will assume until the end, whatever may happen! To take the best that life gives her and completely reject sadness, sorrow, the will of the divine.'

She raised her head and drowned in the deep blue eyes of her future and only husband she would ever have. She had just made her firm and final decision, praying to God that she would not lose him along the way, as it was written in letters of fire in her mind. She knew just as well that she would never reveal this dire fate to him. Nevertheless, she would always vibrate on this register throughout her life.

'Goodbye, negative predictions, hello, happy future!'

Monsieur Eugène smiled: he had just received the message and did his best to protect her almost in spite of herself. He sent an emotional thought to Fiorentina, whom he missed: 'I love you so much. See you soon.' He had learned the date of his own death, which for him would be a simple obligatory passage to finally reach the heavenly happiness with her, so closely linked to him. As for Viviane, she will be alone to continue this process.

'Dear Viviane, live what you have been told, for better or for worse. Be courageous and follow the predicted path.'

In clairvoyance, any prediction can be transformed from one side to the other; in this case, all you have to do is believe in your destiny and reverse everything for it to be positive. Karma, on the other hand, remains immutable, unchanged in this existence. It will only change when it is triggered in the next life, by the consequences of the actions that have been grafted onto it. Will romance at least be able to preserve Donovan's life?

'I will pray that you will still be there with me during our respective retreats and that you will see your grandchildren...'

Although Fiorentina, her reincarnated guardian angel, would only be there in a vision and Mr. Eugène would go to this friend, Viviane wanted to believe that her faith in Heaven could truly change the course of her destiny. Would the stars be kind to this couple in the making? Luck was on their side for the moment: 'enjoy it, above all...' because the wheel of

karma continued on its way!

'This secret will be heavy to bear, but I will bear its weight by savoring every second spent in his presence if comforting. Come what may!'