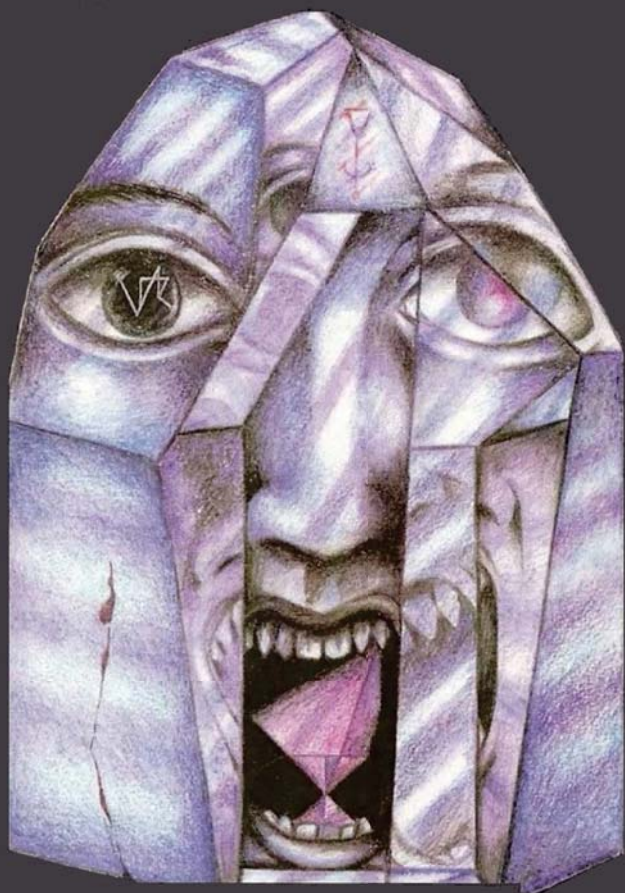


THE FACE IN THE ABYSS



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BOOKS



THE FACE OF THE ABYSS

ON A CERTAIN DAY IN JULY, THE ACT OF FLESH WITH VIOLENCE

François d'Espart was approaching thirty, and he really didn't know what to do with his life any more, which was rather distressing. But there are turnarounds.

Having completed his military service in paratroop commandos, and having, rather nonchalantly, re-enlisted for four years, he had returned to civilian life with a certain dreamy disaffection and, above all, a certain profound disgust for everything, which he admitted only to himself, believing that the display of his states of mind would have shown the most unseemly exhibitionism.

One day, at a very Parisian diplomatic reception, François had overheard his sister Jenny talking about him to one of her friends, which, at the time, made him very nervous. You ask me," said Jenny, "how is my brother François d'Espart? He's hidden somewhere, right here, very close to the sideboard no doubt, so I'll show him to you later. As you will have the opportunity to see, he is quite tall, slim, with short-cropped blond hair, beautiful green eyes and a pleasant or, as we say now, *interesting* face.

Apparently he's nothing but ordinary, but classy all the same, you've got to admit. Dressed with a very discreet elegance, knowing how to hold himself very well, he imposes, and even a lot, it's a fact, but he doesn't attract. For there is something distant, savage, unpleasant even, one might say, about him, which ends up making him the most attractive person in the world.

always stands in the way. And he doesn't get involved with anyone, except perhaps - and even then - some of his old army comrades.

He is a born loner, a predestined loner: a kind of mystic if you like, a mystic in his own way. But he is also a man of action.

And maybe he's just a man of action, if you know what that means. So I hope he won't scare you, because that's what happens quite often with him, when you don't approach him from the right side. But don't worry my dear, you're in no danger with me, I know my wild brother like the back of my hand, and he's turned a lot of pretty heads, believe me. I won't hide it from you, he's what we call a case, a strong head. Someone, in fact, who is very different, very special and, in the end, quite extraordinarily *different* - who often exerts a rather dangerous power of fascination, and who can lead far; who has already led far, and I won't dwell on that, you can well understand my reasons". It was for her friend Bernadette Sladek, the wife of a high-ranking official at the US embassy in Paris and, it was said, a local CIA official, that the charming Jenny had sketched this somewhat ambiguous portrait of her brother François d'Espart, whom she obviously adored more or less secretly, and of whom she was not at all proud.

Back in Paris, after a fairly long stint in the army, François d'Espart had made films, dabbled in journalism, managed a luxury nightclub, and even thought about - and still thinks about - becoming a director.

finally - to join the family business, in banking and in

In the end, in spite of himself, he found himself a superior idler, with a discreet flat in the hamlet of Boileau in Auteuil, a dark blue BMW and no worries about having to earn a living. He often travelled to Italy, Spain, Austria and Morocco. His sister Jenny

was married to a British diplomat, Howard Bedell-Jamieson, and her brother Jean-Louis d'Espart was a Gaullist MP for Paris, and almost certainly a future minister.

Clearly everything was going swimmingly for François d'Espart. And yet no, not at all.

He had just broken off a two-year affair, as passionate as it was tumultuous and troubled, with a young woman who was married but separated from her husband, and after initially enjoying his new freedom, the fact that he could finally, as he put it, 'breathe at his ease', his beautiful solitude already seemed to be weighing on him unbearably.

Add to that the fact that he didn't drink much, didn't do drugs or gamble, and that sports - all sports - disgusted as much as the conventional articles of social life ("and he doesn't even smoke", said his sister Jenny, who, mysteriously enough, meant a lot to him, and to whom he felt much closer than to his brother Jean-Louis).

However, a nagging nostalgia for a certain kind of heroism, the burns of which he had already experienced, or for a certain kind of high violence that was sometimes self-sufficient, secretly consumed him, haunting the rest of his increasingly empty days and nights. In fact, François

d'Espart was hoping for something, but he didn't really know what; and without admitting it to himself, this emptiness in front of him, inside him, he was living it out of breath, caught by the throat, every day, by the same blind race towards the long-awaited unexpected, towards the 'other life'. He was walking through his own life with his eyes closed, like someone walking through the desert, more and more absent from himself and everything. He had a premonition, a kind of unconscious certainty, that this situation could no longer last, but that was no longer enough for him.

more and more unbearable. Everything in his life was going like this, more and more exhausting, and this dramatic escalation had to end. At any cost. Let's face it, the intimate situation François d'Espart's life could not have been more tense, on the verge of breaking down.

But what François d'Espart was so eagerly waiting for, he found on a certain afternoon in July, when the sun was beating down on Paris, when the city seemed on the verge of bursting into flames, of setting itself on fire; a violent white light, incandescent, hard, naked, merciless, bathed everything, hallucinating, subversively driving people to madness, to reckless acts, to suicide; it was, let's be clear, a 22nd of July.

July, around four o'clock in the afternoon.

François had just finished a long lunch, heavily washed down with arak, with Arab journalists Hassan el Mastani and Mohan Selim - both "Arab journalists".

journalists" rather, if we mean secret agents - lunch at the excellent Lebanese restaurant on rue Guichard in Passy.

But as they took a few steps together, before separating,

Mohan Selim had returned to the attack, once again taking up the theme that had formed the basis of their talks over lunch, namely the invitation that François d'Espart had insisted on passing on to him from the "organisation" - from "Al Queda
"The "Base" -

so that he would agree to go on a "journey study and fraternity".

in Afghanistan, on the side of the "students of Islam", on the side of the Taliban.

To which François was obliged oppose, a manner of speaking

- a refusal, however, that is completely intractable.

To tell the truth, it was all getting rather muddy.

But already François' thoughts were a thousand miles away from anything that had been said during his lunch with Hassan el Mastani and Mohan Selim, the two Arab "journalists", urgently and arduously solicited as he was by the fatal slope that the effects of the arak were already insinuating into him, and behind these - both provocation and cover - by the subterranean implementation - though he did not yet know it - of the first act of his final destiny. For the occult mechanism had been set in motion at this very moment of what was to be the fundamental, decisive test of his entire life.

The countdown had begun.

Arak is notorious for inducing a peculiar lucidity, a kind of exalted double-headedness, a second, icy, limpid consciousness, which slyly invites you to stray from the regular paths of reality, to engage in irrational, unforeseen, dangerous situations, to give in to the madness that everyone carries hidden within them.

self.

This was precisely the case for François d'Espart that day, and the heatwave that was in full swing had also added its share of exacerbation, provocation and empty blindness; the extreme whiteness of the light had a lot to do with the strange things that were to happen that day, apocalyptically in fact.

because this day was going to be completely different from all the others.

François d'Espart was walking down Boulevard Beauséjour, towards Auteuil, to his flat in the hamlet of Boileau (light black summer jacket, navy blue shirt, yellow trousers, black moccasins, black sunglasses and, in his jacket pocket, his 38 cobra with its ultra-short barrel, which he never took out of town).

And so it happened that, as he reached Calle Oswaldo, walking in a more or less second-class state, he suddenly veered to the left - for no apparent reason - and came to a halt, speechless, in front of a sort of cul-de-sac, corresponding to numbers 12 and 12 bis of the street, which was completely deserted and at that moment plunged into an extraordinary silence.

In the blinding light of day, in the heat, the cul-de-sac corresponding to numbers 12 and 12 bis of the rue Oswaldo Cruz was, in fact, a strange haven of striking shade and coolness, a space almost outside the immediate reality of things.

And there was not soul in, as if suddenly reinforced by the mysterious surrounding silence. "Something's bound to happen", came the reply.

François thought, suddenly on his guard.

The ground floor windows of number 12 bis were wide open, sheltered by some etic oleander bushes, giving way to interior spaces of dark, intense shadow and freshness, as if mysterious depths had been calmed and pacified. Now, before he had even really realised what he was doing, François, giving to a sudden impulse of insanity - or of some other kind of madness - had to go and look at the windows.

something like that - leapt in a single bound over the edge of the open window into the house, which seemed to have provoked him to do so by the very mute invitation of the trap of its open windows onto the shadows, the throbbing dizziness and unsuspected mysteries that seemed to lie there, waiting for his own arrival (his adventurous decision, his gesture of no return).

Because, as soon as he was inside, in a sudden fit of lucidity - or super-dementia, which was almost the same thing - François had to understand that under no circumstances was he going to be able to back out of anything, that he had to go ahead, to the final end of what he had just committed himself to, to experiencing all the paths and all the perils, the fearsome adventure already . There was nothing left to do, he had to finish what he had just started, even - and especially - if it was a gesture of pure madness, which was clearly the case.

At first glance, the flat François had just entered seemed to be empty; but in any case, it was time to go and see. At

paying close attention. No wrong moves, no false steps. Everything to perfection.

François had landed, first of all, in a vast long lounge, bathed in half-light. He then passed into a narrow corridor with coloured stained glass windows leading to a spacious dining room, but before that, on the left, a slightly ajar door let in the daylight.

François quietly pushed open the door, all his senses alert: was a large, room, with windows overlooking the courtyard.

He saw a low double bed with messy dark blue sheets and a young blonde woman lying on her stomach, completely undressed, with her arms folded across her body.

moving, like an aura of limpid, gentle, Pre-Raphaelite strength. Her long hair covered the pillow like a golden scarf, with a vague ashen glow.

And as François advanced into the room, she half awoke and, turning round to stand on her haunches, cried out, frightened, while waking up for good, and revealing to François, forbidden by the spectacle she was offering him, a face of exceptional beauty, and a bosom that was quite terrifying, while the words that came out of her mouth proved her dismay, the great fear that had seized her:

-... but what... but who are you, what do you want...

how did you get in here... stop, don't go any further... there, stop...

you just don't understand, stop, don't go any further...

François, suddenly displaying his 38 cobra, replied very calmly, looking her straight in the eye:

-

... be careful, if you shout, if you do the

The slightest gesture of resistance, if you even move... I'll immediately put a bullet between your eyes... so very careful... no nonsense...

-

... but then , who are you... and what

do you want from me...

-

...who I am, it doesn't matter...

Let's just say that I'm the one with a gun in my hand, pointing it at you... as for what I want, it's quite simple: I want to make love to you and, if you don't make fuss, then I'm going to leave, just as I came... just as if nothing had happened...

Think about it, you have the choice between a few moments of amorous submission, passionate abandon, and the risk an eternity of darkness... so... but don't hesitate too long, it might upset me...

-

... as if I had a choice... turn it down

your gun, and... what can I do, come... but don't hurt me, I beg you... don't be unnecessarily brutal, I'll do my best... you can come...

There were a few moments of very intense silence, a brief space truly decisive waiting that settled between them, the very space of destiny in the process of forming itself into a narrow black trench that they had to cross. And they passed through it, each on his own and, in the end, together.

A narrow black trench, the fatality of the inevitable in progress.

Then François, who had undressed, came and took hold of her and, for an hour or more, gave himself over to a veritable crisis of amorous madness, demanding much, almost everything from her with an unquenchable rage, making her cry out in pleasure several times, and leaving her, at the end, completely broken, half-unconscious, moaning softly with her lips half-open in the completely wet sheets, her left leg seized by a slight tremor that persisted.

Then a long sob suddenly shook her, a sob like a wave of pain spreading through her body - pain or perhaps something else as well - as she said, in a voice that was almost dying out, barely audible: "...

Ah, what have you done with me... and how I going to... ah, I don't know any more, I don't know any more...". She was breathing heavily, her hair in her eyes, unable to move or react. But as François staggered away from the bed, he spoke to her from the doorway, as he was already about to disappear, saying to her in a voice - his own. also - uncertain, troubled, darkened :

- ... and you're still grumbling... what have I done with you? But I did what I had to do with you... and don't think everything between us is over, no, not at all... there's absolutely no question of that... in fact, it's only just begun...

now that I've met you, I'll never let you go again... never again, do you hear me, never again... because I've just recognised you, now I know exactly who you are... you're the one I've been looking for all my life, the one I'd just given up waiting for... but at last you've appeared, you've entered my life just as I've found you... you're the one I've been looking for all my life, the one I've just given up waiting for... but at last you've appeared, you've entered my life just as I've found you.

I've entered yours, and soon, very soon, everything will be back to ... Have I done you any violence today?

No, not at all... I haven't done you any violence, I've introduced you to our mystical wedding night... I've just taken you in a nuptial way, and for eternity... you have to understand me, my whole life and yours are at stake, unconditionally... so I'm coming back, wait for me... to the

I'll be back, you'll see, in a few days...

wait for me...

On his way out, François snatched up the young woman's handbag, which was on the table at the foot of the bed, and hurried out the same way he had come in: through the open front window. Once outside again, he calmly walked away, taking the underground passage to Renelagh Park.

François already knew, and he knew perfectly well, that what he had been waiting for these last few years had finally happened to him, even though at the time he couldn't quite make out all the implications - some of them still very much hidden - of what he had just done; he was too much in the direct, violent grip of his own immediate experience. An experience which, however, had immediately taken on the distant, protected - and even, already, somewhat erased - appearance of a dream, of something which seemed to be situated alongside his real life, in a space of special jurisdiction, of something for which he didn't feel really or entirely responsible, but for which he nonetheless felt, now, in the depths of himself, the incendiary and now quite certain burn, the awareness of *having done it anyway*,

this leap into the inconceivable which he had secretly sensed and even, as it were, already remembered. The memory, therefore, deeply hidden inside him of what was going to have to happen to him on the day he had planned for it to happen; inescapably.

But remembering one's own future as if it were already in the past, and even in the past before that, isn't at the same projecting into it in a visionary way what, in one's own past - the past of the future - was already in the past?

in its own present, too - has always belonged to this perpetually waiting future, which corresponds to what we might mystically call the *eternal present*?

In any case, it could be said that François d'Espart was constantly living on two levels: that of his ordinary, conventional, external life, immediately open to public scrutiny, and that, at the same time, of his own inner precipices, kept in the shadows, off-limits to his own awakened consciousness. But which, as far as he was concerned, were called upon to decide the very course of his existence, and which, occultly, commanded everything, arranged everything according to a coherence of their own, as unpredictable as it was over-activating on the ground. Let's not forget: François d'Espart was driven by his own abyss.

So François d'Espart was not at all the man of what he appeared to be on the surface; he was unconditionally the man of his own occult, forbidden abysses, "kept in the shadows".

the other hand, and at the same time, as François resumed his walk through Renelagh Park, interrupted by the episode of his

his love affair - his walk to Auteuil, and his flat in the hamlet of Boileau, the frightening succession of recent images that kept coming back to him, constantly attacking him, of the young stranger he had subdued in her blue sheets, and all nuptial violence that had been consummated there, incandescent, never ceasing to devour his blood, making him tremble with all his body, with all his breath. He walked down the street as if drunk, unable to see anything in front of him, as if in a dark corridor of flames.

However, despite his state of mind, François soon realised that he was being followed by two guys who knew what they were doing - a burly, bald North African and a tall, skinny blond (who was quite a bit older).

Surprisingly, he was not unfamiliar with the latter). Nevertheless, he managed to lose them on rue Erlanger, entering through the back door of the Résidence d'Auteuil and exiting onto rue Chanez. Was this something to worry about? Was it to do with the lunch he had just had with the two Arab journalists, or as inconceivable as it might have seemed - with the episode

The love affair he'd just had with Oswald Cruz? For the , he didn't want to think about it ("... fuck those two bastards", he told himself).

II

ONE YOUNG WOMAN KILLED INSTEAD OF ANOTHER?

When he got home, François threw himself on his bed to fall asleep heavily, and did not wake up, albeit with great difficulty, until well into the night. By then he had realised that a strange joy, a great joy, the like of which he perhaps never known before

of his whole life, had crept up on him like an intense, burning light that persisted in wanting to stay there.

Later, out on the balcony, stretched out in his deckchair, he spent a long time contemplating the starry night above him, above the glittering city, and also looking inside himself, and what he saw there seemed to him to be fascinating in the highest degree: He knew that he had just found what he had been looking for for so many empty years, that he was already living the only great adventure still worth knowing in this atrocious, hallucinatory end of a world irretrievably doomed, and doomed in advance, without hope, namely total adventure - the only adventure worth knowing in this atrocious, hallucinatory end of a world irretrievably doomed, and doomed in advance, without hope, namely total adventure.

even totalitarian - of what is commonly called 'absolute love'. What he had longed for, and wanted, he now had

But he still had to be able to wrest this love from the equivocal conditions of its emergence in his life, from all the

dark shadows that he sensed were subversively gathering over his mysterious, providential nuptial find.

He had quite a terrible job ahead of him, he told himself, not without reason. But he was far, far from suspecting the tragic pitfall into which he had just plunged headfirst, the death trap that had just been slyly sprung on him, and from which he would not escape completely unscathed.

Rummaging through the handbag of the young woman he had so abruptly violated, handbag he had taken with him when he left her, he learned that her name was Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, that she was twenty-three years old, and that she was the administrative director of a company,

and that she lived in a villa in Marne-la-Vallée. The company of which she was the administrative director was, in fact, a chain of top-class nightclubs, whose offices were apparently located in one of the chain's clubs, the *Rose Noire*, in the Porte Maillot district. Laurence had a Safrane and an unlimited credit card; he also found a well-stocked address book, and the draft of a break-up letter she seemed to be preparing for a certain Bruno, in which she treated him worse than dirt. That was about all François wanted to know at the moment about his dear stranger, who was not so much of a stranger after the careful exploration of her handbag he had just undertaken.

And the next day, François had his cousin Diane, who lived in the flat above him in the hamlet of Boileau, telephone Laurence in Marne-la-Vallée on some pretext to check whether she had returned or was still in the rue Oswaldo Cruz. He learned that Laurence was indeed at home in Marne-la-Vallée at the time. Which, strangely enough, seemed a good omen.

François then went to a large florist on Avenue Paul Doumer to order a bouquet - or rather a spray - of 113 long-stemmed, fiery red roses, which he had great difficulty in getting delivered to Marne-la-Vallée on time. He attached a handwritten card to the bouquet, which read:

"Laurence, your terrible presence in me never ceases to devastate me, I love you completely, I love you madly, I love you

for all eternity. May the 113 fiery-red roses of the mystical crown attached to this humble homage to what I know to be your secret greatness, in the visible and invisible worlds, help you to understand this nuptially.

What can I do to make you forgive me for the fiery violence of yesterday afternoon, our first meeting in love? Because I know, my , that nothing can separate us any more, that your existence and mine have come together forever.

At the same time, he sent her her handbag and everything in it in a standard post office box.

But he was still in such a state of over-excitement that, to calm himself down, he decided to spend the day walking in the woods of Fontainebleau, and even spent the night there, in Fontainebleau, where he dined, alone, very late, at *Aigle Noir*, having kept his usual room there (for François often liked to retire, alone, to spend a few days *Aigle Noir*, to break away from the routine of his life, to secretly get away from it all).

Two days later - he'd been back in Paris since the day before - he was suddenly inspired to drop in again, as if nothing had happened, at Rue Oswaldo Cruz, to return to the place where it all began, and in such an adventurously insane way, to tell the truth, totally insane,

the course of events they had unfolded on the afternoon 22 July, the day when everything in his life had been turned upside down, when fate had spoken, and there was no turning back.

However, once we arrived in the Rue Oswaldo Cruz, things seemed to take a turn for the worse. Three unmarked police cars were parked in front of the cul-de-sac formed by numbers 12 and 12 bis, one inside the cul-de-sac itself and the other two on the pavement, completely blocking access.

Four plainclothes detectives were on duty there and, on the opposite pavement, on the other side of the street, there was a fairly large group of people watching to see what would happen next. "They've been standing there for hours, those scavengers, glued to the pavement, waiting for some detail, some piece of news about the abominable murder that poor young woman who was raped and shot in her bed", said a neighbouring concierge and, hearing her words, François suddenly felt his chest being squeezed as if in an iron vice, urging him on so that he wouldn't feel sick and collapse right there on the spot; His heart had become like a block of ice, the day was darkening before him.

For a few moments he thought he was going to lose his . Fear, a horrible, unbearable fear, had suddenly taken hold of him. Because, he said to himself, "... it was me who did it, that's for sure...

I did it... I was drunk, I didn't know what I was doing...

completely; unconscious, I raped her and then shot her...

everything is tipping over into an insane dizziness, I'm lost... but, at the same time, it's not at , no, not at all the penny; come may I have kept in me from all that... there's something wrong, it doesn't make sense... not at all... there's a misunderstanding, we need to take a closer look at all this... look at the situation clearly, don't

me; let myself be carried away by fear... appearances can be deceptive, there are insane coincidences, you have to see... yes, you have to see, consider better... whatever the immediate appearances may be, don't give in to the vertigo, don't let yourself slide, I absolutely have to see what's going on.

come to my senses... go on, beat it,

buddy, go on...

elsewhere... then, well see... no, it absolutely can't be like that, I can feel it... no, I absolutely < couldn't do that... on the contrary... yes, it's all the con- 1 traire, that girl I

I adore her, I want to find her, I want us to stay together... that's the memory I have of her... the rest is a nightmare, a nightmare that isn't real,

which can in no way be mine..."

Dragging himself to the news-stand in the Place de la j Muette, François pounced on the day's *France Soir*, which indeed carried a front-page headline:

"Mysterious murder at La Mulette. Alexia Champetier, the - : daughter-in-law of former minister Raoul Champetier, riddled with bullets, naked, in the middle of the afternoon, in her own flat.

Sentimental drama, an affair of manners, or even political murder?

The information detailed in the *France Soir* article was quite extensive, went straight to the point and stuck exclusively to the facts.

"The victim, twenty-four year old Alexia Champetier, had been found naked in her bed by relatives, riddled with bullets, and had returned home,

the very day before, from the United States, where she had apparently been on a business trip for over a month. The initial investigation concluded that the young woman, who had probably been surprised in her sleep, had been brutalised before being raped by several people and then shot four times at point-blank range. As one in the building had heard the four , it was concluded that the murderer - or murderers - had used a silencer, proof that they were professionals. It was also understood that Alexia Champetier's assailants had entered her flat through an open window, the front door being locked from the inside.

Alexia Champetier was married to a CEO of France's cutting-edge petrochemicals sector, but had been living apart from her husband for the past two years. He lives in Neuilly, and has so far refused to make any statement pending the outcome of the investigation by the Paris Criminal Investigation Department.

Alexia Champetier was a quiet young woman, available exclusively to the busy, over-active demands of her career, while at the same time pursuing, in the footsteps of her father-in-law, former minister Raoul Champetier, certain political activities linked to fundamentalist Catholic groups opposed to abortion and the current 'progressive' initiatives at work 'within French Catholicism adrift', as they put it.

With the support of a number of major French companies, Alexia Champetier was in the process of setting up an international chain of minitel advertising groups, with headquarters in Paris.

Hence her frequent visits to the United States, where she sought support.

Inspector Patrick Landes of the Paris Criminal Investigation Department is in charge of the investigation into this appalling and, until now, totally incomprehensible affair, the background to which is certain to lead to some extremely disturbing revelations.

The article was accompanied by a photo of a beautiful young blonde woman, which made François realise that it was by no means Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, his beloved victim, whose identity he had been able to establish from the passport and the passport photo. which he had found in her handbag. Photo of the victim of the murder in rue Oswaldo Cruz, published by *France-Soir* - j despite a certain resemblance - was not at all the portrait of the forced lover François had known during his own escapade there. At least there' he could breathe easy, the worst wasn't true; but there was still the aftermath, and it wasn't nothing, the aftermath of i those who had taken over, on the spot, and the imitation, so to speak, of what he had done there himself.

Circumstances, after all, fortuitous? Nevertheless, the immediate conditions of the murder were extraordinarily similar to those of his own adventure there, with Laurence; except, of course, for the conclusion. Alexia; Champetier had been killed, while he had left the scene i confessing to Laurence his burgeoning violent passion for her, and his irrevocable decision not to leave it at that, to come back in the following days to look for her, to try ensure that, in any case, something was set in motion, definitively, between the two of them (1"

absolute love", and nothing else, of course, he told himself).

It was impossible not to make the connection between his own love affair there day before and the conditions of the subsequent murder, in the same place, of the other young woman, Alexia Champetier.

unheard of, in ; something completely staggering, 'unbelievable'.
And yet it was all the more certain.

That was where things stood at the moment, and they were terribly muddled, constituting a real, impenetrable mystery. A mystery that not the slightest clue, not the slightest opening, no matter how small, not the slightest direction to follow. The real doldrums.

A mystery, however, that François was already determined to solve, whatever the cost. If only because the very fate of his irrevocable love affair with Laurence was at stake. In other words, because his very life was at stake, his whole future existence. Because, once and for all, his choice had been made, and he intended to stick to it; it was a matter of life and death for him.

So, for François, there was not the slightest doubt: his life, from now on, was closely, inextricably, fatally linked to that of Laurence. Nor was there the slightest doubt about Laurence's feelings for him in the end. For, mysteriously, their love - and François knew this only too well - would never end.

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was not to be made, and certainly not to be invented, but to be *found*: it came there from the hidden chasms of their own past, their own shared past. For they had already, in other times, met again, and they had

been together for a long time.

It was in this state of mind that François took the liberty of going to Marne-la-Vallée to watch Laurence in front of her villa: he longed to see her, to watch her walking down the street, moving, breathing, to see her *there, in front of him, alive*, if only for a few moments. And François was lucky: barely an hour after he began his amorous vigil outside Laurence's villa, he saw her coming out of her house, dressed in a white dress.

short, hair up in a bun, large sunglasses. But she wasn't alone, another young woman was with her, a slim, lively brunette with long hair down her back; and a young man too, very tall, this one in a light black silk suit, red tie and sunglasses. They were almost shouting, speaking in English, and the subject of their discussion must have been, from their demeanour, a very burning one; something urgent, something serious, something doubtless connected with an inexplicable murder and its confidential consequences.

François was so taken by the sight of Laurence and the group accompanying her that he didn't even think to follow them, to see where they were going or what they were going to do. All their attention was focused on Laurence.

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But it was then that François recognised the young
man

! who accompanied Laurence, Franck Banister, a diplomat from the US embassy in Paris, whom he knew to be a scientist; some

Damn, this story is getting really complicated, isn't it? Isn't it obvious that the CIA is getting involved too," he exclaimed, as he set off in his turn to join someone in Paris whom he intended to put on the case confidentially, and with whom he was going to work. to which he had an appointment.

It was Tony Richmond (but was it really his name), a former regimental comrade who had since become a divisional officer in the DST, and who was constantly on the move up the ladder.

The only reason François knew Tony Richmond was a friend of his was that his intelligence was better suited to the special work he was doing than by chance, although he was inclined to pretend the contrary. Tony Richmond was, in fact, the only friend François knew, a shady, secretive friend who was hard to handle.

in

LAURENCE DISAPPEARS IN SPAIN

At the bar of the George V, where René Richmond was already waiting for him, François did not hesitate to attack the outset:

-

... would you like to tell me about the murder

of young Alexia Champetier, rue Oswaldo Cruz...

-

... ah, so that's it... that's why you

wanted to see me, didn't you... dirty, dirty business, indeed... but as for me, for the moment at least, I know virtually nothing about it, it's the PJ who's in charge, it's none of our business...

-

... and if I were to tell you that you're wrong, that on the contrary... that this is a matter that falls exclusively within your remit to

you others, those from ST... you'll see, I'm here to tell you all about it...

-

... what do you mean? What is this new

Let's be serious, we're talking about some very serious things... there's no telling where all this could lead, and we might even have to plan for the worst...

-

... the worst, yes... you don't know how to say it very well indeed... Behave yourself, old chap... I'm going to tell you everything, and you're going to be stunned... super-flashed...

And, sticking to the essentials, François unravelled the whole story, as he had experienced it himself, ending by telling him the final episode in Marne-la-Vallée, where he had caught Laurence in the company of Franck Banister, the CIA man, and Banister's secretary, an Italian from New York, no doubt his mistress...

-

... damn, you really seem to have the knack

special, that it's the most super-twisted stories that follow you , unless you're looking for them yourself out of some unconscious vice, some crazy vocation...

I'm going to see what I can find out for you, but don't get your hopes up... I've got to walk on eggshells, and the slightest slip-up and the guys at Headquarters - even those I know closely, who owe me a debt of gratitude - will immediately start wondering what I'm really up to, whether there's something fishy going on, and then everything could go seriously wrong.... is that we're watching each other like thieves... so meet here tomorrow at the same time... and in the , try not to do too much stupid stuff, not to meddle too much in what apparently is none of your business... if you

Put just one foot in the spiral, and it'll be a real struggle to get out of it, and then some... come on old chap, bye... damn, how do you keep looking for these bloody messy stories, you amaze me every time...

But he couldn't stand still, so as soon as he left René Richement, François went home to ask his cousin Diane to go with him and his friend Maurin, a medical student and more or less a tree-hugger, that very evening to the *Rose Noire*, the club where Laurence presumably had his offices. And, once there, table reserved, champagne, etc. leaving Diane and Maurin alone, François, who also made sure that everything was done with the utmost discretion, that his presence there was in no way noticed, managed to have a long discussion in private with the barman, Monsieur Max. In the end, it was a most fruitful discussion, during which he learned that Laurence regularly spent every night there invisibly watching over everything from backstage, and sometimes even that she didn't hesitate to go down to the room, to the tables of significant customers, and that she didn't go back to bed until dawn, often even in broad daylight.

an affair, some time ago, with André Veyssières, the owner of the chain of nightclubs to which the *Rose Noire* also belonged and of which Laurence was the administrator, but that it had since calmed down little by little, to end with her most beautiful death; that Laurence was also extremely popular with all the staff, despite the fact that she knew how to keep her distance, or precisely because of that; that she certainly played on the carpet on the third floor, not too much, from time to time; that she enjoyed champagne, and she said that she would have liked to have her own house in Spain, a place where she could take refuge, alone, when she didn't feel too overwhelmed by the ups and downs of her life; lastly, she had a certain relationship with the police, perhaps even quite close, but how could she have done so?

otherwise in her situation. And that, besides, if she 't present this evening at the *Rose Noire*, it was she had left that very morning for Spain, where she was on holiday until the 15th.

September. "You could perhaps speak to Miss Olga, his replacement, a Polack, very young, very pretty, extremely pleasant and laughing, a very smart girl", advised Monsieur Max, who was perhaps starting to *get attached*, a way to console him.

For a long time to come, Monsieur Max will remember his own stupefaction when he realised how much François had tipped him in exchange for his spiel about the house's adulterated secrets.

They were the last to leave the club, at around four in the morning. Maurin was all buttered up, barely able to stand on his haunches, and Diane was furious.

Despite the unexpected, dramatic turn of events - Laurence disappeared in Spain, according to Monsieur Max - no one, not even André Veyssières, could have imagined that this would happen.

François, for his part, was enjoying himself quite a bit, Mademoiselle Olga having joined them too, and in a very good mood. For his part, Monsieur Max had made quite a fuss about getting them to agree, after closing time, to him offering the champagne and caviar - a one-kilo tin, that had to be done - all the while seeming to have a crush on Maurin ("Is Maurin a bit of a dust jacket," François finally wondered).

For François, however, things were at their worst: Laurence, as he had learned from Monsieur Max, had just disappeared in Spain. The situation had changed completely, in terms of his own interests, which concerned only Laurence. Sooner or later, François was going to have to try to

to track her down and meet her there, to ensure her safety and get her out of the mad scrape she'd got herself into. And finally, of course, to try and get her to come with him, to *seal the deal*. A singularly difficult task, but one that he had chosen to make his own, unconditionally. No, things didn't really seem to be getting any better, on the contrary, they were getting more and confused, there was something wrong. And, let's it, he hadn't even seen what was waiting for him at the next turn.

On the afternoon of the same day - François had slept all morning, returning from his escapade at the Rose *Noire* - Superintendent Tony Richmond turned up at the agreed meeting place, the *George V*, but not without being almost an hour late, and choosing not to apologise, because a man doesn't apologise, he takes responsibility. From the outset, François did not fail to find him a little suspicious, as if he knew something he didn't want to talk about too much, but which nonetheless modified his attitude at time, not so much perhaps towards François himself, but towards the whole affair which was in the process of being "settled".

the of them. Tony Richmond got straight to the heart of the matter:

- ... admittedly, I've been able to learn a lot, and quite a lot already... but I can't tell you how difficult it's been... in any case, the case - whole case - seems extraordinarily rotten to me... just think, old chap, that the room where the young woman, Alexia Champetier, had to be shot was equipped with a secret system of recording cameras which, pointed at the bed, were supposed to monitor everything that went on there. In any case, the tapes had already been taken before, and there was no trace of them... so we're left to speculate: superior putanate, a place set up by the special services for purposes that concern them, private voyeurism, a blackmail operation on a grand scale, anything...

is possible... so we'll wait and see, we'll keep looking... on the other hand, I must also have realised that Alexia Champetier was working very secretly with the DGSE, and that your own lover, Laurence, was in regular contact with the PJ and even, believe it or not, with us, with the ST... strange, strange...

All very disturbing, I admit...

- ... yes, indeed... it's not me who would say otherwise... and I realise that we're learning more every day... how far will all this go in the end, I wonder," replied François.

Then he gave him a succinct account of his evening the previous evening at the *Rose Noire*, placing particular emphasis on the information, of the utmost importance to him, concerning Laurence's disappearance in Spain, an event that had occurred the day before: all his plans of action had been altered by it, but before he went to try to join her in Spain, he recognised that there was still a certain amount of time to do.

He said he was determined to get to work on it without further delay, with, he hoped, the confidential support of Tony Richmond personally if not, perhaps, that of his department too. Because sooner or later it would have to come to this, that was obvious.

-... however," he continued, "I've just come to a conclusion which seems to me to be immediately decisive: that Alexia Champetier was shot instead of Laurence... I still don't know how, or where these two knew each other, but the fact is, I'm now certain, that while Alexia Champetier was away in the United States, every morning when she finished work at the *Rose Noire*, Laurence came to bed in the flat to which she had been given access... broken with exhaustion, Laurence, instead of returning home to Marne-la-Vallée,

outside Paris, went to rue Oswaldo Cruz, a quarter of hour's drive from the *Rose Noire*, at Porte Maillot, and snoozed until the early afternoon... which must have been noticed by those who were preparing her liquidation... except that on 23 July last, early in the morning, Alexia Champetier returned from the United States and went back to her flat where Laurence, having been warned, had not been... hence the killers' mistake: the same flat, the same bed, the same tall blonde girl naked in the sheets, sleeping in the afternoon.... in a way, it was inevitable that what happened would happen... and that's how Alexia Champetier died instead of Laurence, which is not to say that Laurence is no longer - and even more so from now on - in constant danger of dying.... and that's where I need - where we need, my dear, if I may say so - to intervene, so that we can put an end to those who want to take Laurence's life, and whoever they are.

their reasons...

-

... yes, you may well be right about the whole thing'.

line," replied Tony Richmond, a little dreamily... "but we still need to do some in-depth research, and urgently... which isn't so simple, I'm afraid.

It seems to me that it really isn't that simple...

-

... in every way," said François in his obsession, "in every way, the problem is there: what we need to do now is identify the killers, and find the reasons why they act... those who are behind the scenes, and who

play their games with impunity... the occult leaders... as long we don't succeed in destroying them, '

To these people, and above all to these people, nothing will have been done, everything will continue as if nothing had happened... so it's the hidden leaders who should be targeted as a priority... having said that, the crux of the problem is always that of the double secret of the true identity of the two girls, I would even say the problem of their abysmal double identity, of one and the other... a series of questions , which will have to be answered as quickly as possible... because, once again, the extreme urgency of doing what we intend to do is becoming more and more a decisive stumbling block in our current action... so we need to know
(1) who Alexia Champetier really was, who was hiding behind what she was doing, who was holding her and manipulating her, and, also, who she was,
(2) who is Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, who is she in reality, who is behind what she does, who holds her and who manipulates her and, finally, how did they get to know each other, what kept them together, and what did they do together, if indeed they had been in a position to work together, is not at all proven... on the other hand, we will have to find out

who, or what, are we trying to achieve by trying to liquidate Laurence, because one never attacks mere executors, for circumstantial reasons, and it is indeed what was - and undoubtedly still is - targeted through Laurence that constitutes the final word, the *operative key* to whole affair in progress... and all this leads me directly to the following conclusion: if the secret camera in the flat in Via Oswaldo Cruz was working on the afternoon of 22 July last, when what I told you happened between Laurence and myself, Laurence's pursuers must now be in possession of the respective tape, and on this tape I myself am present, in the foreground.... so the others can't fail to be interested in me too, and from now on, very closely indeed... on this subject, there's also the strange episode of the two guys - professionals - who had me followed as I was leaving 1 flat in

Laurence, on 22 July last... in Via Oswaldo Cruz... so the surest way to get close to them is for the rest of us to *reverse the situation*... not to hide at all, on the contrary, to let them get close to me, and to do this, of course, very deliberately... to put myself in the position of bait... to chase them away by being chased away... that they had followed me in Via Oswaldo Cruz, on the afternoon of 22 July last.

July, could mean that they were already on the premises, and that they had noticed my tricks... which they had then had ample opportunity to check out on the tape they had recovered from the flat once it had been emptied by Laurence... I've even come to wonder whether they didn't use it as inspiration for their own murderous plan, the unexpected victim of which was Alexia Champetier... however, if I'm willing to play the bait , you'll understand that I can't envisage that happening...

seriously do it on my own... I need to be covered and supported in this action by a group, an organisation, an operational service... so that's what I was getting at: couldn't you try to arrange this for me with the ST, or even with the nasty barons of the DGSE... and even, possibly, with a similar structure, but even more hidden, downright occult, as I know there are a few...

-

You're obviously right have thought about it, but I don't feel in a position to guarantee you - at least on the spot - the support of the government.

But I'll see what I can do... at the same time,

; it's also true that this affair is already taking a turn which should alert our people, so I'm going to try ' to urgently set up a support, surveillance and intervention system based precisely on what you're trying to do on your side, for the moment on your own...

-

... and all this," added François, "now that I'm still a long way from Laurence, hiding in God knows where in Spain, under what conditions and with whose help... I feel I'm going mad, if I don't do something right away I don't know what might happen to me, I'm going crazy... and I assure you - believe me, I beg you - that I'm not exaggerating in the least... Laurence may also find herself reasonably thinking that it was I who, the day after our amorous encounter, would have done the same thing to Alexia Champetier as I had done to her the day before, with the difference that I really would have killed her... if they knew what they absolutely shouldn't do!

if they , I mean, what I'd done with Laurence that afternoon... I mean, they wouldn't doubt for a moment that, the next day, I'd tried to do the thing again with Alexia Champetier, on the very spot where I'd done it the day before, and that Alexia would have been killed.... and it could be Laurence herself who, after all, could meet them there if, as you claim, she is more or less in regular contact with them... I'm sleepwalking along the ledge, and only blind, total, unhopd-for luck can save me...

-

... on the other hand," interrupted Tony Richmond, "I do hope you realise the insane risks I'm taking personally by standing beside you as I'm doing on these super-precious occasions... the very fact that I'm telling you what I'm telling you, that I'm talking to you about it, that we're acting more or less together, clandestinely, could at any moment - if by some means it came to light - cause me to immediately throw away my professional situation, my whole career.... in fact, let's be clear: I'm constantly betraying the department to which I belong, for your good... you'll admit that this is no mean trick... that I'm acting like a madman, like an irresponsible person... you'll admit that it's a madman's trick, something truly unheard of, a kind of miracle in reverse, a suspicious, super-twisted counter-miracle... We're cursed, you know, the two of us... predestined stowaways, born for the shadows...

-

... yes and no," replied François, who refused to let himself be confused... all cops are the same thing, inevitably narrow-minded guys, essentially lacking in genius, except for the *top cops*... the ones who

are able to see ahead - to see, literally, as seers - the course of things, who grasp, from within, the true importance of events and of what is secretly going on behind them, and who are personally always beyond the apparent truth, in the invisible, where the really decisive forces act, the very forces of destiny... But you're essentially a top cop, and those who don't know it yet are no doubt all suspecting it, one after the other... whether you like it or not, you can't hide, *we know who you are*... and if you're by my side now, it's because you understand, from a higher source of inspiration, that this the real battle, this is the decisive battle today... the crux of the matter...

hidden from the current final confrontations of power - because there is only ever one power - supreme delinquency and supreme legitimacy facing each other, and both clandestinely... because, in these times, it is clandestinity that makes us free...

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IV

THE TRAP IN THE SECOND BASEMENT OF THE VILLA IN MARNE-LA-VALLÉE

He inherited the gift of his grandmother, a famous clairvoyant who worked hard in Paris during the Occupation, when von Choltitz, Otto Abetz, Jean Moulin, Jean Cocteau, Jean Marais, Jean Jardin, Véronique Rebatet, Constantin Brancusi, and Maillol, and Danielle Darrieux, and Georges Soulès, and André Malraux - this was, of course, the great Nelly Dalimier - François d'Espart was also clearly - albeit often with long eclipses - a seer, what we call an 'extra-lucid seer'; He sometimes reached heights "that

it would come to make you tremble like a leaf, fill you with a dangerous, black turmoil", the fickle wife of a professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, a leading social figure, had once said to François.

consented to reveal 'his gift to a certain extent, to punish her for exceeding him with her shameless, greedy and singularly morbid solicitations.

François often turned this gift on himself, , it seems, is not done, nor should it be done. But that didn't stop him. So known in advance that, in the present circumstances of his life, he would

would soon have to face a terrible ordeal, an ordeal of captivity and appalling torments, during which he risked suffering the worst avenues, intolerable physical abuse, for an indeterminate time, and even losing his life. But, knowing this, he had decided to ignore it, to go ahead with what was to happen to him, to face it with all the rage of the dark relentlessness he had carried within him since the day he learned of the ignominious death of young Alexia Champetier, while not ignoring the fate to which Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, his 'mystical lover', was also destined. For what was lurking in the shadows behind the wave of the last events of his life - events that were incomprehensible, terrifying, the bearers of secret darkness - he had to confront it directly at all costs, bring it back into the light of day in order to annihilate it sacrificially.

In the astonishing battle he had been waging blindly for several days now - and all alone, in spite of everything - against elusive shadows, against active absences, François had the increasingly certain impression that he was obliged to measure himself, in reality, against the very principle of evil, that it was a war

spiritual war that he had undertaken to pursue in this way, perhaps even what in certain truly informed circles would have been called the 'great spiritual war', the very secret 'holy war' that certain predestined people are supposed to be waging, occultly, in order to remain unknown until the end of their action, and even well beyond the end of it.

So, unable to do anything complicated, which in any would always have been more exciting, he had to resign himself to simplicity for the time being: François had therefore decided to go and visit - which meant searching from top to bottom - on his own, without further ado, and illegally, Laurence's villa at Marne-la-Vallée.

Despite a nagging, negative feeling deep down inside, François had invested himself unconditionally in the project: "It'll be this very night, that's all", he said to himself when he woke up in the morning.

And so it was, and by some incomprehensible aberration of his mind, no doubt overtaxed at the , he ended up - without knowing why - refraining from telling Tony Richmond about his plans to visit Laurence's villa in Marne-la-Vallée at night. It almost cost him his life.

François arrived at his intended destination at around three in the morning, and parked his car a few streets away. Entering Laurence's villa, silent and empty, from a narrow alleyway in the dark that ran along the back garden, did not seem to involve any special difficulties. Nevertheless, once inside, the feeling of danger, tenacious and sticky, which had been pursuing him for several days, became present in him again, even with a certain obscure violence, something which he should no doubt have taken into account more effectively than he had known how to do at the time, while he was still conscious of it.

time. But it's hard, very hard, to avoid, and we know that what is planned in the shadows by the negative powers always happens. There's nothing we can do about it.

The first thing he noticed was that Laurence was obviously living there alone. As he moved from one room to the next, François felt increasingly uneasy: there a great, beautiful elegance about the place, uncluttered, confident, haughty, but there was not a photo, not a book, not a painting on the walls, not the slightest personal note; there was no TV set, no stereo speakers, not even a radio, nothing. Alone, on the mantelpiece of the large ground-floor living room, half-masking the mirror, was his bouquet of 113 roses, still astonishingly enough

The fresh flowers, arranged in a beautiful black vase, added touch of freshness and a living presence.

The strong scent of roses, which was everywhere, the deep, unnatural silence, the strange cold that reigned in all the rooms, created a sort of sepulchral atmosphere of the most ominous kind. The bedroom and bathroom upstairs, austere and elegant and spacious, still carried the faint scent of Laurence's personal perfume and lingering presence. In a vast cupboard, there was an insane number dresses, dozens of pairs of shoes arranged in perfect order. And not a single piece of paper anywhere in the villa.

And despite all this, François never ceased to feel Laurence's exacerbated presence, as if she had been pursuing him, from room to room, behind him, invisibly, all the time he was delightfully exploiting his villa and, in a way, even its hidden intimacies, hostile at the same time.

attracted, and attentive to him, to his throbbing desire for her. Was it just an illusion?

As François made his way downstairs to the kitchen, he noticed that the bar was very well stocked, including a whole row of original tequila bottles of all brands.

The kitchen was as elegant and new, as clean and as uncluttered, and as empty as the rest of the house, the fridge as empty as the food shelves. There was a small red-painted wooden door next to the glass door to the garden, which gave access to the cellar; François opened it carefully and, with all his senses alert, began to descend the narrow wooden staircase leading to the cellar, which he found filled to the ceiling with rows of leather and canvas suitcases, to the point where you could hardly move. And what would all this be," he said, "it looks like cargo.

He didn't try to enquire about the contents of the suitcases, at the same time he had just noticed that a second door - made of wood and painted red like the first - was hidden behind the storage of suitcases, painted red, just like the first - was hidden behind the suitcases, ' which would no doubt give access to a second cellar (and maybe even to an underground passage, or something like that, who knows).

It was pitch black in steep staircase of this second cellar. But no sooner had François descended a few steps than he was suddenly struck by a violent blow to the back of the head and, losing consciousness, fell forward head first. "He's had enough, that one," said a voice in the dark. And then: "Fuck his mother, he's been a pain in the ass for so long".

A good while passed before François slowly came to.

Completely out of it, curled up on the floor, his hands cuffed behind his back, thrown on the floor in a narrow dark room, his head against a blocked toilet, he was struggling to regain consciousness, but he wasn't really succeeding.

Several hours passed before the door to the room where François was being held was suddenly opened and he was kicked out. He was then dragged wordlessly into another room, also plunged into darkness; there were two of them looking after him; a third, standing off to one side, seemed to be supervising the operations in , looking detached, smoking incessantly, and who hadn't cast a single glance at François collapsed on the floor.

Next, the tape of François in the bedroom where Laurence was asleep, naked, was projected onto the opposite wall in enlarged format, along with all their lovemaking.

The sound, as well as the image, were of an absolutely exceptional quality, it was like real cinema; this managed to disturb François somewhat, who did not have such clear memories of all this. It was the projection of this cassette that finally made him *understand everything*.

In the end, the lights were switched back on and they took it in turns to question him. François had just enough time to admire their flawless professionalism, because after that, things quickly got out of hand. François had to realise that he was in for a tough game, and that he had to be extremely careful. The real game hadn't started yet, but it was going to start moment, and he knew in advance everything he had to fear, including

the very fact that he risked losing his life.

So there were three of them: a bald Arab, the placid violent one, a colossus; a tall German, or Slav, blond, as tall as the other, but dry, nervous, extremely dangerous; and the "ideological leader" of the operation, in a black alapage suit, white shirt, silk tie with black-white-red stripes, dark glasses, the "face of an angel", a genetic criminal, but giving himself manners, almost simpering.

However, without revealing anything, François had immediately recognised

- the bald Arab, the skinny blond - the two guys who had followed him out of Laurence's flat in rue Oswaldo Cruz on 22 July.

It was the "ideological leader", his gaze firmly fixed on François, who spoke first, addressing him in a low, calm voice:

-

...you see, we know everything. We've got the tape of you performing, the proof is undeniable. So, you're going to tell us: who you're working for, what they wanted you to learn, do or look for on Oswald Cruz Street. If you talk, we'll let you go. If you don't, they'll kill you. But in the meantime, we're going to work you like hell, until you crack, until you tell us everything. Everything, you hear me? We want to know everything. I want to know everything...

Then the tall blond man intervened:

-

...so look at me carefully, you... I'm telling you to look at me...

right in the eyes... yes, like this... I hope you've understood... so I'll give you one last chance: cause... that's all you've got left to do, talk...

to cause or to suffer, to cause or to clamour...

François, not quite sure what he had to say - in fact, what did he have to say, his real story seemed unacceptably extravagant - resigned himself to the simplest truth:

-

... I only did what's on the tape, I only said what's on the tape... and why I did it, I don't know myself... a crazy whim, a madness that I can't explain myself... that's all, what else do you want me to say, there's really nothing else to say...

As soon as François had spoken, the tall blond threw a tremendous backhanded cuff into his face, throwing him to the ground and then kicking him with a long volley of blows:

-

... that's so you'll remember what you seem to have forgotten, you bastard... so you'll remember everything, and so I'll tell us everything, really everything, do you hear me? otherwise I'll slaughter you, I'll blow your guts out...

On the floor, François, completely stunned, was bleeding from his nose and mouth, breathing with difficulty; but he had also had time to understand something else. Something else? When the tall blond man had said "I'm telling you to look at me, straight in the eyes", François had immediately recognised him, Erin Lehnert, former chief warrant officer in his company, a comrade from the "great old days", and in his gaze he had caught a sign of hidden intelligence, trying to reassure him, to announce an active complicity, a possible way out; to let him know that nothing was lost yet; that he was there, and that he was going to try to help him out. "Let me tell him I'm going to make his day,

I really want to, the bastard's making me sweat, can't you see she's a chick?" exclaimed the bald man, who stood up and slowly approached François, his face distorted by a terrible smile, stammering out words in Arabic, his hands slightly outstretched.

- ... I'm going to soften him up a bit myself, and then I'll leave you to it, fatso..." exclaimed the tall blond man - Erwin Lehnert, that is - as lashed out at François, or at least pretended . But then it was the big bald guy's turn, and a long, appalling session of beatings began, escalating in terror and unbridled, blind, psychopathic violence, with no result whatsoever in the end,

In any case, François *had nothing to say*, knowing, in fact, *nothing about anything*. He hadn't even been able to understand who he was dealing with, or even what these torturers wanted to know about him; their questions were, in fact, as vague as his answers; no doubt they didn't know what they needed to know either, they were advancing in the dark just as François was retreating into the void, into the same darkness as they were.

However, they seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper into the dark recesses of their dirty work. There was now a risk that it would all end badly.

But at the darkest point of his distress, at the darkest point of his defeat at the time, François suddenly had a moment of inner, ecstatic respite.

Losing consciousness, he had a brief vision, secret and luminous, like a half-awake dream. François had the impression of suddenly finding himself on the terrace of his sister Jenny's summer house in Haute Provence. The sun was shining brightly and it was just past midday. Then, coming from the gardens, Jenny appeared on the terrace, seemingly in a great hurry, in a long pale yellow summer dress, high

She said to him: "Where have you been? She said to him: "... but where have you been, Laurence was looking for you just now... now she's gone, she really couldn't do it any more".
wait... but look out of the windows at the back of the house, you might see her walking away over there, in the wide fields..."

-

... I'm looking, yes... but I can't see anything," he replied, disappointed and worried... ah, yes... perhaps a vague white spot that sparkles in the sun...

-

... yes, my darling," said Jenny, "yes, my darling, you can't see her any more, Laurence... it's far too late, now you'll never find her again... she's out of your life, Laurence, and out of life itself... and all that will remain of her, as you yourself have just said, is a vague white spot in the bright midday sun... it's time you understood that, you must...

1 But a kick to the chest quickly brought François back to the reality of the moment. Blood blinded him, flowing from a large open cut in his arches, and he was suffocating. He realised he wasn't going to be able to hold out much longer.

Perhaps disgusted, the "ideological leader" then claimed that he had to leave for two hours, but as he was leaving, he whispered to the other two that "at this stage of things, it would be better for them to get it over with", that "they should finish him off and dispose of the corpse in the usual way"; that, "obviously, there was nothing to be gained from this cretin, since he might not really know anything more than he kept saying"; that "they had no doubt wasted their time on this one

shitty, stupid".

But as soon as the "ideological leader" had left the room, François threw a tremendous headbutt at the German, knocking him to the other side of the room and, at the same time, with a spinning kick, literally smashed the Arab's plexus, killing him outright.

The German then struggled to his feet and exclaimed, his breath coming in short gasps and his mouth full of blood, "... you can see, Captain, that you still haven't forgotten anything about what we used to be able to do...

". He then opened his handcuffs and gave him a large glass of rum to drink. "I'm going to play the half-dead alongside Carlos, who's going to play the half-dead alongside Carlos, who's going to play the half-dead alongside Carlos, who's going to play the half-dead alongside Carlos,

seems to me to be for good... when the boss arrives, I'll manage...

he's Eugène Lambrichs, an ex-gendarme, squadron leader, who now works in private security... he's formidable, ultra-dangerous... and I have to tell you that I'm a Military Security infiltrator them, and we've been keeping an eye on them for quite some time... if you want to see me again, meet me in three days' time at the Auteuil greenhouse, at 2pm... I'll have a lot to tell you, as you can imagine... off you go, the other one may turn up at any moment... and be careful when you go out, he's hanging around with two other creeps, you must avoid him at all costs... I'd give you a light, but I don't have any, just my own, which you understand I can't part with... off you go, my captain... goodbye, and be careful... take care of yourself, you're not really out of the woods yet..."

François remembered his ascent, and the return passage from room to room in the villa, as one of the worst nightmares of his life; while he could barely stand on his legs, he risked falling at any moment on the "

He was going hypnotically, an unknown force directing his steps, pushing him forward to get him out of the trap.

HOW TWO YOUNG WOMEN FROM THE UPPER CLASS PLAYED WITH

DEATH

Fortunately, François had got into the habit of stashing a spare set of car keys in the glove compartment, so he was able to out of the car immediately (although not without breaking the glass on the front door).

However, the "ideological leader", who had seized all his papers, was not going to be able to go straight home,

now had his identity, his personal address, his bank details and the details of his immediate contacts, all of which he carried with him in his black diary. François had just made a terrible mistake - "I've really lost my touch", he said to himself as he thought about it: His face was swollen beyond recognition, and the blood-soaked shirt was sticking to his back, soiling the seat of the car; violent twinges in his head left him half-blind, and he was breathing with great difficulty.

Nevertheless, fate had mysteriously intervened in his favour, and it was a real miracle that his former regimental comrade, Erwin Lehnert, had turned up, as unexpected as providential, in the booby trap at the villa in Marne-la-Vallée.

Where could he go? For lack of anything better to do, he decided on Tony Richmond's personal residence in Place Vauban. For a start. Then we'll see. In the morning

was already here, the sky was turning red on his left, and without it François was driving at almost two hundred kilometres an hour. A strong urge to puke was creeping up on him.

When he arrived at Tony Richmond's house in Place Vauban, François called him on his mobile to ask him to come down and find him in his car and, above all, to ask him to bring "an old, worn mackintosh" and "a large jumper that he would be willing to get rid of".

-

... you're into second-hand clothes now? That's a new one," said Tony Richmond, handing him the parcel containing what François

had just asked to be found.

-

... don't get me wrong, the mackintosh's so I can get out of the car and go up to your place with my collar up... as I've been arranged, I can't show my face in the street... and the jumper is to hide the big bloodstain on the car seat that passers-by might see from the pavement... and it's a good thing it was so early and the streets were empty...

-

... come on, let's go upstairs, old chap, you can tell me all about it at home... ah, it so happens that I'm not alone at the moment, but that way you'll also get to know Lise... she's a very nice kid, you'll see, but at the same time a real ferocious beast, a woman of prey, a real one, what in the good old days we used to call, I think, a 'tigress'... although she doesn't look like one at all...

-

... but who is this Lise, this newcomer, I didn't know? You're aerating your harem, renewing cages? The straw and everything?

-

... surprise, surprise, my friend, surprise... it's not just you who picks them up... luck often varies, you'll see...

As he entered Tony Richmond's house, François that he could no longer stand upright and that he would soon collapse. So he threw himself into the first armchair and closed his eyes.

Everything seemed to start spinning around him, faster and faster.

- ... but then, François... this isn't going well at all, tell me... besides, with the look of wreck you've got on your face, I'm hardly surprised... so keep still, I'll make you a very strong coffee, with rum... and I'll also bring you a snack with foie gras... don't move, wait for me a moment... I'm coming...

As Tony Richmond left for the kitchen, François soon realised that someone was furtively staring at him from across the room; stunned, frightened, burning with curiosity, a beautiful tall redhead, dressed entirely in a man's shirt, whom he immediately recognised as the young wife of a very important politician of the day. She didn't dare speak to him, no doubt violently struck by his fearsome appearance as a bloody escapee from a clandestine rendering plant.

But Tony Richmond arrived with a well-stocked tray, and as soon as François had finished eating, took him to the bathroom.

- ... well, first of all a long hot bath, and then we'll see... I think I'll put you up temporarily in one of the department's hideouts, in a quiet corner of the 14th arrondissement, rue d'Alleray... because that's what it's for, damn it... in the meantime, if you feel up to it, tell me all about it... from the beginning, and leave nothing out...

I hope by now you've realised that the usual secrecy is no longer an option.

We can't do anything about it, that's just the way it is... admit it... and you'll also notice that I'm not reproaching you for the fact that you hid the secret expedition from me, which you've just brought back in pieces... reduced to a pulp... let's move on...

Like all great professionals, Tony Richmond knew how to listen in a *decisive way*, being made to > listen; silently, without interfering in the other's discourse, without commenting or asking questions; to make the flow of the words of the person confessing to him entirely his own, to intensify even the desire to do so, to overexcite it, to bring it to incandescence; and to do this without a word from him; by the sheer power of his gaze, of his radiant attention; hypnagogically, as it were. And always to the very end.

It was only when François had finished speaking that Tony Richmond felt entitled to try and conclude: the presence of Erwin Lehnert in the ranks of those opposite was an absolutely unheard-of stroke of luck, completely providential; and that it would be he, Tony Richmond, who, the next day, would be going to the meeting with Erwin Lehnert, at the greenhouse in Auteuil; that in the state he was in at the moment, there was no question of François being able to go out and show his face in the street; on the other hand, the meeting with Erwin Lehnert was certain to prove decisive, to bring about a complete reversal of the positions of both sides, giving invaluable support to their camp, that of François d'Espart and Tony Richmond, in which Laurence Mercier-Duvernois also had to be included; Normally, Erwin Lehnert would have to deliver to Tony Richmond, the very next day, the ultimate key to the still unresolved mystery surrounding the events in the bloody flat in rue Oswaldo Cruz, which they would then have to exploit, together, by any means necessary,

the 'active source' represented by Erwin Lehnert; "... it's all there, absolutely", concluded Tony Richmond. And he added: "... Erwin Lehnert, I'll take charge of him, I'll have him taken care of by our services, I'll even have him leave France clandestinely if necessary; we'll find him a temporary hideout abroad, with one of our embassies; but he has to talk, and it seems to me that that's exactly what he intends to do... now the

So it seems that things are beginning to work out for us... just as they are for walking, so let's be ready..."

But it wasn't until late in the afternoon that Tony Richmond was able to move François to the services' hideout, a large modern studio in a building surrounded by beautiful gardens on several levels. In the meantime, Tony Richmond had also had to get rid of Lise, who was distraught by François's condition, and who was *determined to devote herself* at all costs, tormented by the unavowable attraction of clandestine adventure, violence, the unknown and "mystery in action". The bourgeois in her - the "grande bourgeoise" - was sick with curiosity, had sunk into a state of frenzied excitement: the "other side of contemporary history".

"She thought to herself, and was sent . How could she not be enraged? And yet Tony Richmond was intractable.

François spent a heavy, deep, dark night's sleep, dazed by painkillers. The next day, Tony Richmond returned from his meeting with Erwin Lehnert at the greenhouse in Auteuil, ecstatic. The immediate results of his meeting with him had, as he kept saying, "exceeded all expectations". As Erwin Lehnert had already confided to François, he was in fact a Military Security (MS) agent who had penetrated the French army on the orders of his superiors.

and taking considerable risks, the more than dubious special action group set up by the man François had called the "

responsible for ideology" and who was, in fact, the former squadron leader of the national gendarmerie Eugène Lambrichs, who now runs a "security and research" company with a very special profile, working mainly with Arab diplomatic representations in Paris, and going very far indeed

in the qualification of services he felt entitled offer his employers who paid him accordingly.

According to Erwin Lehnert's information, the two young women directly involved in the Rue Oswaldo Cruz affair, Alexia Champetier and Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, were working together for an operational branch of the DGSE, which had taken it upon itself to sensitise Alexia Champetier's flat in Rue Oswaldo Cruz with state-of-the-art equipment.

This was the ultimate in technological sophistication, enabling them to turn it into an over-activated hideout, directed - as was, incidentally, Eugène Lambrichs' "security and research" company - at Arab diplomatic representations in Paris (as well as other non-Arab representations on occasion, including, most recently, that of the United States).

Strangely enough - again according to Erwin Lehnert - neither Alexia Champetier nor Laurence Mercier-Duvernois worked for money, sometimes even using their own money when the opportunity arose, as they were both, if not themselves at least from very wealthy families.

For Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, the daughter and sister of military men - her father was an admiral, her brother commanded one of the leading ships in the French navy - it could be that there was also a taste - the old taste - for *service*, which still persists in certain old Catholic families with a national tradition.

They had therefore devoted themselves with uncommon zeal to their special tasks, and this despite the somewhat

some of repulsive. Alexia Champetier was precisely in the process of working on - and even concluding - a new project.

about an affair - for purposes secret influence - with one of the Kennedy sons, John John, which seemed on the point of coming to fruition, despite the fact that it was a young marriage, and he was apparently very much in love with his young wife. At the same time, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois had just become involved, by stealth, in an affair that was just as important, if not more so.

We know that Syrian diplomatic structures, and in general those of the Arab diplomatic organisation as a whole, persist in reproducing - rather late in relation to actual political developments - what had been, in other times, the special administrative arrangements of the former Soviet Union's direct underground combat diplomacy, which left the ambassador holding the post in a position of formal, surface representation with no real decision-making power, placing all the political and activist weight of substance under the responsibility of what they called the

"The latter had the rank of "second secretary of embassy", but was the undisputed head of the representation.

diplomacy as a whole, in permanent and active contact with the "centre

"Moscow.

However - again according to Erwin Lehnert - the "second embassy secretary

Their "controller", the son-in-law of the Syrian Head of State, General Q+++ H+++, a key figure in the current leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic, was appointed as the "controller" of the Syrian diplomatic representation in Paris.

of the great secret policy of Damascus, had allowed himself to be caught up in the reels of a distraught, fatal passion for Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, whom he had made his mistress but who, in reality, dominated him more and more effectively. General Q+++ H+++, himself a very handsome man - his mother was German - with great looks, willpower, vision even, a magnetic, powerful, irresistible personality, while aware of the dangers of his affair, stubbornly refused put an it, or least to make it less conspicuous, less 'scandalous'. On the contrary, he only exacerbated her *provocations*.

\ However, when the time came for the French special services to take direct action, summoning him to forced collaboration, the equivalent of veiled subjugation, by producing as a decisive argument a series of cassettes showing his forcible lovemaking with Laurence - material which, if it had reached the Syrian Head of State, his father-in-law, would indeed have had an explosive effect, catastrophic if not directly fatal for General Q+++ H+++

- having immediately realised that Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, whom he had come to believe was as passionate about their love affair as he was, had merely played him, coldly - technically -, he had plunged into a state of mad, foaming, destructive rage, all the more terrifying because he had made it his duty to keep his disappointment completely under control, not to let anything transpire.

out in the open. So he immediately instructed Eugène Lambrichs to organise Laurence's physical elimination at the very scene of their shared exploits of passion, me Oswaldo Cruz, while also demanding that Lambrichs arrange for this to be done under the most scabrous conditions, with obvious innuendoes about Laurence's activities as a callgirl, or rather as - as he himself had said - "a call girl".

- that

She's a "luxury whore", a "prostitute with the pretensions of a young family girl, to make herself more valuable".

Having thus organised the physical liquidation of his mistress, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, General Q+++ H+++ at the same time reserved the right to set in motion a counter-measure aimed at neutralising the use by the French special services of the compromising tapes in their possession, as well as their attempts to blackmail him, which were already underway. And Tony Richmond goes on to say: "... in my opinion, he was deluding himself in a truly fallacious and, in the final analysis, extremely dangerous way about his chances of thwarting the trap set by the DGSE... when you've been fooled like he had been, there's nothing left to do, you have to walk... or else, don't you agree, there's always suicide, which doesn't seem to me to be at all in keeping with the General's character..."

And on top of all that, there was the blunder killing Alexia Champetier instead of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, and the latter, having quickly understood everything, feeling - rightly or wrongly - let down by the DGSE, decided to try and disappear to Spain, we still don't know where, while deciding to contact the political services of the US embassy in Paris, with the aim of negotiating, in exchange for immediate security cover, her knowledge, which we would have to believe to be fairly advanced, of the

This also explains the DGSE's decision to leave it completely alone for the time being, with a view to taking the necessary legal action against it at a later date.

An unhealthy imbroglio, compounded by François' inconceivable interference in the situation so dramatically in progress, and at the very moment of their own paroxysmal developments, on the very eve of Alexia Champetier's liquidation, an interference that was absolutely inexplicable, and took Eugène by surprise.

Lambrichs and his field agents, and the DGSE's on-the-spot checks, not to mention the fact that, once Alexia Champetier's murder had been discovered, the PJ were astonished to find themselves innocently confronted with an indecipherable mystery which, for them, will no doubt remain so forever.

Now, according to Tony Richmond's own information, which he had just received from his own services, things were more or less clear, and a violent dispute over competencies was about to erupt between the DGSE services, whose business it was, in fact, very indisputably, and those of the ST, who were pushing forward their exclusive authorisations concerning internal security of the territory.

-

... and at the same time I also learned the code name that the DGSE operational unit directly involved in the General Q+++ H+++ entrapment case had chosen to designate it... it was, as you can imagine, 'Operation Confidential Dark Mirror'... isn't that premonitory, really gloomy... said Tony Richmond, expecting to overhear François's reaction to his revelation, which he was sure he'd be able to understand.

knew that she risked troubling him deeply.

-

... dark mirror, indeed... it couldn't have been better... since 22 July last, my whole existence seems to me to be reflected in a dark mirror," replied François.

-

... and like our jurisdictional quarrel with the DGSE

We sent them General Rondeau as a negotiator, and they were forced to comply, or to pretend to , which for the moment as far as we were concerned, was the same thing. We therefore moved into the villa in Marne-la-Vallée, and set in motion the mechanism that would enable us, in the long term, to confidentially secure the elements that belonged to Eugène Lambrichs' organisation and that were involved in Alexia Champetier's murder... as to the final fate of the mechanism in action around General Q+++ H+++, that is now - as I understand it - between Matignon and the Elysée... in any case, I believe that the

General Q+++ H+++ now has before him a long period secret torment and subjection to a certain French subterranean will in relation to what is known in certain specialist circles as the "

Arab geopolitical line from Paris"... but, continued Tony Richmond, there is one last bone in this affair, and it's a big one: as far as I can see, it concerns you directly... When Eugène Lambrichs learned of Laurence's disappearance and her flight to Spain, he followed General Q+++ H+++'s personal instructions very closely, and hastened to dispatch a new team of killers after her, with orders to get lost in the wilderness and liquidate her at any cost... a team which, once engaged in the planned action..,

no longer has any possibility of liaison and contact, let alone control on the part of Eugène Lambrichs: they have to run after him, and will run until they catch him and do his bidding... So that's what I was getting at: if your feelings towards Laurence are still the same as those you claimed to have two days ago, now's the time to try and intervene, to prevent the ongoing operation to physically neutralise her from coming to an end... to do that, there's now only one way: find the team of killers after her, and shoot them dead

before they shoot him... and what our services can't - or don't want to - do any more, you, personally, could take care of... with, of course, all confidential support on our side... that's where things stand, that's what I think I had to tell you... it's up to you, and right now...

Putting together indefinitely the information they had just been able to gather on this subject, François and Tony Richmond had already been trying for perhaps three hours to shed some light, if only partially, on the clandestine activities of the two young women, Alexia Champetier and Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, the murder of the former and the flight to Spain of the latter, and now they were beginning to tire. They had to take a break, there was nothing they could do.

Outside, the weather had changed, the sky was darkening, a cold wind had risen that threatened to turn into a thunderstorm soon, the windows were already rattling and, in the distance, above the hills of Saint-Cloud, we could see the lightning that suddenly lit up the skies in a dirty purple, and the crows that flew away.

-

... we're still going to have a bite to eat," says Tony.

Richmont, Lise will be here any minute, she begged me to her come and bring us some ... I gave in, what else could I do?

-

I don't recognise you any more, you who with rage and decision ... shunned all attachment ...

,

- ... ah, if you only knew, my poor old chap, what I've come to

I want to divorce her, and I'm marrying her... were all victims... I'm done for... done like a Kosovar who comes across a Serb patrol, and I want more...

-... it's just that, as we know, it's always the best who get caught out, and now, my poor old chap, it looks like your turn has really come... should I congratulate you?
Only if you let me... VI

THE SECRET OATH THAT FRANÇOIS MADE TO HIS SISTER JENNY

The next morning, Tony Richmond came to have breakfast with François, in the hideout in the rue d'Alleray where the latter was staying; very early on he appeared; he looked appeased, the night seemed to have washed away all the worries that had corroded him the night before; the night, and no doubt also Lise, about whom he couldn't stop fantasising ('tigress', 'liberated bourgeois'),

"inspired", "lost in voluptuousness", "a little girl's soul", "mystical lover
"and so on).

The coffee was absolutely excellent, and they both great coffee drinkers.

-

... do we have the slightest idea," asked François, of
where in Spain she might have tried to hide?

-

... no, not the slightest... apart from the fact that, according to her father, the admiral, whom we were able to contact, Laurence may have kept certain contacts in the Gibraltar region, around the new town of Sotomayor and Puerto de la Duquesa... and there's also the possibility that Franck Banister, the American you saw her with when you first went to Mane-la-Vallée, might be there to see her again, or to keep an eye on her... the Americans have kept their bases in Spain, and they can certainly do a lot for her if they want to...

But François had already made up his mind: he was going to leave for Spain:

- ... since Eugène Lambrichs' team of killers is out of the picture for the time being - although they could mobilise other elements at any moment, but it doesn't matter now - I'm going to start by going home... there are some things I need to see to urgently... because my decision is made, I'm leaving this very afternoon for Madrid.... could you hold a seat for me on Iberia, you'd be doing me a great favour... if you like, we can meet at Orly, just before I leave... ah, another thing... I would have liked to take Erwin Lehnert with me, could you negotiate that for me... I know time is very short, but if you wanted to...

-

... I'll try, of course... but I can't guarantee anything... in spite of everything, the military are extremely biased against us, but I promise you I'll do everything I can... after all, we're committed to pursuing this business together, so we'll just have to see...

-

... you'll try to do everything you can, and even more...

.

- ... yes, even a little more if you want...

Over the last few days François had often wondered about the mystery - or so it might be called - of his friendship with Tony Richmond.

It's an iron rule that you can't make friends with a cop. And Tony Richmond was first and foremost a cop, even if he was a great cop, a superior cop as François had called him. But in him, too, there was the memory of their youth, still alive - buried deep, though, well hidden, perhaps deliberately - which, for both of them, were also the years of the army.

No doubt Tony Richmond's military soul was ultimately and despite everything stronger in him than his new soul as a cop. What's more, the unusually committed, militant - one might even say sacrificial, if we agreed on the meaning of the term - way in which he carried out his secret activities as a top cop showed him to be totally available and of a different class from the outset. Tony Richmond is a great lord who knows how to cover his tracks.

François had long understood that he had to trust him completely, what we call *blind trust*.

So François discreetly left the ST's special hideout at me d'Alleray and returned home alone to the hamlet of Boileau.

Once there - several phone calls 1 were waiting on his answering machine, but silent, as if 1 had only called to check if he was there - François began to walk around the flat as if he suddenly didn't really know what he wanted, and then, dressed in all white, packed things into a large canvas travel bag and stopped, thinking, in front of the phone.

Finally, he called his sister Jenny, who was fortunately at . "... It's me," he said, "are you all right? What impudent heat, isn't it?

Listen, my darling, I'm leaving for Madrid very shortly, and I thought I should call you to tell you something... something of the utmost importance, you see... so I'll tell you straight away: I'm going to Spain to try to save the life of a young woman who is in mortal danger... someone wants to make an attempt on her life, they want to kill her... a young woman called Laurence Mercier-Duvernois. a young woman called Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, I suppose you've heard of her recently... well, I don't know... but this young woman, Laurence, I love madly... she's the only woman I've ever really loved in my life, and if anything should happen to her, if I can't save her, if I can't stop her being shot, I've decided to kill myself, I'm avoiding the word suicide, which seems to me to be a singularly scabrous word... you are therefore, my darling, the only being in this world to whom I still feel close, infinitely close... so I thought I should tell you, so that you know what my secret is, my last secret perhaps... I am, I beg you to believe me, I couldn't be calmer, I couldn't be more lucid, but I also couldn't be more determined... I know very well what I want, what I am trying to do, and what I will do in any case.... it's an iron will that's carrying me forward, nothing will stop me... but at the same time you know, now, what I intend to do with all this if I should, despite everything, miss my chance; if I shouldn't be able to save Laurence's life... you never know, destiny is more often than not like looking into a dark mirror... "

-

... no, no, wait... listen to me, François," cried Jenny, "listen to me... you've just told me that you're entrusting me with your secret, your last secret perhaps... but in that case, allow me tell you what my secret is too.

last secret... but no, no, I can't you, tell you everything, right now, not like this, not like this... then,

Listen to me carefully, François, my darling, listen to me carefully: I've never asked anything important of you in my life, so let me make a request of you now which, believe me, I beg you to believe me, I want more than my life, infinitely more... I need you to swear to me, no, what am I saying, I need you to give me your word, to promise me on your honour that, if you were ever to take the negative decision you have just told me about, you would not do anything about it until you had seen me one last time.... as I too have a great, even a very great secret to confide in you - for it is to you alone that I must confide it, and to no one else in this world - you must agree to hear me tell you, myself, in person... promise me this... whatever the fatal course of events, you will come and see me before doing anything in the way you have wanted to tell me now...

promise me, yes, I beg you, promise ... because only you, at the end of everything, can, you must even know my great secret... the great secret of my life, the secret also of my death, of my secret death of all the days of my life, for so many years...

-

... yes, I promise you, my darling, yes, I promise you," replied François, after a few moments hesitation... yes, I promise on my honour, and you know that I have always kept my honourable promises... I will come to see you, whatever happens... goodbye then, my darling, see you soon I hope... and know that I will think of you a lot... I will think of you all the time...

Arriving at Orly, François was surprised to find not only Tony Richmond, but also Erwin Lehnert, who had managed to find him where he was.

hid just in time to ensure that he could accompany François to Spain, thus being entrusted, as it were, by his own people, by those of the SM, with a confidential mission on the sidelines of his usual work.

While we were waiting to board, a violent storm broke out, in the most unexpected way - these last few days, it was always like that, the storm would break out all of a sudden, only to go away, just as it had come - the sky suddenly filled with darkness and fire, the rain pouring down, as if with gusts of lead, an icy wind had risen which swept everything before it, with a rage sudden and inexplicable, only for everything to return to normal a quarter of an hour later, the sun shining brightly and the sky clear of any temptation to darken.

François took the sudden arrival of this storm as a good omen, and he also said so to Tony Richmond and Erwin Lehnert, who both replied with a knowing smile. And there were some rather ambiguous farewells, hardly concealing the apprehensions, the anguish that haunted them all, and that none of them could bring themselves to acknowledge.

During the flight, as the sun was already setting and they were chatting quietly and whispering to each other, Erwin Lehnert decided, after much hesitation, to talk to François about something that was weighing heavily on his mind.

-

... Come on, Captain, there's no point hiding it... know why you're still so gloomy, despite your efforts to conceal it, to give the impression...

-

... tell me, Erwin... please don't give me any more

my captain... it's been a long time since I was your captain...

-

... what does it really matter, for me you'll always be my captain... I have a long memory, I never forget anything...

so, as I was saying, I know why you're always so gloomy... it's because you think you won't find peace until you've finished with all those who were involved in the murder of the young woman, Alexia Champetier, whom they killed in the place of the other woman, your dear Laurence.... or here, I want to free you: you've already given up on him, the one who really did it... it was Carlos, the black guy you kicked in the chest in the basement of the villa in Marne-la-Vallée... it was he who killed her, Alexia Champetier, while I was farting outside... the day before, we had already followed you when you left flat in Rue Oswaldo Cruz... we never stopped wondering who you could be, what you had come there to do, who had sent you.... what other group you were part of... about Alexia Champetier, you know... I had absolutely no right to intervene, my mission was to be there, to see what they were doing, what they wanted... that's all... not the slightest initiative on my part, nothing...

- ... yes, old chap... you've just taken a heavy weight off my heart... but there are still the others, Eugène Lambrichs and his new team of killers... and the big boss in the shadows, General Q+++ H+++.

It's my occult pact with the Devil, or maybe with God himself, who knows... their corpses, I need them all, one by one... I'm not going to stop until I've stuffed them all!

at each other's sides, like in a slaughterhouse... I can't it, it's just the way it is...

j - ... I wouldn't say that I don't understand you, no, I wouldn't say that... in any case, I'm completely on your side in this affair, just like, I believe, Tony Richmond... he's a good man too, one of those who don't make them any more... there's no race any more, it's extinct... but with your licence, it seems to me that there's something else too, which I need to talk to you about, you'll excuse me... perhaps you haven't yet realised how much Laurence Mercier-Duvernois resembles your own sister, Jenny... it's really disturbing, they look like sisters to say the least... or else you must be thinking of occultism, of the doubling of beings, of supernatural things that are frightening... do you understand me, I couldn't be more serious, you have to believe me... all this is starting to take on a special air... and when I say special, don't I mean... I understand myself...

-

... but come on, Erwin, what are you telling me here...

but after all, why not... maybe you're right after all... it's strange, I hadn't realised it at all... but now that you've mentioned it to me... yes, it's quite disturbingly obvious to me too... I'll think about it... Laurence and Jenny, Jenny and Laurence, it's all the same... I don't really know what to make of it... at the very moment, I'm speechless...

-

... it must mean something, this resemblance so... how shall I put it, so supernatural... there is something there, after all...

you never know, we'll have to see what happens next... sometimes these encounters, these coincidences of destiny, can leave you dreaming... and..,

in this case, that does seem to be the case... think about it, Captain... perhaps this whole affair that we're dealing with now, the murder in Calle Oswaldo Cruz and all that, is not just a matter of

is in fact only the vestibule for what is to come later... later, when things have really matured... when everything is ready...

When they arrived in Madrid, they stayed at the *Velasquez* - for one night.

and as soon as they had left their belongings in their rooms and taken the obligatory shower, they went out into the great Madrid night, restless, torrid, perfumed, madly inviting to dangerous adventure, to the unknown, to all the excesses dreamt of or not even dared to dream of. The air was scorching, and behind everything you could feel a secret depth, an invitation, a breath held back by the expectation of what at any moment risked giving itself to be lived, and even possibly to die, in an airy, elegant, limpid way, but whose violence you could feel like a warm, intimate, sweet breath, at once attractive and equivocal, a little scabrous all the same; You quickly understood what a bewitchment it was, and what a danger it was too, but how to avoid it; how not to get caught up in it.

That's how perdition goes, like a knife caught in the corner of a shadowy alley, like a dream, like the terrifying call of a beautiful, pale face, barely glimpsed in the doorway.

- ... watch out for the Madrid night, it's as dangerous as sleepwalking along an uncertain ledge... before anything else," says François, "we're going to pay a visit to don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar... we have to do this, we need to get back into the swing of things, and we also need to find some equipment... so we're going to take a look at his club, *El Caballero de Plata*... you'll see,

don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar, a high-flying - and very . high-flying -
crook
- boss -

no doubt on the front cover - of Madrid's most exclusive nightclub,
scored with a pretty American girl, Jennifer - she may not even
twenty, this super-luxury catiche - is at the same time one of our
'oldest comrades in crime'.

combat of the heroic years, if you know what I mean... hes in the
class of an ony Richmond, and that says it all, doesn't it... you get
me... with him, it's just us, he's
one of us in his own ... he is and, I know, he will remain so until the
end... that's how we are, the last of us...

However, as soon as they were admitted to the *Caballero de Plata*,
François and Erwin Lehnner were plunged straight into the j
Underworld: an apocalyptic noise - what they undoubtedly called
music, a hallucinatory mix of techno and hard rock - engulfed the
crowd, making them sway en masse, jerk spasmodically, as if under
the onslaught of a raging sea, ; the crowd went wild, jumping up and
down, screaming, grabbing each other with rage and indifference at
the same time, already rendered unconscious, bestialized,
cretinized, all in the merciless swirl of blinding spotlights, in acrid
smell of forced perspiration, equivocal perfumes, those favoured by
second-hand whores, to the heavy whiffs of strong alcohol and the
effluvia of marijuana and other such filth, all against a backdrop of
decomposing corpses; The stench of blocked sewers and
clandestine mass graves, in which people only survived by
degenerating, in a state of permanent sub-asphyxia; and from this
stagnant slickness, frenzied screams burst forth from time to time,
like dark flashes of lightning.

After laboriously, and not without danger, crossing this infernally
effervescent infrahuman magma, François and his comrade Erwin
Lehnert reached, by means of a narrow, hidden staircase, and
strong

on the second floor, to the private offices of the management, where they were awaited by Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar himself, who kindly them to be accompanied by young Jennifer, who was also a member of the management team,

smiling, excited, immediately served the champagne.

Don Ceferino's personal study was not a source of astonishment, but of amazement: it was like being transported half a century back in time, around an immense oil painting with a golden frame of Alfonso XIII in a white summer uniform Everything was original, dating from the early 20th century of Spanish royalty: furniture, carpets, mirrors, curtains, chandeliers, paintings, glassware and photos, in absolutely perfect taste and of an authenticity that was obviously no less perfect. Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar was an obsessive devotee of the memory of Alfonso XIII, of the Spanish "marvellous decade" of the years 1920-1930, the years of the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, father of José Antonio, during which the precarious yet sumptuous reign of Alfonso XIII flourished.

Lying on a vast burgundy high-wool carpet, two young Dobermanns kept a watchful eye on the newcomers pretending to doze off. And then there were the large bouquets of fresh flowers everywhere, and the champagne served by Jennifer, slowly, in a crystal chandelier with changing lights, which fascinated everyone.

Don Ceferino was a handsome man, tall, slim, dark-haired, but a little too long, dressed in a white dinner jacket, whereas young Jennifer was, one might say, not dressed at all, almost naked under her purple evening gown which, untucked to the hilt, barely covered her upper thighs, leaving her shoulders and back exposed to the air. But she was very charming, with her long slender legs and her flamboyant hair, with her freckles and her big green eyes, with her gestures at the top of her voice.

slowed down, sophisticated as can be and yet laughing and mischievous, unable to hide her youth or the moving foibles of her life.

this one. A terrible passion united this strange couple, and there was no doubt that Don Ceferino had mastered their behaviour and their secrets, which were perhaps quite formidable.

There can be no doubt that all private life in Spain conceals an abyss. After exchanging the customary *abrazos*, the men attacked directly, François giving a succinct but relatively exhaustive account of the case that had brought them to Spain, including information about Laurence's possible desperate hideout in the Gibraltar region, near the new town of Sotomayor or in the vicinity of Puerto de la Duquesa.

Don Ceferino seemed rather pensive, refraining from comment. In the end, he said: "... I understand that you have to leave Madrid tomorrow morning, that you haven't a moment to lose... I'll make a few phone calls, I'll spend the night if I have to... but I don't think I can guarantee anything for the moment... everything, for you, depends to a great extent on luck.... and you either have luck or you don't... I suppose you'll also need equipment... as for that, there's no problem, I've got everything you need... there's still the problem of my personal contacts over there, in the Gibraltar region.... on that point, let's get straight to the facts: one of my men runs a major business in Puerto de la Duquesa, in fact... someone who has very close relations with Tangier... I'm sure he'll be able to tell you everything that's going on there, in the region... he's a former legionnaire, Pedro Zubrowski, a polack... a real tough guy... his establishment, which is actually a clandestine brothel, is called *La Madrugada Verde*... I'm going to call him later and give him all the instructions you need... you can trust him, he's one of my best, I've checked him out...

on many occasions... As for the equipment, I can give you two Austrian Korber 9

millimetres short, with four extra magazines each... I think it's the best gun of its kind in the world today, and it's practically impossible to get... and now, my dear comrades, let's have a bit of fun, or at least pretend to have a bit of fun, gracefully drink a few glasses together... later, if you like, I'll send Jennifer to fetch a couple of super-luxury babes to brighten up your late night... so, my dear François, tell me all about your life, everything you've been able to do in recent years... and let me tell you, I think a lot about

you... yes, my dear, you cannot imagine how much I regret that three years ago you did not settle in Madrid, and you expressed your desire to do so at the time... come on, it's already three years ago, it's hard to believe... how time flies... but as we know only too well, everyone dreams of settling in Madrid, and no one ever does... Madrid is a city we dream about, but where we hesitate to settle... Madrid is just a dream, the dream of a long summer's night... a night of madness and voluptuousness, but out of time, and out of this world... the royal city par excellence, the magical city of the Bourbons... fortunately, there are still a few of us who have understood this... but rest assured, in the new Greater Europe of our coming years, Madrid will find its true place..."

François and Erwin Lehnert stayed for almost three more hours with Don Ceferino and Jennifer, whom she knew very well how to hold champagne, talking with both great fervour and feigned casualness about the most secret things in their lives and about their own friendship, which intact and would remain so. For every great friendship is a pact imposed on you from the outside, an occult predestination. Friendship, as we can see, has a special place in

which is a sign.

And as they were leaving, Jennifer came downstairs to bring them two young girls from downstairs, with whom they went to the *Velasquez*, in don Ceferino's chauffeur-driven car, a metallic blue Rolls, one barely sixteen, the other eighteen, Vera and Andy, Andalusian girls, as their names did not indicate, with whom they went wild together until around nine in the morning - without having slept a wink all night - when they had to get back to the work they still had to do in Madrid. This is what we call, with an expression from the "belle époque

"And with a hint of nostalgia, there's no escaping the ritual of "the white nights of Madrid".

Francis, in spite of everything, could not refrain from thinking, throughout the rest of the night, about an episode that had taken place while they were all together in Don Ceferino's study, which concluded, at that very moment, his lyrical remarks about their friendship and his feelings for Francis: "... and then tell me, my dear Francis, I'm going to make you an offer of service. and then tell me, my dear François, I'm going to make you an offer of service, I thought of it," said Don Ceferino... "I formally undertake to do so," he added... "I am at the moment, very confidentially, in advanced talks with a large German foreign investment company... talks concerning the setting up of a network of airlines linking Spain to the whole of North Africa... Algiers, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Egypt... *Aerolíneas Mediteraneas Españolas*, the AME... and if for the moment it's still a secret, it's not for you, on the contrary: the deal is almost done, we have to sign within twenty-four hours... so, whatever the outcome of your present

rescue of this young woman who you assume is hiding somewhere in Gibraltar, and who is being followed by a team of killers.

I am already offering you, in advance, the general management AME, *Aerolíneas Mediteraneas Espagnolas*, for an initial period of six years... you know me well enough, my dear.

François, to know that if I undertake to do something, I stick to it... my offer is valid, of course, if you settle in Madrid for the duration of your mandate... think about it, it's an opportunity you don't get every day... and above all, you should know that if I'm doing this, if I'm offering you this, it's really only to have you with us in Madrid... what do you expect, my dear, we love you... ask Jennifer if I don't often talk to her about you... when I do, it's like a real attack of depression, the blues get to my throat..."

When François and Erwin Lehnert went down to the hotel lobby in the morning, they were surprised to find Jennifer there, waiting for them, with two additional addresses from don Ceferino to check out first, in the Puerto de la Duquesa area. According to the information don Ceferino had gathered during the night, Laurence could have sought asylum there, the team of killers on his trail could have intercepted him there too, once they arrived.

According to the information they had just received from don Ceferino, the clinic in question was the *Serenidad* Clinic, a detoxification centre for terminal drug addicts run by a Swiss doctor, Dr Adolfo Neuhaus, in Castellon el Alto.

shady, haughty respectability, a singularly dubious if not criminal underbelly, in every sense of the word and even - and perhaps above all

- in the first sense of the word.

Then there was the property of a wealthy Englishman, James Vesper Willoughby, the dissolute young heir to a major electronics fortune, in Los Ferreos, Villa *Maragarita*, where for years he had been entertaining the underworld elite of big money and today's depraved and subversive European subculture, who are busy making the fashions of the day but not the fashion of the day.

succeeding only in fuelling from below the great conspiracy in the making for the next liquidation of Western society, which has long been in its death throes.

The Villa *Margarita* was, in fact, one of the over-activated bunkers on the current front of the ongoing self-dissolution of a civilisation that was being urgently invited to disappear from the face of the earth. And who, on top of everything else, didn't even know what they were doing, or rather what they were being made to do, 'psychically'. In the very area where it was known that Laurence might have sought refuge, the two places indicated by Don Ceferino were indeed hotbeds for an impressive number of young people from all over Europe and the United States.

1 fixing for any research to be undertaken on site to trace it, while not forgetting for a moment that it was, in fact, a sprint race; between themselves and the team of killers on their heels. This was where they had to start their investigations, i blindly, in desperation, betting everything on luck and even, we fear, on luck alone.

That same morning, they still had to visit another planned contact in Madrid, Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher of the Society of Jesus, the brother of the current Head of the Society's Spanish Province and himself responsible for the Society's clandestine political intelligence service for the whole of Spain.

Spain. As he was unable to receive them at the Society's Madrid headquarters for obvious reasons of security and discretion, they agreed to meet at 10am at the palace of Princess Sturdza, in Plaza Nunez de Bilbao, one of Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher's great social friends and, without doubt, one of the leading figures in the Spanish social scene.

It is also one of the Society's most important current channels influence in Spain, as it is known to be familiar with the immediate entourage of King Juan Carlos.

Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher received them in the Sturdza palace, in a small white and gold room overlooking its interior gardens, with its wide-open windows showing long rows of rosebushes heavily laden with yellow and red flowers, an almost heavenly sight in the bright, sunny morning.

And once again Francis had to explain the reasons for their present descent into Spain, without hiding anything from the increasingly alert attention of Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher, to whom he was linked - as he was with Don Ceferino Coertez y Malagar - by old political and other complicities that could be said to be abysmal, (We have not yet had the opportunity to talk seriously about the double life of François d'Espart, about some of his activities that were unknown to everyone, even to those who should not have been unaware of them).

And in conclusion, Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher, like Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar, spoke of luck, saying that things being what they seemed, they had to rely above all on luck, to trust in luck. As for Divine Providence," he added, "it will follow its own paths, of which the rest of us will know nothing. The paths of Divine Providence, whatever some may think, will always remain closed to our intelligence, kept apart, hidden.

Nevertheless, he was quick to provide them with a certain point of support in the Puerto de la Duquesa region, which he felt could prove decisive on the spot, namely Father Luis Saenz, superior of the *Comunidad del Sagrado Corazon de Jesús y del Corazon Immaculado de Maria*, a community based in Ventador el Viejo, in the mountains.

"Father Luis Saenz is here to do just that..." he concluded.

Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher then took them on a brief courtesy visit to Princess Sturdza in her personal flats, whom Francis asked to convey his greetings to King Juan Carlos, to whom, passing through Madrid, he could not fail to convey his most faithful respects.

This happened some forty kilometres from Madrid. They had stopped to fill up at a petrol station on a secluded hill just outside a sun-bleached village. It was around three o'clock the afternoon, under a huge, cloudless sky.

François had gone to the toilet and was about to leave when he sensed something was wrong. Through half-open toilet door, he saw that another woman was in the bathroom.

Erwin Lehnert was standing with both hands on his head. A guy was pointing a reduced Uzi at him, and he saw that there was also another guy behind him, and a third who, gun in hand, was trying to see where François had gone; and as the latter was looking towards the toilets, François recognised him at once: it was Eugène Lambrichs, dressed all in white, with dark glasses.

François jumped out of the back window and hid in the rows of maize that stretched far behind the toilets, through which the wind was blowing with a violent, uninterrupted, deafening metallic noise.

Moving about fifteen metres away, he crouched down and fired twice in succession: the first bullet killed the man pointing the gun at Erwin Lehnert, and the second wounded Eugène Lambrichs, who responded by firing three times in the direction from he had heard François' two shots; François, without stopping, fired three more times, and there he hit Eugène Lambrichs full on, blowing his head off, who was also thrown backwards, forcefully, with a single shot. François, however, was still sheltering behind the rows of maize, which the wind was blowing violently and continuously.

As the third guy plunged to the ground behind their car, Erwin Lehnert fired a burst of four shots from under the two cars and didn't miss. ... you can show yourself," he shouted at François... "I've just had this one too, it was the third one... we've had them all, it's over...

Let's find out..."

The exchange of fire had lasted no more than three or four minutes, and now it was all over, as Erwin Lehnert had just said.

A profound silence fell over the place, like a great slab

of air that suddenly landed on them, trying to immobilise them under its translucent mass, still vibrating, invisibly present there, terrifying.

Leaving things as they were, they left without touching a thing, taking the road back to Madrid where they could lose themselves,

thus avoiding being checked on the roads by the Guardia Civil once the alert had been given, which was not long in coming.

In fact, they weren't risking anything as there wasn't the slightest trace of them having been there.

the real ideal.

-

... They must have found us since Madrid, and they followed us, watching for the best moment... they were going to shoot us at the first opportunity... this Eugène Lambrichs, he was ultra-fast, there's no denying it... but for what it will have served him...

"said Erwin Lehnert, who was driving, and added: "... the petrol station attendant

I think he's passed on... fucking misery, the poor guy...

-

... Yes, whole thing was decided in a matter of seconds," replied François. "We've been incredibly lucky," he continued, "and I hope it will last...

They spent the night in Madrid, locked in their rooms at the Residencia don Ramon de la Cruz, before setting off again the next morning, taking a different route and making a long diversions to leave out vicinity of the place where their deadly encounter of the previous day had taken place, where the checks were surely in full swing. They had lost a day, but at least they had had some much-needed rest.

When you think about it, elimination of Eugène Lambrichs and his new field team was something quite unexpected, something "abnormal" in fact.

found it hard to believe: it had all happened in a matter of seconds, like a dream, and when you least expect it.

And there was another problem: how had Eugène Lambrichs managed to find their trail, to intercept them in Madrid without them noticing at all? Yes, how? Through what hidden complicity?

VII "TANGO IN KALI"

Once they arrived in Puerto de la Duquesa, and having made contact with Pedro Zubrowski at his bar *La Madrugada Verde* on the seafront, who had quickly found them a hotel in Puerto de la Duquesa itself, despite the outrageous demands of the season in full swing, François had decided that very evening they would discreetly take over James Vesper Willoughby's estate, the Villa *Margarita*, where he just announced that he was going to hold a *big fiesta*.

François thought he knew him, but as soon as he'd met him, he'd realised that Pedro Zubrowski was more or less the double of Erwin Lehnert, who didn't seem to suspect a thing.

The attraction and hostility between the two men was equally intense, exacerbated by the very contradiction that governed their confrontation, both permanent and subterranean; a state of affairs that they both tried not to let show, or even to conceal from themselves, perhaps unconsciously. François, who was still a little angry with Erwin Lehnert because of the doctrine he had expounded on the plane to Madrid about the mysterious resemblance between the two men, and the fact that Erwin Lehnert was the only one of his kind in the world, was not at all surprised by the fact that the two of them were so much alike.

between Laurence and her sister Jenny, a doctrine involving unacknowledged, dramatic undertones that have greatly disturbed

François was therefore only too happy to be able to return the favour to Erwin Lehnert by pointing out his own resemblance to Pedro Zubrowski, which was actually rather equivocal; but he didn't make the slightest comment or allusion to it, preferring to refrain from doing so in order to better enjoy, secretly, his revenge. For it was really something to see them together, Erwin Lehnert and Pedro Zubrowski, who, at times, seemed to be each other's double. What sign was there to be surprised by in this resemblance, perhaps fortuitous but in any case surprising and even, in a way, fascinating? For the cracks in nature will always be fascinating, where the supernatural sometimes shines through as if thinly veiled. Yes, there was a sign there that we would have to decipher. Later, I mean as events unfolded. Because it will undoubtedly happen, at some point.

So around midnight they arrived at the Villa *Margarita*, only to lose themselves in the tumultuous crowd of guests, no one having bothered to check who they were or who had brought them there: the party was at its height. At least a hundred *beautiful people*, most of them already dead drunk, were more or less pretending to dance, shaking their hips, together or separately, to the subliminal, moronic rhythms of avant-garde techno, while others were wandering, haggard and overexcited, with a drink in their hand, through the spacious rooms - with all the doors and windows wide open - on the villa's two floors, or in the gardens where brightly lit areas followed zones of black shadow.

The way some were acting, their accelerated extra-lucidity,

their own fictional habits, thereby making fools of themselves, of their own exalted debility, it seemed that the coconut too, discreetly, and what could be more regular in the end: it found its place apart from the rest of the world?

all part of the profoundly imbecilic mythology of this kind of semi-mundane revelry, of the adulterated rituals of the great final suicide of a race stricken to its very core. And on top of that, in the role of whipped cream, Chantilly-style, the coconut spread out in profusion, like snow, whose thickness did nothing to hide its airy, light, icy quality. James Vesper Willoughby was a generous man.

Taking care not to taste any of this themselves, François and Erwin Lehnert combed the gardens, room by room, group by group, alley by alley, bush by bush in the shade, and even on the roofs of the villa, looking for Laurence, until in the end - at around four o'clock in the morning - they had to admit to themselves, with a heavy heart, that they had come up empty: not the slightest trace of Laurence at the Villa *Margarita* that night.

Now, as they were quite seriously exhausted, they were planning to return to their hotel to treat themselves to three or four hours' sleep, since that very morning they had an appointment up in the country, at Ventador, with Father Luis Saenz, the superior of the Comunidad del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y del Corazón Inmaculado de María, the superior of *the Comunidad del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y del Corazón Inmaculado de María*, Francisco suddenly felt overcome by a fatal presentiment, which he would not have admitted to himself for anything in the world, but which tormented him in an anguishing way that blackened his soul; For it was a final anguish which, on the spot, tended to close off everything in him.

François had in fact been very strongly persuaded - a kind of certainty

The fact that they had all too obviously failed had a singularly negative effect on him: he was now certain that they had exhausted their last chances of finding the one they were looking for,

that a mysterious 'fateful mistake' had been made on their side, that Laurence was lost and there was nothing they could do about it; that she would be shot by her followers, that now they would only find her dead. This atrocious inner certainty was insidiously taking hold of him, irreversibly investing him, as if it had been secretly imposed on him, in the final analysis, from outside, under a foreign influence, hypnagogically. I

Now, an attempt to curb this destabilising obsession, François had to start exchanging impressions with Erwin Lehnert about their wanderings through the hustle and bustle of life that they had had to navigate in every direction during the last hours of the night that was drawing to a close. Erwin told him how, in a secluded room on the second floor of the villa, he had come across a group of four young people having sex with each other; two of the boys with each other, and the girl sucking the boy's dick as he jerked her off frantically.

Meanwhile, a cassette was playing, very loudly, a recording of an Orthodox mass being sung. He couldn't fail to recognise the girl with the boy, a young Italian film actress, already a star, whose name he couldn't remember at the moment ("... but it will come back to me, and I'll tell you..."). say").

François, for his part recounted how he had met James Vesper Willoughby in the middle of the villa's grand central staircase, and how Willoughby had

having no doubt mistaken him for someone else, he had been apostrophised in these terms: "... I want you to know, my dear, that I greatly admire your new way of painting, and that I spent a whole afternoon, alone, looking at the marvellous canvases at your last exhibition in London, a week ago...

but you should also know that I don't appreciate the incestuous relationship you are pursuing with your own sister, Marion Seymour... and not for any so-called moral reasons - I hope you can imagine - but because I know the extent to which my poor friend José de la Fuentes, of the Spanish Embassy in London, is in love with her, madly in love, that he's going to end up committing suicide out of despair because of her, whereas I know - yes, I say I know, and you know, don't you, that it's perfectly true - that your special relationship with your sister hasn't meant a thing to you or to her for a long time now.... so what do you intend to do about it, tell me..."

- ... Sincerely," replied François, determined to get into the game, to play the part of the man he was not, "very sincerely, I think that Marion Seymour and I are now going to put an end to this... in fact, I can already tell you, it's almost done... and it's quite decided... So you can give your friend de la Fuentes back his hopes, life will soon be able to start again for him and who knows, his loves too... but he'd better be careful, my sister Marion Seymour is an extremely whimsical person, stubborn as can be and at the same time infinitely inconsistent... things aren't going to be easy for him, so he'd better be patient... because if he wants it, he'll get it..."

If you don't mind, this is my personal message to your friend de la Fuentes...

well, you might as well tell him, on my behalf, that if he is who I think he is, I know that he is far from indifferent to me... that he probably has every chance, if he

knows what he's doing...

James Vesper Willoughby had then approached him, and - in the middle of the staircase, while, in the meantime, people

He took him in his arms and gave him a long abrazo, exclaiming: "Thank you!

thank you very much my dear friend... I knew you were a good person, that's why I spoke to you as I just now... yes, you're a great person, really... great, great... I'm infinitely happy to have met you... my house is yours forever, this is your home.... with the same step, I'm going to call London, I'm going to wake him up in the middle of the night, my dear de la Fuentes, and it's going to be a great moment, I know it... ah, how I know it... and you don't know how much I'm looking forward to it... ah, it's a night I'll remember, the night of my dear de la Fuentes, the night of his deliverance... "

While François and Erwin Lehnert were talking amongst themselves, a movement began to emerge, gradually, in the mass of guests, who seemed to find themselves magnetically drained towards a place on the ground floor, no doubt the large living room whose high French windows looked out over the gardens. "... but where are all these people going, what's going on?" asked Erwin Lehnert, whose attention had been aroused by the start of this unspoken upheaval. "We'll see a few moments.

"I absolutely must have a word with you about my disingenuous intermezzo with young James Vesper Willoughby in the middle of the grand staircase... tell me, doesn't it seem worrying to you that - even if he thought I was someone else - he should talk to me about the story of someone - who I was supposed to be myself - who

has a special relationship with her own sister, incestuously... because, following what you yourself told me about Laurence's strange resemblance to my sister Jenny, it seems to me to be a little too apropos... there's the like the call of a destiny secretly on the way to fulfilment,

I don't want to think too much about it... but it seems to me that the mystery is thickening, that we understand less and less what is being prepared for us in the shadows...". The push towards the ground floor, however, was growing stronger, taking with it François and Erwin Lehnert who were following a little in spite of themselves, preoccupied by what they were saying to each other. "It's probably not the right time to talk about all this," replied Erwin Lehnert, who then went on, "... it's already too late, we should probably be getting back... but, at the same time, something tells me that we should go and have a look too, what do they all expect, what do they think is going to happen... you never know, anything can happen on a night like this".

Little by little, they too were carried away, as if in spite of themselves. The large drawing room on the ground floor, where a certain coolness could be felt thanks to the high French windows opening onto the night outside and the restless foliage of the gardens, was lit by a multitude of tall yellow candles, clustered together in clusters, but this did not a certain darkness reigning there, made up of flickering shadows.

Loudspeakers blared out an uninterrupted succession of old songs.

tangos, and the mass of guests spread themselves with difficulty along the walls to free up the centre of the room, whose wooden floor gleamed like - François thought - a

"dark mirror".

"What's going on, what are we waiting for?" Erwin Lehnert finally asked a young red-haired girl who had come to pull up alongside him.

by their side. "How?

Don't you know it? But it's the Tango à Kali", she replied, surprised by Erwin Lehnert's question, or rather by her ignorance of the customs of the place. Afterwards, she kept looking at them furtively, perhaps feeling the urge to strike up a conversation with them but not daring to do so; or perhaps she considered them *suspicious*.

At the back of the living room, an entire wall was taken up by what appeared to be a faithful representation an altar - perfectly painted in trompe l'oeil - which was to have been placed in the middle of the room.

devoted to the active devotion of the Hindu goddess Kali, "the daughter of the mountain", who was shown there in much larger than normal dimensions, naked, painted all in blue, a deep, fiery blue, a mass of red necklaces around her neck, against a black and gold background, and spectrally surrounded by her customary attributes of fear, content and death. A heavy profusion of flowers gathered at her feet, completely covering 1 wooden platform set up there to receive offerings.

From a certain point onwards, and in an increasingly accentuated manner, the clear sound of the very strong rhythmic beats of a whole multitude of bells was added to the original musical background of the tangos, which also continued. With the intervention of the bells and their increasingly accelerated beats, a subtle change seemed to take place in the atmosphere of the salon, which had in the meantime filled up with people.

After about half an hour, and just as the atmosphere in the lounge was beginning to become unbreathable due to the clouds of incense that were being poured in profusion, there was - suddenly - a terrible, blood-curdling scream, and a tall, slender, very long-legged young with a glorious bosom, painted entirely in blue, including her face, burst into the room.

A prodigious leap that brought her to the middle of the salon where, standing still like a statue for a few moments in a hieratic, fascinating pose, she then began to dance in Hindu style, bells on her ankles and wrists, lips slightly parted, performing choreographic figures of great invocatory and hypnotic power, gradually capturing the collective breath of the audience, subdued by her archaic science, captivated by the invisible reels of an abysmal enchantment. What had to be understood at all costs was that it was Kali herself who, incarnated in the being of the unknown young woman, was performing her sacred dance, her nuptial and cosmic dance of instruction, whose vertiginous power of invocation was leading the occult counter-dance of galaxies in motion, of suns and worlds drawn fatally into the aftermath of her tragic exhibition, with devastating over-power, recreating everything anew, in an absolutely new way, *novissima forma*. For is she not Kali, the Mistress of the Great Renewal?

Her dance then intensified and became more operational, turning against herself as she moved into a phase of self-exhibition celebrating her own being, her most secret bodily instances and her breath: she showed her half-open sex, her anus, the back of her throat, moans and sobs that were at once excruciating and ecstatic, revealing the mystery of her very interiority.

the increasingly unbearable spiral of her call for the advent of the one through whom her divine femininity could be fulfilled in terms of her total love, the cosmic and polar *maithuna* leading to the end of one world and the beginning of the next. She wanted him desperately and he had come. And he did.

A superhuman howl was suddenly heard, and a young man appeared, at the end of a leap no less prodigious than that of his predecessor.

who had brought Kali , on the spot, a young man as tall as her, as slender, and all painted black as she was blue. As soon as she entered the dance, it became supremely obscene, exhi

the whole rhetorical body of the act

The young man, with his maximum erection, came to place himself between her breasts, in her mouth and between her buttocks, so that together they could dance the final penetration, which they celebrated by performing the act openly, right to the end, with an intensity in the exercise of self-giving that was immediately suicidal, demented and sacred.

In the end, as they parted, they disappeared through the French windows overlooking the gardens. _____in different directions, running, leaping, getting lost in the night, like shadows, like the mental fantasies of those who have found themselves invited to witness their archaic, sacred, superhuman exhibition.

It should also be remembered that the entire performance was set to a musical backdrop of old tangos, and that the figurations of the dance had never for a moment ceased to be inspired by the original positions of the tango, its secret pathos and the work of violent fascination that are inherent in it.

the unmentionable mystery of the tango. It had indeed been the Tango in Kali.

On the way back to his hotel, devastated by the tragedy he had just witnessed, François tried to remember the title and author of a novel with a sky-blue cover, which he recalled had been published in the eighties by L'Age d'Homme, and where he had first encountered Tango's expression in Kali. But there was nothing he could do, a strange mental barrier

was preventing him from doing so, it was maddening, these memory lapses were assailing him more and more these days. A conspiracy against himself that he was secretly responsible for, for purposes impossible to grasp.

Everything was going to shit.

And then, just as he was about to fall asleep in his hotel room, a flash burst into his head, blinding him, suddenly laying everything bare.

How could he have been so blinded by circumstances, by the fascination of a reality that had been deliberately manipulated? And manipulated by whom, and for what purpose?

Kali's dancer, it was now suffocatingly obvious, was none other than Laurence herself: he'd had her under his thumb, so to speak, and he hadn't been able to realise it, to *recognise* her. The icy despair that had seized him paralysed him, he could no longer move, he could barely breathe. What could he do now? There was nothing to be done, no one at Villa *Margarita* knew the identity of Kali's dancer, let alone where she lived. Without realising what he was doing, he had questioned James Vesper Willoughby's guests at the villa at length, and none of them had the slightest idea about her.

Some had even come to wonder whether she really existed. To ask James Vesper Willoughby himself about Laurence? He knew in advance that Laurence would never talk.

VII

LAURENCE, OR THE MIDDAY HOLOCAUST

François decided not to share with Erwin Lehnert his dazzling intuition of the night concerning identification he had been led to make between Laurence and the 'Kali dancer': however intense his intimate conviction about what had thus appeared to him, he could not ask Erwin Lehnert to agree to something that was not based on the slightest objective proof, on anything.

He was forced to admit to himself that his own conviction was based on nothing more than a kind of inner visionary impulse, which had no material support, no assurance of fact. So he would have to wait a little, see if anything new came along to reinforce his intuition, the persistence of which tormented him continually, tore at his breath, without respite; but he already knew that he would never get rid of it, that it would *mark* him as if *with a red-hot iron*. Tango à Kali", the new Oswaldo Cruz street.

And early that morning, before leaving for their meeting with Father Luis Saenz, they called Tony Richmond in Paris to tell him about the situation on the ground and, above all, to update him on their meeting with Eugène Lambrichs and its decisive outcome. Mute with shock at the news he had just received about the liquidation of Eugène Lambrichs and his new team, Tony Richmond told them, for his part, about the evolution of the

situation in Paris, where things were slowly beginning to settle down in the Rue Oswaldo Cruz affair. Tony Richmond was also certain that they would be reunited with Laurence in the next few days, and that he too felt her presence powerfully Puerto de la Duquesa, "... I'm sure she's there, that without you realising it you're brushing past her in the street...".

The village of Ventador, a true mountain village, was built of hewn stone, with winding streets and tall plane trees; it had icy fountains and lots of flowers in the windows; although, haunted by wood pigeons, it seemed deserted by its inhabitants, except for a few old men hidden away in the corners, already absent, already somewhere else.

The *Comunidad del Sagrado Corazon y Jesús et del Corazon Inmaculado de Maria* occupied an old, three-storey house with an intense ochre façade and a multitude of windows with heavy wooden shutters painted a dark forest brown. The large entrance doors were surmounted by a stone sculpture depicting the Sacred Heart Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary embracing each other, with the community motto *Vestro in numine*, the emblem and the motto in gold, underneath.

Waiting for them on the third floor, where they were led by a bright, peaceful man in dubious overalls, they had to climb a high, steep wooden staircase to get there; As they passed the second floor, they saw, at end of a corridor plunged in just the right religious half-light, two young girls washing windows, who pretended not to notice them.

says.

Dressed all in black, dark-haired with green eyes and a look of extraordinary intelligence, tall, skinny, unshaven and even rather grimy, Father Luis Saenz, Superior of the *Comunidad del Sagrado Corazon de Jesús y del Corazon Inmaculado de Maria*, had already been warned from Madrid by Father Martin Acevedo y Genscher of what they had come there to find and also of what they were going to expect from him in terms of local and other information, moreover, of what he was going to do.

dangerous. After listening attentively to Francisco's summary of the situation, Father Luis Saenz told them that, in fact, since he had already known the gist of the case - thanks to the phone call from Madrid, which seemed to be remarkably exhaustive - he had, since the previous day and on his own initiative, begun his work of providing appropriate information on the places where they were most likely to be found. "...

Before anything else," he said, standing up, "before anything else, we already knew, and even knew quite well, the mysterious young woman you call Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, whom we knew here, to begin with, under a completely different identity... last year she spent four months at Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic, undergoing an intensive detoxification treatment.... as part of her special activities, of which I'm sure you know very little, she had to temporarily join a social group of drug addicts suspected of certain subversive activities, and whose detestable habits she unfortunately also had to adopt.... it was the very services to which she belonged that had sent her to Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's detoxification clinic... then, on leaving there, she came to spend a month with us, here, in the Community... we were able to get to know her better, and I can tell you

that I consider your - our - friend Laurence Mercier-Duvernois to be a person of a very high spiritual class, of incredible strength of character and willpower... she is someone very special, very special, an elite soul, a royal soul... and then there's the matter of someone who has faith, a powerful, uncompromising, living and active Catholic faith, albeit perhaps with an interpretation of our Catholic truths that is often too particular - to say the least... I confess that I am personally seized, and very deeply seized, by the living memory of this heroic young woman, for it is an entirely heroic existence, without ceasing...

and who has turned her own life - and believe me, I know what I'm talking about - into something of initiatory journey... Now you've come to tell me that her life is in danger, that she's being hunted down, and that she's hiding in the region...

that you're there to try and prevent anything happening to him... but if that's the situation, I'm still very surprised...

- and even a little pained -

that she hasn't yet come to see us... but she must have her own reasons, which we can't know... in any case, I think I can already give you some information that I've just received, and which can certainly be of use to you: some local men had observed, and came to tell me it, that three young foreigners, travelling in a big black car, had already exploring for a few days - and they had come to see me.

discreetly, but all the same - in the vicinity of Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic... a bearded blond man driving the car, and two other young men with long hair, dirty jeans and sandals, one with small blue glasses on his nose, and the other with an ugly scar from his left eye to his lips,

They're speaking French to each other... it's definitely the team of killers whose intentions you fear for Laurence... we absolutely must intercept them they can act, I think we're running out of time... I'm extremely worried myself, I don't know what to believe any more...

we are left with God, to whom I address all my pleas for immediate assistance and help... yes, his help alone... it is

In God's time, let us invoke his mysterious mercy in action...
". And having said this, Father Saenz sat down.

Having heard all this, François and Erwin Lehnert abruptly got up and ran - after saying a few words of farewell and thanks to Father Luis Saenz - to their car in the street, with the intention of driving urgently to Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic, where the pending drama was likely to be played out at any moment.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon when they got there, and the heat was terrible, but they were getting used to . There was no-one in the streets, and everything would remain deserted until nightfall. A fresh breeze had just risen, however, and the sky seemed to be slowly darkening.

Skirting the grounds of the clinic, were surrounded by a high wall topped with shards of bottle, they managed to find a place on the side of the hospital's vegetable gardens through which they could sneak into the grounds, which were not so well guarded after all.

In the , the sky had suddenly become overcast, a thunderstorm was perhaps about to break out (ever since they left Paris, thunderstorms had been chasing them).

So they made their way, very carefully, through the deserted, abandoned part of the clinic's grounds, taking cover behind the long rows of oleander bushes with shiny, dark green, almost black leaves, which lined the undergrowth and which they decided to cross.

Now, as they reached the edge of the little wood on the other side, which they had just crossed, Erwin Lehnert exclaimed, suddenly surprised: "... damn, isn't it raining already... I've just felt a drop on my joy... but no, it's not rain... it's not rain!

rain... for 's sake, it's blood... it's coming from, it can't be happening... am I unblocking, or what...".

And as they looked up, they a naked body clinging to the high branches of the tree under which they were standing. A young blonde woman, her long hair hanging down among the leaves that the wind was stirring, her blood dripping slowly.

They didn't dare admit it yet, but when they got her down, François had to recognise Laurence, who had just been shot four times in the chest and was dead.

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Apart from a tattered white shirt, she was completely naked, and had been raped by several people, her sex and thighs still dripping with half-dried sperm; her face was swollen and covered in atrocious bruises, she must also have been violently abused. However, traces of blue paint could still be seen on certain parts of her body, which she hadn't had time to remove, the blue paint from her dance of the previous day, the "Tango à Kali".

Erwin Lehnert knelt down beside her and said, stroking her face: "... she's dead, there's nothing we can do... it's an extraordinary idea those lunatics had, to hang her from the top of a tree... what did they mean by that? what did they mean by that... in any , they can't be far away... maybe we can catch them straight away, let's go... let's leave her, Laurence, there's absolutely nothing more we can do for her...

but for them, yes... we can still do a lot for them... show them

the depths of Hell...".

They laid her naked and tortured on a white slab of carved stone, probably dating from the Neolithic period, which they had just found hidden in the tall grass in the very place where they had taken her down from the tree, and then covered her with a multitude of green branches of oleander, plucked from nearby.

Erwin Lehnert was pale, his whole body seemed to tremble spasmodically, and at the moment he no longer control his grief and bitter shame. Their defeat was total, without appeal or the slightest evasion, a definitive defeat that called into question their very being, that cancelled them out and dishonoured them miserably.

Something had closed over them, like a heavy, dark blanket of lead and darkness. And now their punishment would come soon. A punishment commensurate with their terrible failure. A cosmic, legendary punishment.

His eyes brimming with tears and sobbing, François knelt down beside Laurence's trampled body.

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placed a long kiss of farewell on the half-open mouth of the woman who had just learned the mystery of the noon holocaust; for it was most certainly at noon that she had died; just at noon, *as it should have been*.

Then François started to run too, behind Erwin Lehnert who was already advancing through the tall grass of the meadow facing the wood of doom, having no doubt identified the trail of those they were now seeking with the devastating rage of those who can only satisfy their insanity with the sight of blood flowing in torrents. The blood hunt was on.

However, the tracks in the grass suddenly stopped at an elongated eminence, covered in stiff, pale green grass and surrounded by a double row of old acacia trees, an eminence situated a little forward of the wood. They were standing on the heights of a hill that ended abruptly about a kilometre away, and then descended through a succession of wide wooded terraces towards the road linking Ventador to Castellon el Alto.

François instinctively went to look beyond the double row of acacia trees at the centre of which was the elongated eminence - well over five or six metres high - which must have been a Celtic burial mound;

François thought to himself, "this place is full of Celtic remains, it's strange that no excavations have been undertaken..."

Now, at the base of the tumulus, hidden by abundant bushes full of shade, there was a low opening with a stone surround, like the entrance to a tunnel or underground gallery. Erwin Lehnert, who joined him there, found a Gallic cigarette butt on the ground, just the indication they needed.

... they came this way, that's for sure, and that's how they gained access to the clinic grounds...", he said, adding "... they must have used this gallery to get out on the other side of the hill, now... where they must also have left their car... if we don't catch them there, we'll have to retrace our steps to try and catch up with them on the road to Castellon el 92".

Alto... but by then they'll already have a two-hour head start on us, and that'll be too bad... because we'll then have to chase them, on instinct, along all the roads in Spain... yes, they could just as easily try to climb back up to Madrid, or go through Barcelona on the way home...

".

The gallery, where they could walk upright, with two of them at each other's side, sloped slightly downwards, the walls supported by blackened beams and, from time to time, by slabs of stone, the floor covered in sand and, curiously enough, the whole thing dimly lit by vertical furnaces.

some of them filled in by scree and tangled roots - some of them filled in by scree and tangled roots - some filled in by scree and tangled roots - some filled in by scree and tangled roots

If, by passing under the large oak wood on the hill, it ended up on the other side of the hill, the gallery they were now in must have been at least a kilometre long. Clearly very old, its state of preservation was astonishing; in the past, it must have belonged to an architectural device with a religious function, as they were obviously under an ancient sacred hill.

As they ran towards the middle of the gallery, they heard a sort of muffled, savage growl, while at the same time smelling a pestilential odour wafting through the confined air. About twenty metres further on, the gallery had an interior opening into a fairly large cavity, which a central furnace illuminated with an uncertain light. Here they found themselves in the presence of six piles of earth, some of which looked as if they had been recently disturbed, about thirty centimetres high, a metre and a half wide and about two metres long, from which filtered an unbearable stench of corpses. And as they stared in amazement at the macabre sight before them, a huge black Doberman, its coat smeared with crusts of dried red earth, came snarling towards them, preparing to attack, and François shot it dead; there was nothing else to do. "...

it's the clandestine graveyard of someone from around here, maybe

The clinic itself... we don't have time to deal with it, let's run...
"exclaimed Erwin Lehnert.

The gallery now descended more and more steeply, and they soon saw, at the end, the clearing that heralded the opening into daylight.

But just before the gallery came to an end, they came across a seventh grave, this one on the floor of the gallery itself, on the right-hand side, and which, from the state of the mounded earth covering it, looked very recent, with a few large red stones irregularly placed on top. And, very strangely, a man's leather jacket, very worn, with a large tear down the back.

So they came out onto the hillside, onto a small terrace covered in tall grass, which ended abruptly, so that five metres below it another terrace appeared, stretching into the distance, and below which the road must necessarily have passed. Under the sun's violent rays, the air vibrated in the distance.

On the terrace below them, there was a circular, archaic assemblage of carved stones, some of them standing upright.

And there was the astonishing scene: there were three of them, the very people they had been chasing, François and Erwin Lehnert, Laurence's bloody torturers; they were sitting on the stones of the archaic altar, resting and smoking, talking in low voices to each other.

Throwing themselves flat on their stomachs, François and Erwin Lehnert opened fire without further delay, each firing a full clip. A few moments later, François had to finish off the bearded man with a bullet between the eyes, who was still wriggling around with a mouthful of blood. "That's a good thing done," Erwin Lehnert commented soberly, as he too went to sit on one of the stones of the archaic altar kicking one of the murderers to the ground.

And François replied: "... we're on the Hill of Sacrifice... including Laurence, and the three pieces of rubbish we've just taken down, there's already, 94

with the seven anonymous stiffs in the gallery, eleven corpses on display... yes, that's right, the Hill of Sacrifice...", and, he added suddenly, "...I'm sorry, I don't feel at all well...".

And, running away towards the end of the terrace, François threw himself full length into the grass, shaken by irrepressible sobs of terrible violence. "Dead, dead, dead... she's dead", he cried out and then, banging his head against the ground, began to howl like an animal. There was nothing Erwin Lehnert could do about it, except let him exhaust his atrocious grief to the dregs. But how to exhaust that which, precisely, has no bottom, which opens from below onto the black precipices of non-being, of which François was at that moment experiencing the temporary grip, and the vertigo.

Shortly afterwards, they went down to the road to look for the three killers' car, a big black Volvo, which they set on fire after searching it thoroughly, without much result.

So they left the three stiffs where they were and how they , and retraced the route they had come from, including the gallery, to find their car near the *Serenidad* clinic enclosure, and then hurried off to their hotel in Puerto de la Duquesa, where they collected their belongings and vacated the rooms, before setting off for Málaga.

In all that time, they hadn't exchanged ten words with each other, each of them wrapped up in the secret of their distress and their secret, unavowable, murderous shame, which may never go away.

Before they left Puerto de la Duquesa, they still had to go to *La Madrugada Verde* to find Pedro Zubrowski, to whom they gave a brief account of what had , asking him to communicate the main points by special courier, and exclusively in person, to Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar in Madrid; and also asking him to join Father Luis Saenz in 95.

Ventador, to tell him what had happened, so that he could take the necessary steps to ensure that Laurence's body could be found in time and, if possible, hidden from any possible suspects. Luis Saenz, and his family, those of the Community of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, will not cease to pray for the repose of her soul, until, perhaps, a more brilliant reparation has been officially made.

The mystery of Laurence, of her sacrificed existence, of her occult quest, of her incomprehensible predestination, will from now on only become thicker and thicker; One day, who knows, we might even talk about her sanctity, the abysmal virtues of her existential journey, her spiritual upward spiral; her sacrifice of blood providing support whose importance, extreme testimonial value and terrible part in love will later be measured, the last word of which will remain unknown.

On the other hand, it was also a very good thing to bring Pedro Zubrowski and Father Luis Saenz together in this way, as their meeting considerably strengthened the connective tissue the ongoing conspiracy. *Minutis maculis,* "

Tightly knit" was other motto of the Ventador community.

But we're not going to get off that easily, 'on the cheap': too many things have already been left in the shadows, where they risk rotting themselves, and causing everything around them to rot. We need to look at the problem as a whole, and expose what wasn't, or wasn't good enough. Resolutely, to bring the fire of a renewed awareness to bear, to forcefully draw out what lies beneath the obscurantist and totalitarian cover of the unspoken, our deepest cursed part, the bulwark of our decisive unconsciousness.

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So do we know what we're talking about when, in connection with Laurence's sacrifice, we invoke the "mystery of the midday holocaust"?

We're talking about it, but apparently without knowing what, blindly. Which is not without danger. What in fact is the "midday holocaust", and what is its abysmal secret, what tragic diversions through the Greece of the "great mysteries" does it invite us to take? Wouldn't it be better to be told?

Doesn't the final, complete understanding of Laurence's bloody sacrifice depend on this?

And on the subject of the seven anonymous tombs, hidden in a separate room in the clandestine gallery leading to the Hill of Sacrifice: what role do these unidentifiable tombs below ground really play in the overall structure of the story? What could be the reason for their presence as a counterpoint to Laurence's final murder, given that they are taken into account by François d'Espart when, at the very scene of the action in progress, he picks out the eleven corpses of the day on the Hill of Sacrifice? Is not this crown of corpses, in the darkness, Laurence's true funeral wreath, "

Mistress of Fear, Mistress of the End" as René Daumal would have called her?

On the other hand, in speaking of Father Luis Saenz's meeting with Pedro Zubrowski, a meeting that was to take place - and did take place - through François d'Espart, on the subject of certain measures to be taken following Laurence's assassination, there is mention - as if in passing - of a "conspiracy" that would emerge from this meeting, powerfully strengthened. So what is this conspiracy, what are its aims in fighting and infiltrating, its specific means and weapons, the state of its establishment at the time, its visible and invisible hierarchies and, lastly, its own importance in the context of the action in which - an apparently accidental manner - it made its presence felt?

- And what happens, later on, in the nocturnal background of this 'conspiracy', which is called for - in this case, in a very different way - in the course of the , mentioned once, but in a strategically insidious and provocative place? And what happens later, in the nocturnal aftermath of this 'conspiracy', which - at this point in the story - has been solicited?

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are we not being told all of this? Why aren't we being told all this?

But why? But isn't there a risk that this story will continue beyond its own end, through this "

And isn't that where the final knot of this 'conspiracy' itself lies, in its ultimate operative dimensions? And isn't this perhaps where the final knot of this 'conspiracy' itself lies, in its ultimate operative dimensions?

And then, above all: the appearance of Laurence as a 'Kali dancer "What is it trying to hide, while at the same time providing us with all the elements of its immediate manifestation, at once so highly sacred and so interloped, which in any case will remain as if suspended above its own narrative? Which it illuminates from the outside, but of which it, this immediate manifestation, does not even exist.

can in any way be one? Because it is part of another reality, beyond our reach.

But, the other hand, could it not be that this mysterious appearance of Laurence as a 'Kali dancer' was

- is it not - the hidden epicentre of the whole story, its key to intelligence and appropriation, the sacred word that turns the secret device and opens access to what is forever forbidden, but not to the one who holds precisely this sacred word itself, the masked chosen one of destiny, unknown to all until the very last moment?

However, nothing is said on the subject, no innuendo is intended to clarify, if only by tangent, the intractable opacity that surrounds the episode of "Laurence as a Kali dancer".

"Nothing is missing from the story, but at the same time nothing emerges from the depths that secretly ensure its immediate reality, its telling in action. La

"It goes without saying that the 'Kali dancer' is none other than Laurence.

But the fundamental question remains, which 98

is this: how, and under what conditions, which are at the very least unmentionable, did Laurence become 'Kali's dancer'?

Isn't that we need to know, and what we don't know, that the story itself, as it stands, doesn't give us the last word? And isn't that a shame?

And then there is the incomprehensible funeral ritual of hanging Laurence's tortured body from the top of a tall leafy tree,

There is a decisive instance in the story about which nothing is said, the unsaid once again prevailing over the revelation that would have untied everything, because everything is linked, very closely linked, to the mystery of this ritual staging, the motives for which escape us. Laurence's dead, bloodied body, tied to the highest branches of a tree on the edge of the wood, is the destabilising figure around which everything revolves, and which prevents us from participating in it consciously.

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IX

FRANÇOIS D'ESPART

CONTINUES HIS CLEANING BY

VACUUM

This novel, as we have seen, is like life itself, with shadowy areas coexisting with areas of a certain clarity, the latter, more often than not, disturbed by the fact of this coexistence itself, bubbling, adventurous, full of perils. But that's the way it is. For it is perhaps this fundamental ambiguity of the present narrative that provides it with its own vital, genetic thickness, its highly compromising commitment to a certain *combat*.
final of ours.

But let's get back to the story. Having vacated their hotel rooms in Puerto de la Duquesa, François d'Espart and Erwin Lehnert set off again, in their black Mercedes, stopping only in Málaga, still under a sun that would drive you crazy. When you're in Spain, you have to learn to live with the sun, and it's a tough learning curve.

The very state of their extreme fatigue contributed greatly to the fact the mortal tension which had kept them mobilised to excess over the last few days was beginning to decline, giving way, in them, to

kind of daze, white drunkenness, like a strange splitting of the self.

François, for his part, claimed that he was completely, and *very effectively*, plunged into darkness, that from the moment he had found himself in front of Laurence's naked, tortured body, lying dead on the ground at his feet, everything around him seemed to *have turned black*, from the blinding whiteness of the day, which he now saw as a certain dirty black, to the walls of the houses and the faces of the people, everything seemed to him to be tinted black, and everything was black, too, in him-100

The darkening of the world around him responded to the darkening of his heart, which now seemed irremediable. For François, the final reign and domination of blackness had just begun; everything had been handed over to blackness, which continued to intensify its presence, its action, its general stranglehold on the whole of the visible reality of this world. And yet it was in Malaga that this evil had really broken out in him, had taken on its disquieting reality at every moment.

So François told Erwin Lehnert that, for the time being, he wanted to stay in Malaga alone for a while, and asked him to go up to Madrid to return the Mercedes, and then to Paris, where he would be returning later. And that once in Paris, he should go immediately to see Tony Richmond, to give him a detailed account of what had happened. That he wanted his Malaga address to remain unknown to everyone for the duration of the penitential stay he intended to make there.

— ... of course, yes, there's nothing to stop you staying in Malaga for a month if you want to... but I'd like to be sure that, alone, here in Malaga, you won't be tempted to do anything stupid... I don't want to say any more, you'll understand that I'm thinking of an irredeemable act... Erwin Lehnert dared to step forward.

— ... you mean I'm not going to fuck myself? No, that's out of the question, for the moment at least", replied François, who continued, looking him straight in the eye, "... because you should know, I still have a few scores to settle, which were left unfinished at Paris... and there you can also help me, if you want to... and then I'll have to honour a promise I made to someone who is infinitely dear to me, the only person in the world who still interests me in terms of affection... deep, living affection.... then it'll be something else, I can't guarantee anything... then I'll regain my freedom, I'll act as I wish... towards myself, and towards everything... I'm sorry to have to tell you these things, but what can I do otherwise... listen to me carefully,

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Erwin: the time has surely come for me to confess something that is weighing heavily on my mind... it's difficult, very difficult to do so, because in letting myself do it I will also have to admit that I have hidden something important from you during the crazy days we have spent together since we arrived in Spain... So here it is: the night when, at the Villa *Margarita*, at James Vesper Willoughby's house in Puerto de la Duquesa, we witnessed together the supernatural apparition of the 'Kali dancer', I finally understood that she was none other than Laurence herself.... but I realised it too late, as we had already returned to the hotel... so there was nothing more to be done at that point... and the last doubt that might still have remained in my mind as to Laurence's identification with the mysterious 'Kali dancer' was dispelled.

The 'Kali dancer' feeling of the previous day was dispelled when, having approached Laurence's naked body dead at my feet, I immediately noticed the traces of blue paint she still had on her, which she had probably not yet had time to remove.

yes, now I know and I'm telling you, 'Kali's dancer' was none other than Laurence...

- ... ah, how strange all is, how very strange...", Erwin Lehnert replied, visibly disturbed by François' confession, "... yes, how very strange all this is...

because, you see, I too had my suspicions on this very subject, and I had them immediately, because as soon as I saw her arrive, all painted blue, hieratic, brilliant, leaping like a true goddess, a flash occurred in me, and I thought I recognised her with certainty... and that, therefore, long before you did, because, I repeat, I thought I recognised her right then and there, and not like you did when we got back to the hotel... only I didn't want to - I didn't dare - talk to you about it, fearing that, if I was wrong, I would have inflicted on you too bitter, too heartbreaking a disillusionment...

but now I realise that I was wrong... if 'd just

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If we had really realised - if we had really let ourselves be convinced by our intuition at the time - about *X identification*, that it was Laurence who was hiding under the sacred guise of 'the dancer of Kali', we could undoubtedly have intercepted it in time, avoided everything that happened the next day, changed the final course of what at the same time - we now know - was going to happen.

I'll never forgive myself, and that's why I don't even think of asking you to forgive me... I, who never hesitate about anything, had to hesitate at that very moment... to hesitate so that the inconceivable misfortune that we know about could make its way in, digging into the invisible the furrow of death that was only asking for it... because death is always asking... it's

So you see, I've found the courage to tell you all this now, and it's on the basis of this disqualifying confession that we're going to say our goodbyes... so we'll see each other again soon in Paris, hope... you made a commitment to me... farewell my captain, and may God keep you".

Left on his own in Malaga, François took his drinking quite seriously for the first few days, but soon gave up, disgusted by the sheer vanity of this procedure, devoid of any meaning other than that of a falsely suicidal use of one's own uselessness, always leading back to the same starting point, a restart of the same non-starting over and over again. Whores, drugs? Let's even talk about it. He didn't even know they existed.

But in the end he found what he needed: he went to the beach early in the morning and stayed there, exposing himself to the insane sun of the blinding white days of Malaga - which he saw, however, all tinted black - until around six o'clock in the evening, enduring with a will beyond - or rather below - all will, the atrocious, devastating torture of the sun, the slow cooking in the dark of the day

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day after day in the face of the work of this destroying light on him and in him, forgetting everything, until the final cretinisation, losing awareness of everything, being consciously dissolved in the terrible vitriol of his solar ordeal, until the complete annihilation of himself. But isn't that what it was looking for?

?

So that one day, in a daze, he would hobble onto the plane to Paris, thus saving himself from the voluntary torture of the crematorium in which he would have to die.

During his stay in Malaga, he had lived like a madman, like a blind man, like a martyr without a god or mystic atonement, *like a dog*.

Once he was back in Paris, where Erwin Lehnert had already been for a month, François played dead, hiding from everyone, even Tony Richmond. He had already drawn up his plans: he absolutely wanted to do it, too, to finish off General Q+++ H+++. The outstanding accounts of the murder on Rue Oswaldo Cruz and its aftermath, including torture and murder of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, 'his Laurence', would thus be completely cleared up. But General Q++ knew what he had to do.

H+++ wasn't going to be easy at all, on the contrary.

And because he was so keen on his business, wanting it to succeed at all costs, and to succeed completely, he also knew that he had to pay the price: not the slightest adventurous approximation, and even more importantly not the slightest mistake, everything would have to be carried out rigorously according to a long-thought-out plan, perfected down to the last detail. A nickel operation, a "major operation", a simple yet supremely sophisticated operation. But at the same time he was convinced in advance that there was no way he could fail to pull it off, that "it was written".

He had put too much into it, too much of himself, that part of himself that, secretly wounded to death, was desperately fighting to give himself a new way out, a new chance at life. And all of this was fuelled, constantly exacerbated from below by the consuming fire of the desire to avenge Laurence, to do justice to the

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intolerable memory of his body trampled and dirtied, of his soul cast back into the darkness of the merciless defeat that will have been his in

Her defeat, and his too, without redemption or return. A shameful, dirty, useless defeat, an unforeseen defeat.

A defeat that came about through a mistake of fate. For François, it was a total commitment to himself, and he knew exactly what that meant. François intended to redeem himself by the very perfection of his vengeance, so that no one would get away with it.

And if, on his return to Paris, François had refrained from contacting Tony Richmond, despite the very strong desire he felt to do so, it was he did not want to involve Richmond in any way in the matter his planned liquidation of General Q+++ H+++, the risks of which he was well aware, and in particular those he was incurring from the special services.

French

themselves;

who were very

They certainly had other intentions towards him, and were not keen that the acute diplomatic incident of his political assassination in Paris should suddenly cast an even darker shadow over the current state of Franco-Syrian relations, which were already too badly damaged a series of regrettable blunders on both sides.

Indeed, according to direct sources, François was aware that the French services had - temporarily - reduced or even suspended - their unspeakable pressure on General Q+++.

H+++ , no doubt to better organise their game, while discreetly warning him that the Israeli external services were in the process of trying to mount an operation to physically neutralise him personally, in Paris itself, believing - rightly or wrongly - that it was the hard political line that he was imposing on Damascus - himself and the political and economic groups - that was the cause of his death. in its obedience - which was the main obstacle to a possible opening - or even

This is the kind of "rapprochement" between Israel and Syria that could unblock the situation in Lebanon and, by extension, in the Middle East as a whole.

It was to François's advantage, in this situation of subterranean crisis in the hands of Israel's external services 105

links, precisely because he intended to blame them, if he himself succeeded in his own coup against the general
Q+++ H+++ , the fact of murderous attack against him, shifted onto the Israeli services the suspicions that the French services would not otherwise fail to bear on him, not being unaware of his intentions or doubtless of the true content of the action he had undertaken to carry out in Spain (and in which, through the intermediary of Erwin Lehnert, an agent of the SM, they had even participated, without having to acknowledge it).

Was François himself being manipulated? But by consciously allowing himself to be manipulated, was he not dialectically manipulating his manipulators? This is a twofold question that will have to be taken up again one day, at a later date, and explored in greater depth, and which is bound to take us quite a distance from our starting point; but we'll see when the opportunity arises, when the situation has really matured.

In the meantime, we still have to deal with the present and move the story forward. Let's just say that outside François's immediate circle of accomplices, the news of his death

Laurence Mercier-Duvernois had not yet arrived in Paris, and things being what they had become, it would now take months - even years - for her - this news - to arrive, if ever.

By focusing his attention exclusively on General Q+++ H+++, François had created a kind of barrier to his own existence. Unwilling - or unable, because he had been forbidden to leave Paris - to leave his own country, he had set up a sort of barrier in front of his own existence.

He and those close to him were surrounded by a number of draconian security measures, leaving nothing to chance and no room for the slightest error of management: the protective measures put in place by the Embassy, or rather by its own services, were in principle absolutely foolproof.

François, however, was relentless in his search for this loophole, and once he had found it, he rushed straight in, without 106

waste a single day. Because, if he was to be able to use it operationally, it would require a terrifying amount of work, to be completed in what would have to be considered a very short space of time, with unforeseen events being able at any moment to get in the way and interfere with what had already been done ("once bitten, twice shy").

This loophole opened up in the very vicinity of the private mansion that General Q+++ H+++ lived in Neuilly, and François had not failed to intercept it, and it had taken him ten days or so to be able to put it in a position where it could be used immediately by him. In the end, it was his neighbourhood that was to prove fatal to the general Q+++

H+++.

Every morning, just before ten o'clock, a large armoured Mercedes would drive out of the gates of General Q+++ H+++’s private mansion in Neuilly - which was under constant surveillance by several armed security working in two-hour shifts, day and night - and drive off - with General Q+++ H+++ in the back seat.

Q+++ H+++, his three armed bodyguards at his side - and closely followed by another car also packed with armed bodyguards, towards the Syrian embassy on rue Vaneau in Paris.

But it also happened that, in front of the private mansion in Neuilly occupied by General Q+++ H+++, on other side of the street, there a religious establishment of recluse nuns, a place isolated from everything, and as quiet as could be, No one was ever to be seen, and no nuns appeared at any time in the courtyard or in the gardens, with their sun-drenched, regal but always deserted paths, where only the sound of mass, regularly repeated day and night, marked the passage of time. The convent was a fortress of silence and absence from the world, and its well-kept secrets were bound to create a certain unease in the neighbourhood, a certain implicit, irrational fear that cast shadows. So the quiet convent of recluses was not without having given birth, around it, to a certain

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A latent climate of fear, which perpetuated itself, and which never ceased to create a certain amount of unrest in the neighbourhood, which was therefore rather unfavourable to him, and sometimes even manifested it.

No one ventured onto the pavement in front of the convent, no one wanted to have anything to do with the nuns who were enclosed there.

It was behind the perimeter wall of this convent, lined on the inside with bushy, tangled rosebushes, overflowing with red roses, that on the morning he had chosen for himself, François found himself

He fired the first round directly at General Q+++ H+++’s car as it passed through the hotel’s exit gates, and a second round a few moments later at the following car, which was already coming up behind the first.

After the two cars had exploded quick succession, a red and yellow blaze had immediately risen into the air, engulfing the garage and the very facade of the hotel, whose bay windows also exploded in a single blast. And then there was a great silence in the sunny, empty street that seemed to have no end in sight.

But François had already fled across the inner courtyard and the empty gardens behind the establishment towards the Boulevard Charles de Gaulle, where he quickly got lost in his own car in the heavy traffic that was climbing over Paris at this hour.

Of course, to obtain the final liquidation of the Q++ general

H+++ , he had to go through some real carnage, but "whatever takes", that’s all.

With the liquidation of General Q+++ H+++ , François’ mournful list of those responsible for and directly involved in the double murder Alexia Champetier and Laurence Mercier-Duvernois was closed. But other tragic deadlines now awaited him, the imminence of which he had no fear whatsoever, and which, on the contrary, he would have liked to be able to accelerate even further.

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any more. Because he couldn’t wait to get it over with, to get everything over and, above all, himself. The suicidal obsession was, in fact, gripping him more than ever. That was the real danger.

Once out of Neuilly, François hurried to send a press release to AFP, from a so-called "political party".

counter-strategic commando" of the "Jewish Combatants of France" who, while taking full responsibility for the murderous attack on General Q+++ H+++, also provided precise details of the action that had just been taken, so that they assured him of its authenticity. This attack was justified by the "Jewish fighters of France" as "an act of terrorism".

General Q+++ H+++s "criminal and pathological anti-Israeli relentlessness", just like all the terrorist actions souterraines, for which the latter would have been the "central political leader

The "Jewish Combatants of France" claimed that their action would continue and that they would extend their objectives to France and Europe. The "Jewish fighters of France" stated that their action would continue and that they would extend their objectives throughout France and Europe. It's easy to imagine the mess this statement must have caused, even within the Jewish community in France, which seized the opportunity to accuse Likud networks of having manipulated - or even hiding behind - the "Jewish Combatants of France" commando, which "only existed circumstantially" and which, in their action, "... had no intention of going on".

committed only themselves". For the time being at least, François was covered up and off the hook.

On the other hand, I think would be really exciting if we could get a account of how François had been able to invest - and invest in the future.

taking less than ten days to do so - the religious establishment across street from General Q+++ H+++s private mansion in Neuilly, to the point where he was able to use it as the very basis for his local legal action,

against Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's manipulated former lover.

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But the fact is that a certain prohibition on talking about it still prevents any approach to what François might well have done to secure, within religious establishment in Neuilly, from which he had been able to bring to a conclusion the action he had taken against General Q+++ H+++, the complicity that he had not lacked at the decisive moment.

For, without personal involvement of certain elements from within the religious establishment in question, François would never have been able to pull off his coup. But it should also be noted that the regular hierarchy of the community had been kept completely out of the loop by the small group of conspirators that Francis had been able to mobilise clandestinely in the service of his special action.

However, as we are formally denied the right talk about it, let's not, but it's a pity for the intimate continuity of this story.

I would have very much liked to have been able to dwell, even if only very hastily, on fabulous episode of the night when François had succeeded in establishing his clandestine contact with the person who, from inside the convent itself, had set up, to help him in his undertaking, the small support group on the spot which had given him the unexpected chance, when the day came, to be able to act as he had done. A night when he had once again had to go all out, stretching his courage to the point of insanity, and *it had worked*. But never mind.

Finally, after two weeks when he had gone to relax, to free himself from the deadly embrace of Paris, at the home of his sister's friends in Monaco, François was back home again, in the hamlet of

Boileau, and ready to take up the collar again, unable, by its very nature, to stand still.

Enraged that he had not been able to find Erwin Lehnert, who had been sent by the SM on a mission to the French embassy in Bucharest before François returned from Malaga, he was finally able to consider himself in a position to renew contact with Tony Richmond, not unaware at the same time of all the reproaches he was incurring from the latter for 110

the intolerable delay he had taken in deciding to come and see him. Even though there would have been powerful reasons to apologise for this, but they were unavowable; for he could not tell Tony Richmond that if he had not seen him during all that time, it was so as not to compromise him in the action he was then organising against General Q+++ H+++. Tony Richmond certainly wouldn't have appreciated very much if François had been able to show him some consideration, to "spare" him, when he himself would have liked nothing better than to be involved on the front line, at his side, as he had not failed to do even before François left for Spain.

So when François finally tried to find him, he was extremely unhappy to learn that Tony Richmond was in hospital, trying to recover from a rather difficult emergency operation, an intestinal occlusion with infectious after-effects; François therefore rushed to visit him at the Val de military hospital, where he found him rather weakened, looking very bad, but with "an iron morale", as he said himself. Of course, Tony Richmond had always been a hard man. But now *he had surrendered*.

François felt quite terrified, having realised at the Val de Grâce that what had so incomprehensibly kept him away from Tony Richmond their strange separation was not the reasons he had given him, but his own.

It was not the spurious, external reasons he had given himself to excuse it, but the much deeper, much more worrying feeling that Tony Richmond was undergoing the ordeal of an illness which, dangerous as it was in itself, was in reality only the visible part of a probation of which Tony Richmond was probably unaware himself, and which - this probation - was in fact the cause of his death.

was an abysmal part of him, a call to death and resignation from himself, a call to self-destruction coming from the outside but which he had mysteriously and despite himself

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made his own for as long as the ordeal in question was going to last. That he had been its unwitting accomplice.

Now, when someone is undergoing such a decisive probation, when he is tragically taking a turning point in his existence where everything will secretly be put back into play, it is a fact that he must be left alone, that he must be "left alone", that it is inadvisable to approach him, to disturb him on the edge of the abyss where he is unconsciously standing, like a sleepwalker, waiting for his final fate to be decided.

For there is a great mystery here: this dramatic ordeal never comes on its own; it is always unconsciously *called for by the person who has to undergo it*, and who thus makes it come so that it takes on the task of resolving - with him, through him, against him, for him - a vital problem that is beyond him, and whose demands he can no longer control in the waking state, "reasonably".

So it was the waves emitted by Tony Richmond himself at the height of his ordeal that had prevented François from seeking him out when he shouldn't have, his own negative waves of prohibition, of forced distancing, of self-isolation that had been used to block out the desire that François could have

to find Tony Richmond as soon as he returned from Spain. François didn't know if Tony Richmond himself was aware of all this, but he had just realised that in some way Tony Richmond had understood him, because he hadn't done anything - he'd just done something - to him.

contrary to his fears - not the slightest reproach for his inexplicable defection to her.

Why had Tony Richmond had to go through this secret ordeal in his life, so atrociously dark? François didn't know that either, nor did he really want to know, except from the moment Tony Richmond told him.

But he himself remained torn, deeply saddened by what he had just understood about Tony Richmond, who remained 112

his only true friend in this world (along with, perhaps, Erwin Lehnert, but with Erwin Lehnert it was a relationship that had only just been established and had only just undergone X

fireproof).

François had also just realised that he had to be careful, very careful with Tony Richmond, who was still - and this François felt was a *warning* - only partially recovered from what he had had to go through recently, and in what intractable, mortal solitude devoid of everything.

And because of this, François knew that from he had just understood about Tony Richmond, who was being held in his peaceful room at the Val de Grâce, a new task lay before him. imposed: to unravel the mystery of what had happened to Tony Richmond, of what had risen up in his path with enough insurmountable will to do harm that he had had to resort to the abysmal therapy of his direct confrontation with death, because what had his illness really been, and, above all, what had chosen to take over his life?

What is behind it, if a *hidden confrontation* with death?

So let's be clear: François had known all without knowing it, and had acted on , unconsciously. As usual.

The room Tony Richmond occupied at the Val de Grâce was spacious, bright, bathed in a strange tranquillity, and full of flowers.

- ... I can feel you admiring my roses," he said to François, with a strangely luminous smile. And then :

"... you see, it's all Lise... you remember Lise, don't you... she was at my place the morning you came back from Laurence's booby-trapped villa in Marne-la-Vallée... just think, old chap, she often talks to me about you, insists on asking me about you...

Once the preliminaries were over, Tony Richmond obliged François to tell him the whole story of the events he had had to face in Spain, and then in Paris during the liquidation of the general.

Q+++ H+++ - with great emphasis 113

on the latter, which he himself, he said, had considered to be a "...

brilliant counter-terrorism operation" - only for him to confide in her that under the code name of the confidential "dark mirror" operation - which had already been used, on the same subject, by the services concerned, prior to the murder of Alexia Champetier - an active file was currently being processed, at a higher level, both at the ST

and the DGSE. At the same time, the Prime Minister's private office and the Elysée Palace were demanding to be kept informed.

We are always aware of the pending developments in this case, which Tony Richmond himself was responsible for keeping up to date.

It was, in fact, a "frozen file", for which operational follow-up was envisaged for the time being, but for which updating was maintained as a top priority.

Tony Richmond was obviously aware of the double liquidation Eugène Lambrichts and General Q+++ H+++, but, although he knew that these were operations carried out alone by François - with, as he also knew, the personal support of Erwin Lehnert, at least for the first of these two operations - he had contented himself. When he was asked to update the "dark mirror" file, he was content to record everything with the standard disclaimer that "confidential investigations were underway identify those directly responsible for these clandestine physical neutralisation operations".

Tony Richmond, on the other hand, was very concerned -

This was the result - after the event - of the attempt François had made to 'unhook' himself in Malaga, an attempt which, it seemed, he had not been able to understand at all, either the 'secret reasons' or the procedures François had used on the spot to achieve his personal self-subversion, (if, in fact, for François it had been anything other than a psychopathological plunge into himself, a self-therapy of healing and forgetting at the level of the unconscious, and even of consciousness).

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at that point - already too much in demand, from him, who had seen too much, and who 'couldn't take it any more'; and if there had been any 'secrecy', which is still rather doubtful, because everything had happened, then, in broad daylight, in every sense of the word; and

that, of all that had happened in Malaga at the time, it would be better if it were not remembered at all, if it were all covered over by oblivion, definitively).

On the other hand, according to the confidences made to François by Tony Richmond at the Val de Grâce, it would also appear that the American intervention in the dangerous course taken by Operation Dark Mirror after the physical elimination of Alexia Champetier had been far more important than initially thought, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois and Alexia Champetier had clandestinely maintained close relations with the American special services, both at the level of the American embassy in Paris and through direct contacts made by Alexia Champetier in the United States itself during her frequent trips there under cover of her so-called professional activities "in information technology".

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paradoxically, it was at the behest of the French services that Alexia Champetier travelled to the United States, where she was required to carry out important missions on their behalf, and missions that she actually carried out, with results that could not have been more positive. These two knew a lot about double-dealing, "they were champions".

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As for James Vesper Willoughby, Tony Richmond was absolutely certain that he was not the man he made himself out to be, which was just a cover pose he had gone to great lengths to create for himself. In reality, he was the resident of the British MI6, authorised to control the whole of the nerve centre between Algiers, Tangiers and Gibraltar, and who worked in close liaison with the Spanish and American services present on the spot. a long-standing, inexplicable and tenacious hatred between James Vesper Willoughby - the wealthy

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He was a notorious faggot, alcoholic and drug addict - to the French services, who, incidentally, were very grateful to him. After all, it was in his own home, the Villa *Margarita*, that Laurence Mercier-Duvernois' incredible display as a 'Kali dancer' had taken place, which must have had a very specific, but no less strongly hidden meaning that night. Which we must also decide to decipher one day. Yes, we must.

- ... and, what's more, James Vesper Willoughby is also a good friend your own brother-in-law, Howard Bedell-Jamieson... the husband of your sister Jenny...", Tony Richmond was to add, and, he was to continue, "... as he must surely have heard of you at the Bedell-Jamieson house, he knew a lot more about you than you knew about him...".

which might explain his strange outburst about you and your sister, having mistaken you for someone else while at the same time dropping a rather dramatic hint...

no doubt he had a specific goal in committing himself to it, but what it was... remains to be seen... although all this may no longer be of the slightest importance...".

It was also on the afternoon of his first long visit to Tony Richmond, at the Val de Grâce, that François learned that the enigma of the impressive quantity of suitcases assembled, one on top of the other, in the basement of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's villa in Marne-la-Vallée had been solved, after the premises had been searched, by the ST inspectors in charge of the case: they were some OAS archives, stored there by Laurence's father, Admiral Ludovic Mercier-Duvernois, who, many years before, as a young naval captain, had had very important responsibilities in the politico-military organisation fighting against the Gaullist regime of the time, in the final years of the end of the Algerian war.

Tony Richmond said he was astounded by the number of leading political figures who, in view of the 116

of these archives, had secretly compromised themselves with the OAS, from a future - at that time - President of the Republic and some of his future ministers to the leading elements of the Gaullist regime itself who were betraying it from within, betraying which ranged from concealed complicity to direct activist participation. "The whole of the Senate", said Tony Richmond, "the whole of Christian Democracy and the whole of the pro-American Right stood in the shadows behind Bastien Thierry and his henchmen... at Le Petit Clamait, only Divine Providence was still able to save the old General... whose solitude, in fact, always been terrifying... whatever was said about him, I came to believe - on the basis, I repeat, of these archives - that the French had in fact never followed the "man of storms", that he had always governed against the implicit majority of the French, that he had always had to impose his revolutionary ideas in a tragically forced manner, on the razor's edge... yet another somnambulist of genius, a marginal inspired... the transcendental tool of a certain Secret France, whose real power had never been more than an occult power...

a long subterranean tradition in French history, as deeply rooted as the tradition of the party of the foreigner...

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However, to conclude their day's discussions - as it was getting late and dinner was being brought in - Tony Richmond began to make a series of rather incomprehensible remarks.

- at the moment - on the subject of a possible launch - and, moreover, perhaps in the very near future - a special political and strategic intelligence structure of a size, scope and openness".

The Matignon government and the Elysée Palace, as part of coexistence process, were fully involved in the project, and Tony Richmond himself was to take full formal responsibility for it, with no destabilising counterweight lurking in the shadows. "I'll be the only boss,

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reporting only to the President of the Republic, and then only in strict confidence", he added.

In fact, without saying so explicitly, it was clear that Tony Richmond saw this "special politico-strategic intelligence structure for opening up Europe on a grand-continental level" as the crowning achievement - so to speak - of his career, and the "beginning of a new era" for France's grand-continental European political commitments, as it was already secretly ready to "go on the offensive, following its great occult predestination".

Of course, Tony Richmond was counting totally on François's effective participation in this new revolutionary venture, for which he seemed to be taking immediate operational responsibility, and François, not being able to do anything else, agreed to play along. Which was surprising when

even a little François, was the scale of the material and political/administrative resources that Tony Richmond's project already seemed to have at its disposal: there had to be something fishy going on, it really couldn't be any other way.

And, in any case, there was implicit proof that a new turning point had just been taken, in the shadows, by coexistence in the process of moving into an unprecedented, unsuspected phase of its ongoing evolution, an evolution, from now on, of the most unpredictable kind: everything was becoming possible.

They had also agreed that from now on they would see each other every two or three days, François having finally found his way to the Val de Grâce, and then, when Tony Richmond was discharged from hospital, that they would even spend a month together near Nice, where Tony Richmond had a family property; that they would spend the month of Tony Richmond's convalescence together.

Just as we were about to leave, François remembered that he wanted to ask Tony Richmond something about Erwin Lehnert. Namely, what Erwin Lehnert had been doing in Bucharest. "This story
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seems most twisted", he added. To which Tony replied that, as far as he knew, Jacques Chirac was there at his own request. "... he left in a hurry, as if he had the Devil on his heels... well, maybe he did, I've got a little idea about that... when I say he had the Devil on his heels, I'm not far from the truth, I'm burning... I'm even burning hot... because that's what it's all about, in the end... I don't know if you know what I mean, but I do... this mission of Erwin Lehnert's, sent by the SM to Bucharest, smells of trouble... in fact, I think that about ten days ago he had three of his men come there, discreetly, as reinforcements... it's a very un-Catholic scheme, I can feel it... and I'd even go so far as to say that it's a blatantly un-Catholic scheme!

satanic... I won't insist, I risk giving the impression that I'm unblocking...

when in reality... well, never mind...".

By the time he left the Val de Grâce it was already almost dark, and François was lost in conjecture about the meaning of Tony Richmond's last words, about what he might have meant when he spoke of Erwin Lehnert's secret mission to Bucharest as a "downright satanic scheme". He had a little idea about that too, but he didn't dare say it to himself. For that would have meant giving in too much to the supernatural, to "stories from the other world", which was repugnant enough to him to refuse even to think about it ("

it's not done").

He thought of Tony Richmond with great trepidation.

They had spent a long afternoon together, they had talked about many important things, Tony Richmond had revealed to him some of his most secret and cherished projects, but there was nothing to be done, François realised that he had not been able to find, that he had not been able to *recognise* the Tony Richmond he had become accustomed to over the years: that although he was apparently the same, he had changed profoundly, something had changed in him, in the most intimate part of his being.

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hidden from himself. So François had resigned himself to understanding that Tony Richmond had arrived - was in the process of arriving - at the end of a mysterious evolution in himself, which, having had a moment of acute crisis - of which his illness itself had only been the visible part, *made visible* - was now on the point of being resolved, giving way to what had to be considered as new moult, his 'new confidential identity'.

". What could have happened with Tony Richmond? This was the question that was tormenting François, and one to which, to his extreme dismay, he could find no answer at the moment; not the slightest beginning of an answer. On the other hand, François was also wondering whether this confidential change of identity that

was not also an occult sign belonging to the constellation of inexplicable, veiled facts that formed the outer shell, the protective layer of the very mystery that lay at the centre of the two murders - that of Alexia Champetier and that of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois - which never ceased to impose their presence, to maintain in continuity their bloody provocation, their sealed affirmation?

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JENNY'S "BIG FINAL SECRET

On the evening when François had late left the Val de Grâce hospital, where he had had such a long talk with Tony Richmond, he felt like going to dinner, alone, at Lipp's, again sacrificing one of his old habits. At Lipp's, he was given a table at the back of the room, so that he found himself sitting alongside a group of young people - three boys and a girl - who were having a good time.

of whom he happened know one, the very man who was sitting on the bench next to him, Charles Champetier, a more or less right-wing journalist, editor-in-chief of a prestigious cultural and political combat magazine, or "

metapolitics", as they say.

As they exchanged a few casual words over dinner, François was surprised to learn that Charles Champetier was the first cousin of Alexia Champetier, about whom he learned that she had had obsessive mystical and spiritual preoccupations and had even belonged to an occultist research group.

based in Lausanne, Switzerland, *Les Veilleurs du Matin*, and for the past two years had been making frequent spiritual retreats in a Benedictine convent in Brittany.

They agreed to meet again soon, so that Charles Champetier could show François a series of photos of Alexia Champetier among a group of participants in one of his Benedictine retreats in Brittany.

Charles Champetier seemed outraged by the unconscious and obscene publicity that had been unleashed and maintained by the media and the filthy jackals who run them, around the dramatic death of his cousin, Alexia Champetier, and François even thought he understood that Champetier had

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he was aware of it or not, it doesn't matter - he must have been deeply in love with her, obsessed as he seemed to be by her memory, despite the fact that he was married and had a family.

Alexia Champetier must have been an exceptional young woman, with an unusual character, a gracefulness and a power of presence and personal radiance that were quite unusual, and whose aura had survived her disappearance from this world. François had not expected this shadowy reunion, and he was deeply disturbed by it, his old wounds rekindled by the emergence of the suddenly close figure, once again, of the woman who had pursued him so much and prevented his life from continuing as before. Because, deep down, François hadn't been able to separate Alexia Champetier and Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, the death of one calling unceasingly for the death of the other, in the same atrocity, in the same movement of self-blame and haunting distress.

Whatever he did, moreover, it seemed to François, and that evening perhaps even more so, that he would never again be able to escape from the aftermath of these two murders, in which he had been so closely involved, and which had so strongly marked his life, who knows what strange intention of destiny.

However, the killers in Calle Oswald Cruz and in the grounds of Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic in Castellon el Alto, Spain - those who ordered the hit and those who carried it out - François had already made them pay with their lives. The task of justice that he had set himself had been accomplished, so all that remained was to keep the promise he had made to his sister Jenny, that he would go and see her before deciding to end his own life - if that was what he wanted to do.

he really wanted to - so that she could tell him her "big final secret", a commitment he could not possibly consider evading.

Because, in truth, François, the only thing he was really interested in was locking himself up at home and getting a 122

bullet in the mouth. He had even come up with a variation on his plans for himself as a suicidal man: that he would not do it, as he had first thought, at his home in the hamlet of Boileau, but by getting lost on a misty October day somewhere in the heart of the Vosges forest.

But for the moment, he had to go and see Jenny. He might as well make up his mind away, but Jenny was still staying with a friend in Biarritz for ten days or so. Why did Jenny disappear to Biarritz every August?

In fact, François didn't have much left to do, or even, suddenly, anything at all. He just stayed at home, waiting for time to pass.

Now, strangely, Laurence's image had completely faded from his consciousness, and it had become impossible for him not only to see her, but also to think about her.

to see her again, inwardly, as he had known her one afternoon last July, in Via Oswaldo Cruz, and even lying dead at his feet, naked, naked again, in the gardens of Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic in Castellon el Alto, but he couldn't even really think about her any more, a metapsychic barrier having been surreptitiously built up

- He saw in it - and no doubt with some reason - an indecipherable sign of the subterranean evolution his feelings for her; and even more, a sign of the state of their lovemaking, in the invisible if not in eternity itself, in the 'beyond'.

Nothing positive was coming out of all this, and his anxiety was growing all the time, and all the more disturbing because he couldn't see the slightest meaning in it, and things were falling apart inside him more and more. And the strange change, too, that he had thought he had noticed in Tony Richmond, kept obsessing him, trying to intercept its hidden, forbidden meaning, and the relationship it might have with his own mortal disarray.

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And now he was also obsessed with what he thought he had discovered about his three main encounters with Laurence, whom he had only seen four times in all his life, and not one more : He had seen her naked the first time, in Via Oswaldo Cruz, and naked as a 'Kali dancer'; and naked too the last time, when and Erwin Lehnert had taken her down from the tree where her murderers had tied her up, in the grounds of Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic in Castellon el Alto. So he had only seen Laurence naked. But isn't that also a sign that we have to decipher, while there's still time to do so?

He then received a telephone call from his sister Jenny, announcing her return from Biarritz and her desire to hear from him soon. So he proposed to go and see her the next day, at her home, at eleven in the morning.

Not peace, but a kind of morose, anaesthetising tranquillity settled over him, and all the torments of the last few days were suspended: the hour of the end had come. A sort of obscure joy also came over him.

François made sure he wasn't late for the appointment with his sister Jenny: at eleven o'clock sharp, he rang the doorbell of Jenny's flat, and she came to open the door, a little out of breath, her face very pale, her feet bare, in short white silk dressing gown.

- ... oh, no," she said, "what's the matter with you, my poor brother... you who used to hate all those people sunbathing on the beaches of the continent in the summer so much, here you are, black-faced like a real Negro in a comedy show... Have you changed your religion about sunbathing? Have you made some sort of foolish bet with yourself? seeing you in this state makes all my certainties waver? but in the end I'm happy to see you?

- ... a little of that, in fact... I spent the month of August on a beach in Malaga, being carefully -

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and atrociously too, I confess - tanned by the insane sun of the place... but it was nothing, a passing fancy... a foolish gamble with myself, as you have just so aptly put it... and you, my darling sister, how are you?... what good news are you going to give me about yourself... by the way, I think you look lovely this morning... absolutely lovely... there's a marvellous glow on your face, you're radiant... is it your mysterious trip to Biarritz that has..,

again... yes, one day you'll have to tell me all about your shenanigans in Biarritz every August... it's getting worrying...

-oh, that's nothing to do with it... but I have to tell you that...

well, here's the thing... I've just parted company with Howard,

my

husband... divorce proceedings are well advanced, it's practically actually...

-Oh, tell me, Jenny... have you gone mad, or what... what are you singing to me now, are you out of your mind? What does all this mean... getting divorced, how, why? Has serious happened between you, or is this just a case of madness on your part... I can't see you getting a divorce...

impossible...

-What I've just told you is the truth... but let's not talk about it any more, it's already done...

— ... well, let's leave all that aside: if we're meeting today, it's for something completely different... you can see that I'm keeping my promise to you, that I've come to see you, especially, before going off to hide somewhere to shoot myself in the face... I've already told you, my decision is made... there's really no point in trying to oppose it, you know me well enough to know that... my accounts are done, all my accounts...

— ... I suppose you can't be serious. ...

so let me ask you just one question: why? Yes, why, why?

— Why? But it's very simple: I had found the "

absolute love", the woman I'd been looking for all my life...

she came, her name was Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, the daughter the OAS admiral... she came, and

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then she died... she was killed, in Spain... and I couldn't - or didn't know how to - save her... so, don't you see, I have absolutely nothing left to do in this life, or in this world... you have to understand me, I know you do...

- ... yes, I see... I even see very well... it's also a bit what I was expecting... only, you see, things can happen, in reality, a way that's infinitely different from anything you think... there are hidden corners of reality that can sometimes change everything, all it takes is a single word, a few steps forward... a single breath, an unexpected shift in the air...

- ... on the contrary... for me, now, things couldn't be clearer... nothing to add, nothing to take away...

- ... that's where you're wrong, my darling... but give me time to talk to you about it... I will speak to you with a brutality that is perhaps too sharp, but I am only responding, in despair, to the no less sharp brutality of your confession of death, of your unbearable confession of suicide... because it so happens that Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, your dear departed, I knew her too, believe it or not... and even that I knew her very well... we had both been in school together, at the Sainte Jeanne de Chantal institution, in Neuilly, when we seventeen... yet you mysteriously never realised one thing that was obvious to everyone who knew us, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois and me, and that was that we resembled each other in a truly extraordinary way. And your last mistress, the one you broke up with last May, Sylvie d'Aubressac, what did she have in common?

what was so strangely special about her? She also looked like me, and you could have said that we sisters... but doesn't all this make you think of something very specific, albeit rather dramatic, something that for many years you have refused to acknowledge, that for many years you have kept buried deep inside yourself... doesn't

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don't you remember what happened, nine years ago, in this very flat, on a certain afternoon in July too... no, in August... yes, of course, in August... no, you don't want to remember? Don't you remember that we made love there, the two of us, like madmen, like damned men, all afternoon, late into the evening... if during all those years of abandonment and absence from yourself, you couldn't do anything with your lost life, it's because in reality you were doing nothing but running away from me, running away from our hidden love, running madly away from the memory of the afternoon in August when we loved each other so madly in the flat of our parents who were absent that day for the wedding of our Aunt Marianne, which we refused to attend because she was marrying someone we secretly hated, remember, yes, remember... so all that's left for you to do is to recognise - wake up, François, wake up - to recognise, I say, that I'm the woman you've been looking for for so years, that all the others you've wanted - or thought you wanted - only because they reminded you of the one you really loved, the one you loved abysmally, the one you never stopped wanting to forget, forget, forget, that is to say myself... so what's the point in trying to hide it any longer, I'm here in front of you, telling you that I love you madly, with all the strength my being, always and forever, until the end of everything and beyond everything... I'm telling you that I'm the one you've been looking for, understand that... myself, and no one else... the rest will have been nothing but substitution and phantasmagoria... yes, phantasmagoria, whatever you may have thought of it... because if it's the loss of 'absolute love

that makes you want to die, know that you have not only not lost 'absolute love', but that you have just found it again... you see, this is the 'great final secret' that I wanted you to know, and now I'm not going to say anything more... because it's up to you to speak now... I've just destroyed the blanket of prohibition, darkness and profound oblivion that was suffocating you

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your life, which for so long prevented you being, from being yourself fully... I dispelled your fundamental nightmare, I gave you back your freedom before the mortal eclipse that took place in you the day you unconsciously chose to forget, to *forget everything*...

- ... in one fell swoop, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom before me... Jenny, Jenny, Jenny my beloved, how could I, what long insanity have I lived through these last years... what impossible and shameful nightmare have I spent my life in... and how are we going to make up for it now, to save what can still be saved... yes, how are we going to do it... we'll have to think about it, find the brilliant pass, the saving pass... like in the high mountains...

-... but isn't every great adventure in love a vertiginous experience of precipices, a hallucinatory experience of the great mountain... how are we going to do it, you ask me... but by facing up to the ultimate reality of things alone, by loving each other as we love ourselves, by ignoring all considerations other than the burning, ardent fact of our love which lives and will henceforth make us live together, united - reunited - for ever.... and as for the visible, social side of things, we'll find all the subterfuges, all the arrangements we need... let's not be afraid of words: incest, which the Egyptian royal and imperial dynasties practised as a form of initiation between brother and sister, we're going to take it up again and adapt it to our case, and in the end it could even lead to some very great things

things... things that are still, for the moment, completely inconceivable... but which, inconceivable, won't always remain so... not now that we've met again, my darling... certain prophecies, moreover, certain high-flying visions have not failed to announce it, to *foresee* it even... such as Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, the great visionary of a certain Secret France... of a certain Secret France whose time, now, will not be long in coming... thanks to the two of us

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my darling, thanks to the abyssal mystery of our terrible forbidden love, which will nonetheless open doors, the very narrow occult doors of the history of this world at its end...

- ... yes, my Jenny... let's not waste another moment...

let me take you right now, right here... I have to, ah, I have to... that's what will seal our old pact of mad love, our nuptial pact from the day of our aunt Marianne's wedding, which we didn't go to... that's what will also start things up again where we left off... let's not even take the time to undress, come on, lie down here on the carpet and let me do you... let's not even take the time to get undressed, come on, lie down here on the carpet... and let me make love to you, my beloved darling... again, again, just like that afternoon nine years ago...

In the high, pink-tinted mirror in the elegant living room of Jenny's Paris flat, we could follow wild love scene that takes place right in front of this somewhat magical mirror, on the pale blue carpet, in the fascinating, spasmodic disorder of the love battle in progress; the long, magnetic, feverish, clumsy caresses; the insatiable, breathless kisses that tear the lips apart and make them bleed; the brutal, blind, distraught, foaming embraces, at a lost pace; the biting; and above all Jenny's high, unbelievably white legs; the muffled moans, the gasping for breath

of agony of the two bodies tetanised by the unleashed, irrepressible desire; those cries stifled with great difficulty, and then suddenly released; savagely perhaps, but briefly, like metallic flashes; and those sobs at the end, as if from the other world, deafened by the cataracts of the passage of the line of the tilt forward, hallucinated, under the ecstatic vision of the "

other world", on the "other side".

It was as if a ritual was being performed to ensure the emergence of an absolutely new world under the ardent species of the *Vita Novissima*, the nuptial and totally virginal beginnings of *another world*.

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It was like the earthquake that would generate the final reversal of the times, the immaculate conception of the next paraclete and imperial era, abysmally in gestation, and whose time had now come.

Was it an illusion, just an illusion? While François and his sister Jenny were loving each other on the pink-mirrored carpet of the living room, a strange golden light seemed to have settled above them, filling the large room with a subtly transcendental, ecstatic presence, as refreshing as a morning in the mountains, close to the immense, clear sky, in full sunshine. The golden light even materialised vaguely a sort of coronal cloud, closely following the boundaries of the very place where their lovemaking was at its height.

Thereupon Angela, Jenny's young American au pair, appeared innocently in the living room doorway, suddenly petrified - with one hand over her mouth - by unexpected sight before her on the living room carpet.

eyes, and with one hand still over her mouth, withdrew silently and backwards from the forward observation post to which she had unwittingly surrendered, so confused that she no longer knew what she was doing.

- She had recognised François, whom she knew to be Jenny's brother - haggard, her blood beating violently at her temples, her breath coming in short gasps, she masturbated, eyes closed, leaning against the doorframe of the dining room, trapped by the magnetic fields, by the trains of waves intensely emitted by those at work in the next room. For there are channels that operate in the invisible, through which love is communicated, in a circular fashion, without us even knowing it.

But isn't it these networks of clandestine circulation of love that constitute the very substance of its permanent, saving affirmation, that sustains the fire of life, that ensures that non-being can never completely prevail, nor the darkness of nothingness and its occult metastases, despite the fact that these never stop bushwhacking, constantly spreading throughout the world?

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fields of life? Without it, Angela had let herself get caught up in it, she had made herself an instance of this secret flow of love that keeps the world suspended on nothingness, and she enjoyed it fully, overwhelmed and, at the time, filled to the point of screaming, to the point of an exaltation that surprised her, and even frightened her, leaving her panting, disorientated, and as if emptied of herself. You can't approach love with impunity, when it emerges from its own abyssal depths, as was clearly the case with the terrible embrace of François and his sister Jenny.

However, Angela was as distraught as she had been by her clandestine, shameful participation in François and Jenny's lovemaking, and two days later she spoke about it to the young secretary at the American Embassy in Paris, with whom she sometimes met.

who so obstinately resented her half-virginity. The latter, without revealing anything at the time, found himself extraordinarily eager to know the details - and the consequences - of what Angela had just told him.

Like everything else about Howard Bedell's private life-Jamieson, who was resident at MI6

What Angela had told him about Jenny's British wife in Paris was of the interest to him, and he now intended to exploit her source to the full. After all, that the true identity of Howard Bedell-Jamieson, Jenny's husband, whom she was in the process of divorcing. And the young Angela was disturbed to the point of illness, excited to the point of delirium when she learned the secret of the fiery relationship between Jenny, her boss, and her boss's own brother.

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XI

BLOODY NIGHT AT LA MARLIÈRE

For a few days now, Jenny had been adamant - and François, moreover, was also immediately and wholeheartedly in favour - that for her twenty-fifth birthday, they should bring on Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 October

-Jenny had been born on 1 October, the feast of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus - some of their closest friends, at La Marlière, her property in Haute-Provence, at Garde Sainte-Marie.

On this occasion, they would both receive their friends together, without anyone seeing the slightest harm in it, while for Jenny, it would also be the first consecration - albeit only symbolic and hidden - of their very secret new relationship. Jenny's enthusiasm for the project soon became overwhelming, and she threw herself into it body and soul.

She left immediately for the Garde Sainte-Marie, where she wanted to get things under way without further delay, leaving François, who was staying in Paris for a few more days, to pass on the invitations and personally contact the guests they had already chosen before Jenny's departure.

The guest list, which they had agreed together, was roughly as follows: Tony Richmond and Lise, as well as Erwin Lehnert - who had just returned from his mysterious secret mission in Bucharest - and who would be coming with the young Russian he had brought back from there, Tatiana Biély-Douguine; Diane Marescaux, their cousin, who lived above François, in the hamlet of Boileau, and who would no doubt be bringing along her friend Maurin La Serre; Dr Roberta Sandoz, a Swiss woman, Jenny's best friend; and

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also a couple of young architects, Nicolas and Hélène Warnier, who were their teenage friends, and who had just returned from the

Japan, where they had built the New University of Sendaï; and they were also counting on Father Ferdinand Sallenave, the young traditionalist parish priest of La Garde Sainte-Marie, and perhaps also on Claude Sautet, whose property was next door to La Marlière.

At the same time, Francisco did not hesitate to invite Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar and his friend Jennifer, who began by apologising, but four hours later had to telephone to say that they were going to be there. And, what's more, there was still a large room available, to be ready for any eventuality (which couldn't have come at a better time, because at the last minute François also invited General Joseph Constantini, his own commanding officer; which, as we shall see, ended up making quite a fuss between Jenny and François, Jenny having overheard something that didn't suit her at all, and which left her very unhappy).

For Saturday evening, they had planned fresh stuffed squid with a devilishly spicy sauce, and a mountain of lamb chops grilled over a wood fire, with red fruit sorbet for dessert, all washed down with champagne; for Sunday lunch, a huge paella, chilled melons and, in the evening, chickens grilled over a wood fire, with a chilled local white wine. Jenny had brought along two young naughty girls from the village whom she knew very well, Eliette and Anne-Marie (the latter having met her future husband during the weekend at La Marlière, to whom she had already given in on Saturday night).

So we hurried to about thirty bottles of champagne, arranging them side by side in the Marlière, the icy underground river that gave its name to the property, whose old brick bed it crosses at an angle in the cellar below the house, an ancestral custom of the place, per-133

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The thirty or so bottles of champagne were quickly chilled and placed side by side in the Marlière, the icy underground river that gave its name to the property, and whose old brick bed runs at an angle through the cellar below the house, an ancestral custom that continues to this day 133 years later.

from generation to generation, with the same impeccable results. And that's also what we'll the next day with the bottles of local white wine we've planned for the paella and the grilled chicken that evening.

Somewhat miraculously, it was a midsummer's day on Saturday 2 October.

As evening fell, dozens of low garden torches lit up the dirt road leading from the main road to the entrance to La Marlière, a large two-storey Roman-style villa - or manor house, rather - with a light red façade, a flat roof, an entrance portico with four white columns, and high windows with dark blue wooden shutters all along the façade.

In the fairly strong wind that had just picked up, the flickering lights of the torches set low in a double row gave the whole scene a powerfully dreamlike, magical appearance, like something out of an old French fairytale, out of that 'Secret France' Jenny had recently spoken of in her great speech of revelation of love to François in her Parisian salon, when they had *met again*.

Shortly François arrived at La Marlière, the following conversation took place between him and his sister Jenny:

- ... you know, Jenny... I wanted to tell you... I also invited my general at the last minute...

- ... what, which general?

- ... General Joseph Constantini, my current commanding officer...

- ... your commanding officer? What do you mean by that? What about your current commanding ? Didn't you leave the army years ago? At least four years?

-... yes, indeed... my commanding ... my current commanding officer...

- ... ah, I see... I see quite well... I think I'm beginning to understand, to understand everything... so you...

-... yes, that's how it is... I can see that you're beginning to understand... in the army, it's true, in fact I'm still there, 134

and have never even left it... pretending to leave, I in fact always remained in its ranks, working for its special services, for its 'secret services'... something I should never admit, let alone admit... but I feel with you I can finally put my cards on the table...

-...indeed, as you say... that would explain a lot of things, and in the end it would explain everything...

-... the day after tomorrow, when they've all gone, when we've got a bit of time, I'll explain everything to you...

- ... yes, I think it's high time you told me everything haven't told me... you know, this is starting to feel really good... a bit too good even...

-What do you want, darling? It's the things are... you' have to understand...

-ah, no, please, François, you're not going to do that to me ... the 'lord's trade' trick, I know all too well ... I've had enough of all that ... with Howard my husband, and you coming along now with the same song...

no, it's too much... I don't want to hear anything more like it... it has to end some time... because now, understand, I want you all to myself... I have no desire to share you with anything else, not with the army, not with anything... after so many years of separation, silence and oblivion, after so years of darkness, I want us to be able to devote ourselves entirely to each other, I want love, our love, to be able to assert its regal rights... love, yes, our love exclusively...

- ... Listen Jenny my darling, I wouldn't say that, in a certain sense, you're not right... but the situation, in its abyssal identity, is in reality not at all as simple as you envisage it... we'll talk about it again, if you like, when we have the time we need... Yes, we'll have to talk about it, and talk about it in depth... because I already know that I have a special destiny, that a destiny apart has been imposed on me, and that you'll have to share this destiny with me... because our love, once we're

I tell you, and beg you to believe me, you must follow me blindly... to the end... and you will see... tomorrow you will get to know General Joseph Constantin!... he may arrive a little late, but you will have plenty of time to gain access, through him - through his mere presence - to another understanding of things, to things that are difficult to say... and that there is no need to say. and that there's no need to say... you'll see... I'm telling you, and begging you to believe me, you have to follow me blindly... to the end, and beyond everything... besides, I'm convinced that you already know all this perfectly well, on your own.... because there's nothing essential that you don't know in advance... don't forget that I know who you really are, even and especially if we must never talk about it, never... yes, never... never...

The next day, however, General Joseph Constantin! arrived first, late in the morning, accompanied by his aide-de-camp, Captain Charles Roudinesco, and his chauffeur, Beranger d'Autun. Tall and truly , with barely greying hair, General Joseph Constantin! He had a thin, face, an eagle's beak nose, a mouth with thin, pale lips, and hard, steely grey eyes. He was immediately imposing, a man of power - and of powers - who nevertheless took the trouble to be courteous in all circumstances, speaking in a low, almost whispered voice, self-assured and attentive to everything, alert to the extreme, rarely allowing his gaze to be caught, playing with his silences and moving with a slowness, with a restrained strength that hinted at untold possibilities, a great hidden aptitude for dazzling revival, for unforeseen, dangerous reactions. A fluent speaker of five languages, including Japanese, and a man of deep, creative culture, General Joseph Constantin! was, quite obviously, a man of great talent,

He too was chosen by a destiny, someone *predestined*. And you could feel

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also, if Ton was really gifted, that his time was imminent, that he would soon be called upon to give the full measure of his possibilities, including those that could be considered hidden, invisible, held in expectation of what was to come.

General Joseph Constantini's aide-de-camp, Captain Charles Roudinesco, was a perfectly charming young man, a redhead with blue eyes, and his chauffeur, Beranger d'Autun - chauffeur garde du corps - a tall, dark-haired handsome man in uniform; quiet as a mouse and obviously always on his guard, you could tell straight away that you were dealing with a real tough guy. Captain Charles Roudinesco had achieved a kind of confidential notoriety during a series of missions he had had to carry out inside the former Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union, where, it seems, he had pulled off a rather prodigious series of coups of cunning, mad audacity and unstoppable decision, which had not failed to make him stand out from the crowd.

General Joseph Constantini.

After paying his respects to Jenny, as mistress of the house, General Joseph Constantini was abducted by François, who took him for a walk in the gardens of La Marlière, where the rose bushes were dying out before the onslaught of the misty, cold end of autumn, which, despite the unexpected brightening of this unusual day, kept announcing the imminence of winter, the dead season even more present in its temporary false absence, so subversively illusory.

As they left the rose gardens to enter the park, it was General Joseph Constantini who spoke.

The bells of the Garde Sainte-Marie church rang out at midday in the distance, the sun shone brightly and a great peace seemed to reign around them, and perhaps even suddenly within them too.

- ... my dear d'Espart," said the general, "I have the pleasure of announcing your new appointment... I have personally 137

You must see this as the result of the highly satisfactory way in which you were able to carry out, and above all conclude, the confidential 'dark mirror' operation, a particularly atrocious episode, it must be admitted, in our ongoing battle... On the other hand, I know that you are now going to ask me for permission to join Tony Richmont's new project, his politico-strategic intelligence structure for a 'grand continental opening', and not only will I give you this permission, but I am instructing you to invest yourself fully in it. ... I see in it the beginning, in a way, of the future great continental intelligence agency of the New Europe to come, and it is therefore not the moment for us to miss out on the direct participation of our services in this operation... Tony Richmont is one of our own, and I've known him personally for quite some time. You'll remember that as a young lieutenant I had him under my direct command at the end of the Algerian war... I have the utmost admiration for the man, for the leading-edge fighter he has remained, for the high-level manager of one of our most active administrations today, who has never hesitated to take exceptional risks, to play to the ultimate limits of his own abilities.... at his level, I don't know if there are two or three men in France today who can really measure up to him... d'Espart, I'll say it again, Tony Richmont is one of us in his own right, and I want you to know that, because that's how I see him... it's both a personal point of view, and the point of view, too, of what I myself represent at the moment, of

I intend to take advantage of this weekend at La Marlière, which your sister has so kindly offered us, to talk to Tony Richmond about the essential problems of the current situation, which is hanging over us, overwhelming us even, and which we can't react much any more.

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as we find ourselves in a situation at the end of a reign, detestable and rotten, unhealthy and, to put it bluntly, catastrophic for France and for our own aims, and above all for the most confidential, the only ones that count... but you know perfectly well where we've got to, and I hope you've already drawn all the dramatic conclusions, the breaking off points, that are necessary... it's perhaps not quite the right time to talk about it, but get ready for it all the same... because it's urgent, terribly urgent...

By seven o'clock everyone was there, including don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar with his Jennifer, who was dressed in a fine tweed tobacco suit, her hair up in a bun, "adorable".

But it was Erwin Lehnert who really caused a sensation, introducing the young Russian he had brought back from his mysterious mission in Bucharest, Tatiana Biély-Dougine, a slim brunette with a pale complexion and green eyes, who spoke impeccable French, was very sure of herself, and exuded an indefinable charm that was fiery, enveloping ultimately irresistible.

The Warniers, a couple of young architects, were rather distant, but free and very distinguished. They stood a little to one side, chatting quietly with Father Ferdinand Sallenave, while the three of them talked over a bottle of Gentiane, while Dr Roberta Sandoz, Jenny's best friend, was already in the crowd.

We left with cousin Diane Marescaux who, in the end, had come without her friend Maurin La Serre (who, she said, "was a great friend of mine").

was sulking like the complete moron that he is"). What kept the Warniers and Father Ferdinand Sallenave together was their shared passion, which they had just discovered, for the mysterious Roman past of La Garde Sainte-Marie: Father Ferdinand Sallenave claimed to know that the whole village of La Garde Sainte-Marie sat on ancient buried Roman settlements, and the Warniers maintained that La Marlière itself, built on Roman foundations, hid, in its gardens, two or three metres

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Electromagnetic surveys they had already carried out on the spot strongly suggested this and, for them, "it was already a certainty"; the Warniers were therefore eager to move on to the excavation stage, and they knew that Jenny was not at all opposed to their project - on the contrary.

It was also remembered that the Marlière, now an underground river, had once fed a sacred, "miraculous" pool. It had always been known that the Garde Sainte-Marie site, and more specifically the Marlière estate itself, was an important, even super-important, place.

In any case, the atmosphere that evening at La Marlière was, from the outset, bright, dense, very dense, warm, with everyone really willing to do their bit to ensure that things went well, that the weekend at La Marlière was a great success, a real celebration of inspired intelligence and affection, something to be remembered afterwards with great pleasure and joy. Jenny was over the moon, already knowing that she was going to be able to support, and

win the secret bet she had made with herself that what she wanted to do would be done according to her best expectations.

So it seems to me that we need to come back to , once again: without daring to say it - without daring to tell ourselves -

Underlying the immediate appearances of the birthday weekend at La Marlière was Jenny's secret desire to make a first attempt at the coded 'presentation' of her hidden relationship with François, for which, in fact, she was seeking a kind of implicit approval, even if, in this case, it was to remain completely unconscious, on the part of those who would have signed up to give it to her, as if without their knowledge, this collaboration, this 'approval'.
"conspiratorial approval" -

or rather falsely conspiratorial, since only Jenny was in a position to do so, to

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"It was a conspiracy - a very unavowable plan, which she had single-handedly put into action and carried out, veiled to the very end. Aren't the conspiracies of forbidden loves, all things considered, the same as the conspiratorial endeavours that aim to make and unmake history as it moves forward, to force the changes of great destiny into action? Doesn't the occult approach to love always have an abyssal dimension, open to the deepest secrecy and night, to the wildest boldness and brazenness? I say this to try to explain a little of the process that Jenny had undertaken so confidentially, involving all the guests at her birthday weekend at La Marlière in spite of themselves.

And so, from the very first evening, a very specific connective tissue of relationships began to form, mysteriously, as if of its own accord, within the group of guests at La Marlière.
Strange interior layouts were to emerge immediately,

the hidden meaning of which we will have to be able to recognise later on. It soon became clear that a singularly significant link was being established between Tony Richmond and don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar, between the French supercop and the thug.

A Spanish team, even including Lise and Jennifer, their companions, who, despite a definite age difference, seemed to be getting a little closer by the hour. Visit

General Joseph Constantini, for his part, seemed to have attached himself to Jenny, whom he never left, and his aide-de-camp, Captain Charles Roudinesco, had finally succeeded in integrating himself into the separate group already formed by Dr Roberta Sandoz and cousin Diane Marescaux. The latter was visibly more and more sensitive to his active presence, and he had embarked on a sort of resigned but tenacious envelopment, almost hypnotic, of his prey, who was already more than half consenting and already quite intoxicated by the champagne. A certain vertigo thus took possession of all those Jenny had brought together that evening at La Marlière, a vertigo that followed the intimate spiral of her own law, from which to

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At the moment there was nothing to say, because it was completely elusive, resistant to any form of explanation, but nonetheless following its own path, which was undoubtedly *predetermined*. Later we shall see what this pre-determination was all about, and in terms of what occult design, "

from elsewhere".

François, for his part, would have liked to find the right opportunity to be alone, somewhere, with Erwin Lehnert, to tell him about the final details of his secret mission to Bucharest, but he couldn't do it, constantly under pressure from the whirlwind of the evening, which was following its own unpredictable path. But he was still able to have Erwin Lehnert alone, for a few moments, in his room.

in one of the deep windows of the small sitting-room adjoining the library, where they decided to meet the next morning at nine o'clock, discreetly, inside the ruined pavilion at the bottom of the garden, in a bushy corner. For "

unpack everything".

- ... the fact remains," he nevertheless insisted on saying to François, "the fact remains that, at the risk of appearing to you to be going off the deep end, I still have to tell you, and right , something that really worries me, something that literally has me by the throat... it may seem crazy to you, but there's nothing I can do about it, it's just the way it is... *it's just the way it is*, and so I have to tell you about it immediately... I have a very strong intuitive feeling, a very vivid premonition that, despite this luminous atmosphere of joy, understanding, warmth and affection that reigns here this evening, an extreme danger lies in wait for us all, which is becoming more and more pressing, a danger of death and general massacre... a terrible danger which is becoming ever more clear, which comes upon us, from the depths of the night, like an immense black wave... and that with each passing moment, we have less and less time to act, to face up to it.... you can't ignore it, men of action are often subject to this kind of presentiment, and anyone who can't take it into account pays for it with their life every time... don't tell me I didn't tell you, that I didn't warn you; they are

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out there, they're watching us... they're ready to attack, and their goal is nothing less than a general massacre... I see blood everywhere, splattering the walls all the way to the top... all this blood I can see, all blood I can smell... but it can still be prevented...

as long as we know we want to, as long as we catch them off ... as long as we give ourselves a three-point lead over them...

the "three steps ahead" of our special parachute training, remember? yes, the "three steps ahead"? our famous "three steps ahead"?

However, after Father Ferdinand Sallenave had left, at around midnight, the evening began to drag a little, and someone suggested, on a whim, that we turn the tables, that we "...".

invoke the dead". This, quite unexpectedly, met with general approval. A sudden surge of attention seemed to rise in the audience, who rushed to the proposed new adventure, full of a dubious, unhealthy enthusiasm; they didn't know what awaited them.

The two architects, the Warniers, apparently indifferent to the business of the dead, were standing next to other at a small table in the library, leafing through a relatively rare copy of 'The Dream of Polyphilus' with great attention and candlelight.

The others then all moved into the small sitting room next door, where a round table was quickly dragged into the middle, and they sat in a circle around it, which was to be the main tool of their necromantic endeavour. There was no talking, and some people laughed nervously, but a certain silence gradually settled in, a silence with something unnatural, overrated and suspicious about it.

Lise, who had overdone her champagne during dinner and afterwards, was dozing on a sofa at the other end of the living room, with Jennifer beside her, putting on airs as if she was trying to protect her rest. Without saying a word, Tony Richmond glanced at Lize from time to time, not so reassured, as if she were in a dolorous state.

as if he was already beginning to suspect that something was wrong. With her eyes closed, she was very pale and breathing with difficulty, shaken from time to time by small, rather worrying tremors. Only her heavy red hair, spread over the pillow like a bright flame, attracted and fascinated the eye.

The lights were lowered, the roll-call circle was formed, with hands placed on the table in front of each other, and Dr Robert Sandoz began to make the *de rigueur* invocations, in a voice that was astonishingly clear, confident and *convincing*.

For a while, nothing happened at all, although there was a certain unpleasant nervousness among the group who had sat down with the invisible man who was there in spite of everything. And who was about to act, and in a most unexpected and terrible way.

Then, slowly, a certain coolness seemed to creep into the room, a coolness which, at a given moment, suddenly turned to the most icy cold. At the same time, loud knocks were heard at front door, knocking with such force that they seemed to want to shake the whole house.

Surprised, the participants in the necromancy session did not even have time to show their fear, when Lise, rising to her feet, let out a terrible cry of distress, of abrupt horror, of madness, only for her to fall back on her back and talking, very loudly, in a voice that was not hers at all, a voice at the height of her excitement and fright, a voice of unbridled, uncontrollable passion that made your blood run cold:

- ... Jenny, I know you're there, in your house, and you're not alone... it's me, Laurence, talking to you, your old friend...

remember Jenny, we were in class at Saint Jeanne de Chantal's, in Neuilly... and now I don't know what's happening to me, I don't know where I am at all... I'm in a dreadful desert place, where there are only unknown shadows that pass by from time to time, without a word, without a look... and where is Alexia, I think she is?

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I've lost her too... I've lost Alexia, and I've lost everything... I've lost myself, and I don't know anything about anything any more... But I do know that you, Jenny, and all those who are now with you, in your house, at La Marlière, yes I do, are... are, all of you, in great danger of death... there are four... no, six armed men outside, hiding in the shady gardens of La Marlière, waiting for the right moment to kill you, all of you... yes, all of you... to slaughter you all, every last one of you... it's those very -

from the same group - who had killed Alexia, and myself too in Spain... I know, I know... be careful Jenny, be careful while there's still time... ah, may you never find yourself where I find myself at this moment... may you never know, you too, this inconceivable black horror that reigns here... but I don't know where I am, it's all so black... and you François, goodbye... goodbye, goodbye François... and know that I am so I loved you as you loved me...

In a flash, François remembered the vision

- or daydream - that he had had when, in the second basement of Laurence's villa in Marne-la-Vallée, he was in the process of collapsing under the blows of his torturers under orders of Eugène Lambrichs, a vision in which he had found, precisely, his sister Jenny's house in Haute-Provence, at La Marlière, and where he had been notified of Laurence's disappearance, which was then fading away

in the distance, "like a white dusting in the bright midday sun". But the "

Wasn't the 'farewell' that Laurence had just said to him, just a few moments ago, from the 'other world', the *precise reality* to which his vision of the basement of the villa in Marne-la-Vallée had only prepared him, by announcing its inexorable inevitability, even though at that moment this inevitability was covered as if by a black veil, completely incomprehensible to him?

However, Lise struggled convulsively, trying to tear herself away from Jennifer and Tony Richmond who were trying in vain to restrain her, arousing her tetanised body to 145.

breaking off, opening her thighs wide and then closing them again, only to open them again, to the ultimate degree of obscenity; baring her breasts, turning her head violently from left to right and right to left, screaming, screaming, screaming, foaming at the mouth, flailing her arms as if she were drowning, and then screaming again, very loudly, screaming her lungs out. Then, suddenly, at a given moment, everything stopped, she opened her eyes and sat up: "... what's going on, maybe I've messed up again... I've probably just had one of my attacks of mediumistic possession... I apologise to you all, and to you too, Tony, I apologise...".

I'm infinitely sorry... ah, you can't know how tired I am, no one can... I'm really dead tired, dead, dead, dead... and yet I know I won't be able to sleep... once again, I beg your pardon, and please believe that I'm sorry, infinitely sorry for the spectacle I suppose I've just inflicted on you...

"

But she nevertheless agreed to go to her room on the first floor, supported by Tony Richmond and Jennifer, the latter with tears streaming down her face. Slowly, they made their way through the group of guests, who were silently breaking up as they passed, deeply disturbed. And as they were climbing the stairs, Tony Richmond stopped halfway up and, turning to those waiting downstairs in the sitting room, exclaimed in an uncertain, veiled voice: "... I'm very sorry I didn't warn you that Lise has been subject to powerful attacks of mediumistic possession for some time now... that she falls into a trance, that she acts as an intermediary between the 'other world' and the rest of us..."

that she recently launched herself very far into the forbidden interior of the 'other world', from which she had only returned with the worst difficulties... and this very evening, it was indeed a particularly serious crisis, opening directly onto the 'beyond' and particularly dangerous for her... particularly painful, too, for all those who had to suffer the consequences of this crisis.

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were present, and by that very fact were forced to witness his torments, his torture and his misguidance...

again, I apologise to you all, on her behalf and on mine... but she will now try to get some sleep, and there will be no trace of all this horror that we have just experienced, all of us, so unexpectedly... sorry, I'm really sorry..."

It has to be said that the violent banging on the front door, followed by Lise's convulsive, foaming outburst and her panic-stricken screams, had succeeded in creating a certain chill in the air, a certain uneasiness.

that they were worrying too much, that they were suffering quite visibly from these ordeals that had just been inflicted on them from, let's say, "another world". The atmosphere had indeed darkened, had *undergone a change*.

So, after one or two cognacs on their feet, everyone went upstairs to bed, with only the two young girls on duty, Eliette and Anne-Marie, late in retiring. Anne-Marie was silently watched - and, to put it bluntly, caught - by General Joseph Constantini's chauffeur, the spectral Beranger from Autun, who made short work of her (while, incidentally, getting his own feet caught in the act, because, as we all know, she's a bit of a handful).

as we said, he ended up marrying her, his Anne-Marie; but that, I think, is another story).

However, Erwin Lehnert had taken advantage of the others' somewhat hurried departure to draw François in front of the dying fire in the large fireplace, in the suddenly deserted living room, to get him talking again about his obsessive warnings, his disastrous "premonitions" about the danger they were all running that night, the danger of death secretly hanging over their heads, and to which, according to him, they had to react very quickly, in the most violent way. It has to be said that François had never had occasion to catch Erwin Lehnert in such a state of haggard agitation, bordering on panic.

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- ... you saw," Erwin Lehnert continued for François, "what that young , supposed to be Laurence's shadow, just told us through Lise's mouth... now there's not the slightest doubt... they're out there, watching us...

I'm adamant that if we don't do something, we're all going to get slaughtered...

- ... but Erwin, who, 'they'? Who can they be?

those who are waiting for us outside, preparing to attack and slaughter us all"? You know only too well that this is who had finished with them, who had stripped them to the bone.

last...

that it's a

story

definitively closed... that not a single person was left alive...

-... is that what you think? Well, you should know that you're wrong, tragically wrong... I knew the guys who were stripped at Castellon el Alto... they were gendarmes belonging to a special, semi-clandestine formation, who only acted under the orders of Eugène Lambrichs.... it's not even certain that he really left the gendarmerie, perhaps he was acting on orders when he set up his special security and protection group, supposedly on his own account, supposedly a private organisation... the guys we took apart at Castellon el Alto, in the megalithic site, I knew them, I tell you... gendarmes disguised as hooligans, thugs, drug addicts, to give the impression... by now there must be a whole termite mound of deviants among the gendarmes, the remnants at least of the groups that acted under the clandestine control Eugène Lambrichs.... and now, believe me, they're out there, watching us, as I've been telling you since the beginning of the evening... fortunately I have upstairs, in my room, in the luggage that we don't even have

I didn't have time to unpack the stuff I brought for you from Bucharest - a gift between comrades...

two infrared night-vision helmets, and two Russian mini-machine guns, truly extraordinary weapons... the Russians know what they're doing, they're no strangers to cutting-edge weapons... so I'm going upstairs...

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look for them, and then we'll go out together... we'll look around the house, the gardens, the park... check everything out... we must surprise them ourselves, rather than them surprising us... wait for me here, I'll be back in a few moments... you'll see, we'll make mincemeat of them...

remember our , let *no one with it*... we're all going to get it, that's for sure...

Outside, the night was deep, quiet and very cold.

With their infrared night vision helmets on, they could see everything in front of them as if plunged into a kind of spectral, unitary day, with everything coming into sharp focus.

After about ten minutes, they surprised two of them, armed with repeating rifles; the others were posted in an arc, also with rifles, as if to completely cover the depression which marked the limits of the gardens adjoining the house; They stood motionless, unaware that they had been intercepted and could be seen as if in broad daylight; they were waiting for the moment to act; there were, in fact, six of them, as "Laurence's shadow" had said through Lise's mouth.

They waited to act, but as it was François and Erwin Lehnert who acted first.

silently selecting three of the assailants each, they shot them all down in short bursts, immediately, without further delay.

The last man in line, who found time to fire twice and try to escape, was caught in the air by a short burst from François.

For a few moments, the gusts broke the stillness of the night, and then silence returned, as if nothing had happened, as if the sudden and violent noise of the gunfire had been nothing more than a dream of the night; a few dogs barked in the distance.

The counter-operation carried out by François and Erwin Lehnert nevertheless benefited from a special circumstance, which turned the situation to their advantage: François knowing 149

that there was a secret underground passage leading from the kitchens of the house to the gardens beyond, opening out into the park, they had used this passage to go out into the night, in search of the shadowy killers on the prowl, whose presence on the scene they had been warned of from the "other world, by the more or less surviving spirit of Laurence, who had thus demonstrated the supernatural support they had on this occasion: they had had to believe in it, what else could they do. And it was because they believed that they won, this time again, the third time.

Shortly after the shooting, the windows at the back of the house began to light up one by one, and we even saw someone walking slowly, bent double, towards the gardens, trying to penetrate the darkness, but surely unable to make out; François thought he recognised Captain Charles Roudinesco.

Erwin Lehnert, for his part, went to the house to reassure the others, claiming that "it was really nothing" and that François, a little drunk, "had wanted to try out a machine gun in the back gardens".

which he had just given her", insisting at the same time that everyone should go back to bed.

In the meantime, François had gone to get some blankets to wrap the six corpses in, mobilising General Joseph Constantini and his aide-de-camp so that the four of them could transport them in the house van and dump them, without further ado, in the chasms of the Trou aux Maleuses, thirty kilometres away, where no one would come looking for them, nor would they ever find them.

- ... it's hard to believe", said François at dawn, addressing Erwin Lehnert, sitting on the edge of the chasms of the Trou aux Maleuses, "... it's hard to believe the luck we've just had, the luck we've always had in this affair... three times already we've found ourselves up against them, and three times we've taken them out as if we were practising, apparently without the slightest trouble.

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problem... they weren't aunts and they weren't klutzes...

so I wonder if there isn't something going on underneath, something hidden, that you're not being helped, secretly, from the invisible, since we're fighting, if you like, for the cause of the invisible...

- ... nothing hidden , nothing tampered with the invisible, answered

him

Erwin

Lehnert...

that'

s all

simply

the special teaching of the French paratroopers... always be three steps ahead of the enemy... you may have forgotten it, but it was you yourself, my captain, who forced it into our heads... always take the enemy by the scruff of the neck, never allow yourself the slightest respite, attack well before the moment when you should normally have done so... that's the secret of our mad luck, of our so-called invincibility... that's our *special training*...

-You may be right, but all the same... I have my doubts about whether we're protected...

supported by powers from elsewhere...

- ... and even if what you're saying were true, and even if it were true... you mustn't think about it, ever..." replied Erwin Lehnert, throwing his cigarette into the yawning abyss at his feet.

A few steps away, General Joseph Constantin! and Captain Charles Roudinesco were talking in hushed tones. It was very cold, but it was likely to get warmer again around midday, when the sun was sure to come out.

Very early in the morning on Sunday, Tony Richmond and General Joseph Constantin! - who, between them, represented the top politico-military level of the current French administration - to put an end once and for all to this clandestine movement operating in ex-gendarme circles and led astray by the late Eugène Lambrichs, or by others even higher up than him. But it was still necessary to find out exactly what was behind this organisation, whether there were any hidden agendas to be uncovered and destroyed, any

The bitter political and *other* backstage issues are harder to define and harder to grasp.

On this subject, General Joseph Constantini was keen to quote the words of a senior Gendarmerie Nationale official who, speaking to *Le Monde* on 30 August last year, said: *"Every time we have experienced abuses, they have come from officers who have escaped from their superiors."*

Despite the lack of sleep of those who had been directly involved in the night's shooting and the clean-up work that followed, all the guests at La Marière gathered at the church of La Garde Sainte-Marie on Sunday morning for Mass led by Father Ferdinand Sallenave, a fiery preacher who was already well known. People began coming from far and wide to hear Father Ferdinand Sallenave's exhortations on Sunday mornings at the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, in La Garde Sainte-Marie.

Also responsible for a "Confraternity of the Holy Spirit

"Ferdinand Sallenave was thus carrying out a powerful work of paraclete and Marian reconstitution of a new Catholic faith, or one in the process of profound renewal, A perilous task if ever there one, the results of which were nevertheless beginning to be felt through the influence - deliberately muted - of his confraternity which, in addition to France, was already extending its influence in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, in the Milan region and as far afield as Canada.

Si le grain ne meurt" (If the grain does not die) was the gospel word from which Father Ferdinand Sallenave developed his sermon that Sunday, not without perhaps a hidden purpose, for there were

In truth, there little he didn't know, as the channels of faith are sometimes open to the best-kept secrets.

We had a relatively late lunch that day at La Marlière, a little after two o'clock, and the great royal paella won everyone's approval, with its overflowing richness and incomparable combination of tastes 152

Each of these qualities was thus exalted, carried beyond itself into a marvellous *something else*, the height of an unforgettable experience, just as Jenny had wanted it to be.

And so it was that a long siesta followed, during which, however, a few people, gathered in the large downstairs salon for an informal meeting that included General Joseph Constantin! and his aide-de-camp Captain Charles Roudinesco, Tony Richmond, Father Ferdinand Sallenave, Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar, François d'Espart and Erwin Lehnert, together laid the foundations of a conspiratorial movement which, a few months later, was to lead to the complete overthrow of French politics, both visible and invisible, and to the advent of a new Eurasian and planetary grand-continental destiny for France, for the "French Revolution" and for the "French Revolution".

France Nouvelle", which revealed dogmatic identity of the subterranean, suprahistorical perpetuation of a certain "France Nouvelle".

Secret France".

Indeed, far from stopping here, it must continue, now finding its true scope, which, going beyond the level of the personal adventure of a certain number of predestined characters, reaches the supreme horizon of world history in action, objectifying to the point of identifying with the progress of the latter, of which it would then become like a doubling in terms of consciousness and even of the consciousness of consciousness.

that some, standing in the shadows, might even have some, if they themselves had reached the stage where they were no more than transparent instances of it, concepts actively subjugated by the occult radiation of the "absolute concept" through which, each time, history recognises itself and becomes consciousness, while waiting for it to become the "active supraconsciousness" of "great history", of "great history".

interviewed by Nietzsche.

The present narrative will therefore have been, throughout its entire course, nothing other than that through which history at the moment

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The paroxysm of its final renewal is given an existential, lived backdrop, its very nativity, its immaculate conception projected in the encounter, the head-on collision, the sacrifice of blood and the loving assumption of those few who had been called upon to constitute it, history in the making, to invent its origins, forever secret, except to the inspired readers of this story, who know all about it.

In a certain sense, then, it is on Rue Oswaldo Cruz that we should look for the true origins of the greater Europe to come: on Rue Oswaldo Cruz in Paris, over the body of a young woman who had been raped, tortured and finally massacred, in Spain, at the megalithic site of Castellon el Alto, where Laurence had also been sacrificed, handed over to the mystery of the "midday holocaust".

They are also the incestuous nuptials of François d'Espart and his sister Jenny, who, at a decisive turning point in the history of a world that is reaching its shameful end, at the final stage of dereliction and of

in the abyssal oblivion of everything, were able to rekindle the ontological fire of the ascent of being, to rediscover the "ancient Aryan path, which had been lost", to make the occult doors passage to the Far North, to the transcendental lands of the

Anterior Reign, where the powers of saving remembrance, of our most archaic living memory, hold sway.

General Joseph Constantin! arrived first and left La Marlière thing on Monday morning, followed closely by Tony Richmond and don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar; the others didn't leave until the afternoon, as they couldn't tear themselves away too suddenly from the insidious magic of the place, which was ablaze with the promise a splendid autumn.

For their part, Jenny and François decided to stay alone at La Marlière for another ten days or so. But they didn't leave house, they stayed there locked up day and night, completely enslaved to the fearsome demands of their passionate, burning, devastating love. They were "in a lodge".

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— Jenny asked him on the evening of the third day, beginning to worry about François's melancholy moods as she lay in his arms, languid with love, in front of the big fireplace in the living room, where a fire of vine shoots and pine cones was burning.

— ... I think of the atrocious insatiability of Providence... that it took a pile of 19 bloody corpses for the secret doors of our final love to open in the visible course of things... are the paths of great love always marked by these mongoloid heaps of bloody heads? For something new to declare itself, for an absolutely new instance of life to appear, we must always begin by paying the price of blood sacrifice... it seems to me that there is always someone watching in the shadows to make sure that things happen in this way, an unknown master of the ceremonial of the liturgy of renewal through the shedding of blood, the foaming blood of the foundational sacrifice... he

So it's not impossible that our unspoken guilt, our melancholy, stems from the awareness we carry deep within us of the sacrificial, bloody origins of our love... it's thanks to the bloody double murder of Alexia and Laurence that we ourselves have been able to draw closer again, that we can finally see clearly into the hidden chasms of our souls torn apart by the long separation that had been imposed on them... and *imposed on purpose*, perhaps...

— ... these are strange male thoughts, pagan thoughts, that no woman would agree to understand, let alone follow," Jenny replied, rather upset by his words, and continued: "... love is never the product of an exchange... love, our love itself, is a gift, the absolutely free, un hoped-for, inconceivable gift that is given to us by the Mystery Love, by the *Incendium Amoris*... we are then called participate in this mystery, we have been chosen for this... through our love, we

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must give thanks, indefinitely, to the Mystery of Love... in our very lives and beyond, in eternity...

Much later that night. François is sleeping, a troubled sleep, his face turned towards the window, half his body along its entire length cut off sharply by the intense light of the moon, a strange sidereal violet.

Jenny gets up slowly and leaves the bed, naked, to go to the bathroom, where she stops, standing, in front of the large mirror that takes up the whole wall; she insists on caressing the hair down her back, the hardened tips of her breasts, very little of sex, rather allegorically. But she dwells at length on her anus, which has a definite mystagogic significance.

Then, as she moved closer to the mirror to touch it to her face, began to say a fast-paced invocation in a low voice, in a completely unknown language - an initiatory language, a "witch's language" - raising her arms high above her head while slowly undulating her belly in an extremely lascivious, hypnotic way.

The mirror then darkened, turning dark green towards inside, and a long trickle of blood began to ooze from its surface, flowing up and down in a loop to the right, spreading out in a round spot where the stream of blood seemed to turn on itself, from left to right, faster and faster, "like a sun". Jenny knelt down and lay there for a long time, prostrate and motionless, shaking from time to time. Perhaps you could even hear the distant, muffled beating of drums, bluish and white flames ripping through ecstatically charged air of the , which had been made sanctuary by Jenny's nocturnal, all-powerful work, thus rediscovering her occult identity, which even François didn't know about, because François didn't know about a lot of things.

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XII

ON THE HIGH WALL OF THE PASSY WATER , THE
PREMONITORY APPEARANCE OF THE HEAD
LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD

"At the first breath of wind

unfurled it in all its extent, we saw a

huge standard illuminated

by the ruins of the fire. In the centre
was a heart pierced by two swords:
the shield of the Counts of
Monteleone.

Around the coat of arms ran his motto
Agere, non loqui.

Paul Féval, *The Silent Companions*

In the meantime, with an iron will and a phenomenal knowledge of manners and dissimulations, of the obscure conspiratorial secrets of the profession and of the often highly dangerous mysteries of the underbelly of the political administration of the regime in power, Tony Richmond had nonetheless managed to put on track his project for the "special politico-strategic intelligence structure with major European and continental objectives" of which he had spoken to François d'Espart during the latter's visit to him while he was hospitalised at the Val de Grâce: the *Direction Évaluation Stratégie*[^] or DES. This department, which reported to the Matignon, was also attached, by necessity, to the Place Beauveau and maintained close relations with the political and military services of General Joseph Constantin!

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On Rue Lauriston, in the 16th arrondissement, the departments of the DES

occupied the top two floors of a large stone building, with an imposing entrance, a hidden inner courtyard in the style of a small park, with rows of tall fir trees, a mythological pool, lawns and gravel and, on two levels, reserved cellars, very useful to

certain confidential jobs. The other occupants of the building were senior executives, seated merchants, and maids were often seen walking beautiful, smiling, blond children in prams - the very image of happiness, carefree, interesting concealment for the nocturnal activities of the DES. Indeed, we had done things right.

François d'Espart acted as operational assistant to Tony Richmond, who was the head of the department, managing fifteen or so inspectors whom he had had great difficulty in expropriating from their original departments (ST, RG, etc.), as well as a lieutenant-colonel and a captain - both aviators - from General Joseph Constantini's department.), as well as a lieutenant-colonel and a captain - both aviators, who knows why - from General Joseph Constantini's department.

Behind its motto *agere, non loqui*, the DES presented itself as a highly sophisticated machine for the politico-strategic processing of operational intelligence, acting at both the national and the European grand-continental levels, a superior war machine, destined for a highly decisive career if it succeeded in really putting itself in the line of battle while avoiding the fatal pitfalls and dramatic, tailor-made pitfalls that were bound to come its way very quickly. For in the French 'intelligence community', Tony Richmond's 'headquarters' was already surrounded by a triple ring of fierce enmity and inconsolable jealousy.

But that doesn't matter: in reality, the real strategic aims of the DES, as secretly conceived by Tony Richmond, were quite different from those that were admitted, that 158

Ion put forward administratively, and of these occult "strategic plans", only François d'Espart and General Joseph Constantin! were allowed to penetrate their subversive nature by

to the regime. For Tony Richmond and those close to him, it was ultimately - or, as they themselves put it, "in the final analysis" - precisely the overthrow and liquidation of this regime that was the ultimate, hidden aim of the DES, a death trap acting subversively from within the regime itself.

Things, however, were going their own way. And with every day that passed, France came ever closer to the final precipice, towards which, despite the superhuman efforts of Tony Richmond and some of his friends, it was being relentlessly pushed by its masked enemies, both inside and outside, who already sensed that the end was near, that the time for the bloody slaughter was coming, the great bloody slaughter they had all been waiting for, and which had them drooling, stamping their feet, whetting their appetites, panicking, haggard, sick with impatience, unaware of the wonderful surprise awaiting them at the end of the race, which some were preparing for them in the shadows, *having understood everything, knowing everything.*

For several days in a row, we had heavy, black, sooty rain, which made you feel black and suicidal, reminiscent of the greyish walls, the long greyish walls of the cemeteries in certain suburbs. And then the sun came out again, the great white and yellow sun of late autumn, contrasting in a subtle, fascinating way with the pronounced coolness of the background air.

For several days François d'Espart had sensed that something was afoot somewhere, that he would soon be called upon once again by fate, by an unexpected change that would suddenly intervene in his life. And his anticipation was already tinged with a certain anxiety, and he was already beginning to feel a certain metallic taste in his mouth that he knew only too well, the very taste of imminent danger.

Until, at around midday, he received a rather strange phone call from the Spanish Embassy in Paris. A certain Luis 159

Sanchez Soria, apparently one of the heads of the cultural and press services, told him he had a message for him.

He asked François to come to the Embassy as soon as possible to meet him, so that he could convey the message to him personally. So they made an appointment for the next morning. Since the "mutual friend" in question was none other than "don Javier Astrana Marin", in other words, don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar himself, François d'Espart knew in advance that *this would be a promising meeting*. knew straight away that it was all going to start all over again, even if he had no idea what it would be like this time.

An innocent start, and then, suddenly, the crushing blow, *el màs que cuenta*.

Indeed, the next day, Luis Sanchez Soria appeared to a handsome young man with long hair, elegant and withdrawn, cultivating coldness and diplomatic restraint - despite the pronounced type of effeminate gigolo from the Ramblas of Barcelona that he had - and showing himself to be in a hurry to finish with the commission he had been given. However, François was quick to recognise the service professional, giving himself the type that was expected of him, *el chulito de distincion*.

Thus, "Don Javier Astrana Marin" informed François d'Espart that a young Spanish nun, Mother Superior Angelica del Santo Espiritu, belonging to the *Comuni- dad del Sagrado Corazon de Jesús y del Inmaculado Corazon de María* of Father Luis Saénz, of Ventador, who had to be discreetly present in Paris, wished to take advantage of the opportunity to meet him; that she had something to give him in person from Father Luis Saénz, as well as a number of things to let him know urgently; the Mother Superior Angelica del Santo Spirito therefore asked him to come, three days later, to the House of

Our Lady of Fatima" retreats, in Boulogne, where she was going to be, and where she would be waiting for him at four in the afternoon;
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she insisted that her visit to Paris, and her planned meeting with François, be treated as a matter of utmost secrecy.

For his part, François knew perfectly well the seriousness that had to be attached to such a step coming from someone who had been sent on a mission by Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar. So he paid the utmost attention to setting up this strange meeting. At the same time, he was dying to meet this young "Mother Superior Angelica of the Holy Spirit" that Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar was so mysteriously sending to meet him; so, the twisted super mug could feel her viciously sneaking up on him, but what could he do?

Frustrated exaltation or, in advance, exalted frustration? How could he tell? But he was already sensing something similar, with a kind of morose delight that never failed to disgust him, that seemed to him entirely suspicious (and suspicious it was, and perhaps even more so).

In three days' time, when he had to go to the appointment, it had started raining again. The raging downpour wove a heavy, thick canvas that drowned everything, plunging everything into a disturbing, hypnotic, translucent light that seemed to have something dangerous and captivating about it, taking hold of everything and holding it in its . It was hard enough to find the address of François's rendezvous in Boulogne, but with this rain it was looking more and more like an impossible challenge, a sort of half-awake nightmare, a somnambulistic wandering guided from the ruined cellars of the invisible.

Having left his carriage alongside the Seine, on the Quai des Manœuvres, François, following the instructions of the Ambassador, had to enter the vast, empty courtyard first.

of a disused warehouse, and then through a succession of backyards and wild gardens, where the enchantment created by the high, tangled branches reduced the rain while intensifying 161

the darkening of the already weakened day. Finally, as he crossed a long enclosure of large stones, he came out onto a beautiful stretch of grass, revealing, at the far end, a sort of private mansion, all white, with all its windows lit in broad daylight.

And there it was. He was in front of the Retreat House "Our Lady of Fatima", where Don Ceferino y Malagar's mysterious envoy, the "Angelic Mother Superior of the Holy Spirit", had arranged to meet him, and he arrived at four o'clock on the dot, as agreed.

It was a house intended for spiritual retreats led by priests and religious of renown, retreats for prayer and meditation, for looking inward, and not an establishment where retired people were supposed to find a place to rest at the end of their lives. Maison de Retraites Notre- Dame de Fatima was the name of this surprisingly well-hidden place, which was not without its mysteries, dissimulations and spiritual deviations, and in any case almost certainly not without serious perils in shadows. Was this the reason for keeping all the lights on - symbolically, if not preventively - all the time, day and night?

At first , there wasn't a soul in . François was already beginning to worry a little, having been unable to meet anyone up to the second floor. However, the lights were all brightly lit, suggesting a sort of spectral reception in broad daylight. Terrible, this marriage of light and emptiness. And the profound silence, reverberating from its own bare interior spaces. However, at the top of the stairs, at the

On the third floor, a tall young woman seemed to be waiting for him, and he knew at once that it was the Mother Superior Angelica of the Holy Spirit. Dressed in a very elegant black suit, she looked to be in her late thirties; with long brown hair, silent, of a dazzling beauty, severe, haughty, that she had a great sense of humour.

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seemed to control her from within, creating a kind of unease, not to say dread; a subtle dread which, instead of imposing itself outwardly, seemed to be constantly trying to evade it. Only a modest silver cross on the lapel of her suit said she was a nun, and she immediately invited François to follow her into a small room just opposite the staircase. It was a room with a view of the sky, thanks to two very high windows, but with only a table and two chairs and, on the wall, a large red wooden crucifix and, strangely enough, a huge mirror with a heavy gilded wooden frame. On the table, a tall, thin bottle of jerez and two glasses, as well as a saucer with green olives in brine. It emanated a powerful, indefinable fragrance, which Francis immediately had to call the *scent of holiness*, and perhaps that's what it really was. The scent of roses and lilies, of incense, of virgin wax, air warmed by the flames of candles, by the secret breath of prayers. At this first meeting, Angélique had an unquestionable advantage, an obvious advantage, which François immediately perceived as a grace, as proof of an occult pact, coming from much further away than the very fact of their present meeting, perhaps even from beyond their present lives.

She spoke in whispers, in a veiled voice, deep, low, a conspiratorial voice, made for shadows and secrecy, with wide stretches of silence between her statements, sometimes even between words; deeply impressed, François began to feel himself trembling as he listened to her, and he couldn't believe it. Trembling?

- ... and here's what I had to tell you: when we recently made some changes and renovated the upstairs of our mother house in Ventador, where Laurence Mercier-Duvernois had stayed shortly before she was murdered, we discovered a bundle of papers in a black cardboard box under the bottom drawer of a massive two-hundred-year-old cupboard,

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I must confess that I myself had the opportunity to read all of it... yes, all of it... so Father Luis Saénz and I thought we should entrust you with its safekeeping... I believe that when you read it, you will be terribly upset... that you will not emerge from it completely unscathed... Our brief affair with Laurence and all that you subsequently tried to do for her and, after her death, your implacable decision to liberate her memory by eliminating, one by one, those responsible for her final torture, makes you the natural heir to this appalling document.... but you will see for yourself... it will open up again, I know, like a long bloody trail in connection with the occult struggle and the torture of Laurence, and this

This 'secret diary' is in fact a well of blood that overflows, foaming, inexhaustible... because there is here indisputable proof that your general point of view on the events that led to the liquidation of Laurence in the atrocious conditions you know about, was totally mistaken, *aberrant*.. you were, in fact, wrong about everything, you had got it all wrong ... not for a single moment had things been as you believe, at least as far as their hidden reasons were concerned ... but, as I have just said, now you will see for yourself and, I hope, you will not fail to proceed accordingly ... to draw in continuity

all the necessary conclusions... yes, I know perfectly well that you are not going to be able not to react immediately, to *go right back to the attack*, and I must tell you that I am counting - that we are counting - firmly on your reaction, because we are not unaware that through the DES you currently have far more considerable means at your disposal, and it is on this that we have conceived our own plans for joint action with yourself and what is now behind you... we know 164

the deep feelings of Tony Richmond, as well as those of the General Joseph Constantine!... Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar has given us great confidence to tell us all about it...

he won't have to regret, no, far from it... on the contrary...

by bringing us together, he has had an essentially providential role, I am very deeply convinced of that. ... a providential role, yes... moreover, our own meeting, this afternoon, must be seen in an immediate providential perspective... I would like you to understand this, to think of it yourself as something truly decisive, planned from on high... at least that is my deepest conviction... and I have no hesitation in telling you about it quite openly, as you can see... and here we come to the second part of the urgent reason why I wanted to meet you... You see, as I've already told you, I'm convinced that when you read Laurence Mercier-Duvemois's 'secret diary', you'll immediately be tempted to react, to correct the errors of assessment that you and your comrades have made about this dark, gloomy affair, until you come to the real end of it.... and this is where our interests meet... because if the end that you thought you had to bring to it was not the right one, and if you decide to go back and do what you should have done and did not know how to do the first time, at the time of your death, you will be in a position to do what you should have done.

of your first attempt at a vigilante settlement of this case, we're going to be able to - we're going to have to

- working together... the situation has changed, and so have the objectives...

So read Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's "secret diary" for yourself, and think about it... but, I beg you, don't act - don't react - just yet...

I'll be back in Paris in a fortnight, and we'll then be able to compare our decisions and action plans. There's no need for me to tell you any more at the moment, you'll understand everything when you read this post-mortem diary, and you'll be able to make your own too

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the terrible operational secret that it contains, that it somehow brings to us to show us the path we must take to get to where I think we are expected, to where Divine Providence wants to lead us... finally, I think I also owe you a few explanations about myself, about what I am and what I am supposed to do.... as you are perhaps unaware, the Church, while constituting an impregnable block of stone - you are Peter, and on this Stone I will build my Church, against which the Gates of Hell will not prevail - comprises several inner hierarchies, several parallel, occult hierarchies, adapted to the ceaseless battle she wages in the century, against the century.... I myself belong to one of these parallel, occult hierarchies, charged with fighting Evil at work, Evil within Evil itself, where Evil manifests itself in the most intolerably total way... but we'll talk about all that later, at our next meeting.... in the meantime, I'd like us to maintain contact through one of my elite activists, Clémence Lemonier, a young mother - she has four children - married to a naval officer...

Clémence is in charge a social work and the press for this work, *La Nouvelle famille catholique*... I'm going to give you her personal details... see her, very discreetly, establish together the permanent methods of contact that will suit you best, I've already warned her that you'll be contacting her shortly... I beg you to be very careful, these days we're fighting a battle that is becoming more directly dangerous with each passing day.... we're probably already risking our lives at every moment, with every step forward we take... and now let's put a spell on this bottle of jerez, I've brought it from my lands, it's a very great wine, a truly royal wine... and rest assured, through the exhaustive confidences that Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar has given us, I think I know everything about you... you'll soon know as much about me if, as I think, it's possible that you're going to contact me soon.

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we'll have to go a long way together... we're a large underground supranational organisation, increasingly overactive, aware of the importance of its fight and all its secret missions, and I know that we can help you a great deal in the action that you yourself are carrying out, at the moment, alongside men of great exception like Divisional Tony Richmond, like General Joseph Constantini, within the framework of your DES and even, sometimes, in a completely personal capacity. ... so don't be fooled by appearances, I may look like a rather young woman - a young Spanish aristocrat, I don't mind saying - but I consider myself to be an old woman, a very old woman indeed, who has come back from everything, but who is determined to fight to the bitter end the merciless battle in which I have embarked against the powers of darkness currently at work in this world...

So here's the gist of what I felt I had to say to you today... and, once again: be very careful when reading Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's 'secret diary', you may find yourself extraordinarily uncomfortable...

She then escorted François downstairs, to the ground floor, into the large, *giorno-illuminated* salon, where he caught a glimpse, as he passed, of a group of four nuns, dressed in black and white uniforms, standing huddled together at the foot of a narrow spiral staircase, staring at him silently, their eyelids lowered, their eyes gleaming like white carbuncles in their faces veiled in shadow. It was then that François suddenly felt fear, an irrational, mystical fear, coming out of who knows what forgotten recesses of his subconscious, but intense enough to that it took his breath away, the ancient fear of the sacred hiding behind its own shadows, fear of the veiled gazes of the four nuns who had insisted on attending his departure from the House of Spiritual Retreats. Why had they done this? Why had they insisted on doing so? Yes, *why?*

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Outside, the rain seemed to have eased somewhat, but it was already dark, and François hurried back to his car on the Quai des Manœuvres, clutching the black-covered file of the "

Laurence's secret diary.

The walk back to the car seemed inordinately long, the muddy crossing, one after the other, of gardens with leaves dripping with cold rain, plunged into darkness, while certain suspicious presences stealthily allowed themselves to be approached, an almost ectoplasmic, if , in a way, obscene manner. Because, one way or another, *there were people*. No, the nightmare of returning to

the banks of the Seine was not at all innocent. François wasn't even sure that he was completely conscious yet; it seemed to him that he was walking as if in a dream, through a long dark tunnel; He saw himself passing through places he had perhaps known once, in another life, but now only vaguely remembered, in the grip of a great sadness, his chest shaking with sobs and spasms (somehow, he had to take the full brunt of the backlash from his strange conversation with Angelique du Saint-Esprit, which had been no small ordeal). On several occasions, it seemed to him that Angélique du Saint-Esprit was walking silently beside him, a sort of white flame above her head, and he thought he could hear the dead leaves rustling under her feet. He was feverish and trembling again.

What was going on with him?

When he finally arrived home, François stood up, ate a slice of pâté and drank a few glasses of claret - Jenny had gone down to La Marlière for three days and he was home alone.

and then, without further ado, began to read the document that Angélique du Saint-Esprit had just given him, the 'secret diary' of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois.

By four o'clock in the morning he had read the whole thing, and even reread some passages, taking notes. He was 168

He was stunned, he felt he was on the verge of losing control of himself, *enough is enough*. That's what he kept repeating to himself, unstopably, obsessively, paranoid, *no, no, enough is enough*.

Delivered post-mortem, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's 'secret diary' was also a kind of testament, and the upheavals and harmful magnetic influences it set in motion, disturbing the very order of the stars, were as devastating as the 'death of a man'.

violation of the ultimate, hidden burial chamber in the pyramid of the Cursed Pharaoh.

Powerless, desperate, François d'Espart tried to summarise, to put in order what he had just learned, and the result was catastrophic. He had taken notes, which he destroyed as soon as he had reread them, at the end (and always his nagging *no, no, enough is enough*, but he had to face up to the terrifying evidence of the disaster, the only thing he could do for the moment).

These notes hastily established more or less the following, and their conclusions were staggeringly obvious, leaving not the slightest doubt:

1) It was absolutely not General Q+++ H+++ who had engineered the liquidation of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois. They were lovers, they loved each other passionately, and she was in the process of betraying the French special services for him, to whom she had revealed everything about her activities on his orders: it was he who had demanded that she continue pretend to inform the French special services about him, which, thus turned inside out, she was continuously intoxicating.

2) However, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's big job was, in reality, a completely different one: having managed to penetrate, having been used as an occasional call-girl for their very special activities, a top-level, top-secret "counter-initiative organisation", which clandestinely pursued highly dangerous group amorous activities sets under control, and much more, which carried out human sacrifices,

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liturgically, to the series of mutilations and horrible tortures ritually inflicted on those who were about to die, she was subsequently allowed to take a full part in all its clandestine activities, reporting secretly to General Q+++ H+++, and to him alone, exclusively.

In fact, a "New Religion" was secretly in the process of being born, a subterranean religion, a "new religion".

The "religion of abyssal darkness, of original darkness", in the process of investing in and securing the occult underpinnings of a French society in perdition, or rather of a certain French grande bourgeoisie and a certain intellectual class, rotten to the core and already doomed, inevitably, to annihilation and eventual self-destruction. General Q+++ H+++, on the other hand, intended to keep a very close and constant watch on all this, no doubt with a view to its later use, of which he himself was surely unaware, the future direction, the direction he was going to impose, one day, on the use of this higher-level social intelligence. His own politico-strategic intelligence activities in France and throughout Western Europe called for

He was the man behind the surveillance a secret organisation that would undoubtedly have a decisive future.

1) At a certain , however, Laurence Mercier-Duvernois began to seriously fear for her life.

She was increasingly under the impression that the 'unknown perpetrators' of the counter-initiative criminal grouping she had who had managed to penetrate its operational workings, and who used it their borderline amorous sessions, were already doubting its loyalty.

Laurence was already doomed, doomed to disappear. We soon came to see through her game, and she had undoubtedly made some fatal oversights.

2) This is how François came to understand what must have actually happened: the "unknown leaders" of the secret counter-Initiatic society penetrated by Laurence Mercier-Duvernois had intercepted the

Eugène Lambrichs' special action group, working for the French political-military secret services, and negotiated, with Eugène Lambrichs, the liquidation of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, whom they had asked to tell his men in the field that they were acting clandestinely on behalf of General Q+++ H+++, and that they were being paid by him. In reality, the orders for action and the money had come, via Eugène Lambrichs, from the counter-Initiatist secret society that had decided to eliminate her, convinced that she was a traitor.

1) So it was not an enemy that François d'Espart himself had killed in the person of General Q+++ H+++, but the only support, the only ally that Laurence had by her side in her desperate battle against those who had just condemned her to death.

In this case, François had allowed himself to be manipulated into liquidating the team of killers used by Eugène Lambrichs to murder Laurence and, once the murder had been completed, to be remanipulated, a notch higher, so that he himself would personally eliminate General Q+++ H+++, whom we had managed to frame him as the shadowy mastermind Laurence's murder.

François d'Espart's revelations in Laurence Mercier-Duvernois's "secret diary" hit him like an iron bar to the throat.

In the end, realising that he could stand no longer, he dragged himself to his bed, where he lay on his back, his eyes wide open in the dark.

Did he fall asleep? Perhaps he did. The fact is that at some point he woke up - or thought he had woken up - in the dark, as if he'd been locked in a vault deep underground, with no way out; in the grip of an unbearable dread,

with difficulty mastering the inhuman, bestial howl that he felt rising in his throat.

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from the twitching depths of his being, trapped in a black trap a thousand times more terrifying than death; and already he was beginning to be unable to breathe normally, struggling in panic in his narrow confines of darkness.

Then, at the very last moment, he was inspired to pray, to call on his old protector the Archangel St Michael, whose help he urgently begged for, and suddenly there was a great light around him, and he found himself, half-awake, lying in bed, as if nothing had happened. Slowly, until he reached a kind of immaculate white incandescence, like that of a mirror set on fire, which then began to fade. A heavenly freshness filled his chest, an ecstatic joy lifted him. He had just experienced a mysterious "passage between two worlds", and François was awake for good; it was five o'clock in the morning, and he could hear the birds singing, as if in panic, beneath his windows, lost in the leafy branches of the Square du Général Duseigneur.

Shaken by the vision he had just had - the vision of darkness defeated by light - François began his day early.

Before noon, he had already told Tony Richmond and General Joseph Constantin! about the revelations contained in the "

secret diary" of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, and began discussions on the immediate consequences of these revelations, *The immediate consequences had to be dealt with immediately.* Far from being over, the Laurence Mercier-Duvernois affair had only just begun.

And the urgent need to rethink whole Laurence Mercier-Duvernois affair seemed all the more obvious to them as they had just learned of the more than dubious suicide - of a woman who, in the past, had been the victim of a fatal accident.

the so-called "fatal accident by overdose" of Clémence Lemonier, in a small hotel in Suresnes, where it seemed she had spent the night with a man she had never met.

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unknown, who had disappeared very early in the morning. According to a more precise version, she had arrived late at night with three men, two of whom had vacated the premises shortly afterwards, and the third of whom had spent the night with her, only to leave stealthily at dawn. Clearly, the whole smacked of a cover-up, set-up to make it look like a real set-up and serve a real purpose.

This was a signal, a warning to those concerned, i.e. François d'Espart and his secret politico-strategic action group.

In any case, the "organisation" - as François d'Espart, Tony Richmond and General Joseph Constantin! were already calling the counter-initiative secret society of high-level criminal subversion whose existence and activities they had just discovered through the *post-mortem* revelations of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, the "organisation" - had taken a lead, with the new murder of Clémence Lemonier, of at least ten lengths over the DES. This proved the extraordinary relevance of their operational intelligence and their immediate response mechanisms. On the other hand, the very fact - inconceivable, to be honest - that they had been able to operate for so long, and over such a wide area of social activity, without the DES ever having known anything, really known anything, or even suspected anything about their activities, was enough to prove the importance their organisation and the effectiveness of their active presence. It therefore became all the more imperative, for those of the DES, that they succeed in

Reacting, and finally getting the upper hand, whatever the cost, to wipe out this black canker operating underground at the very base of current French society, and with the support and confidential backing of who knows what senior political figures in the current regime: that was the final conclusion reached around midday by Tony Richmond, François d'Espart and General Joseph Constantin, the operational staff of the DES.

A conviction they now had to reckon with in a total, tragic way. A

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A new form of political combat had thus appeared on the extreme left of the fiery spectre they were obliged to confront, a new combat objective for the DES: extreme anti-social nihilism, satanic commitment as an immediate political-social conspiracy. A huge step forward towards the final abyss of the super-catastrophe feverishly, fanatically prepared by some, which they had to identify and put out of action. Which wasn't going to be easy at all. "Dirty, dirty business". For the first time, François doubted his star, felt disqualified. And Mother Superior Angelica of the Holy Spirit, had something happened to her too," Francis wondered, as he left the conference at the top of the DES. How would he know? Should he have gone back to see her himself at the "Our Lady of Fatima" Retreat House in Boulogne? Wouldn't it be better, for the time being, to break off all contact with the Ventador group and with Spain?

So those at the DES soon came to agree on one absolutely essential point: the murder of Clémence Lemonier *was a strong signal* that the enemy was openly sending to the confidential Catholic organisation of which she was a member, concerted defilement, a manoeuvre of insulting stigmatisation.

designed to destabilise us all morally. The fact that a fervent Catholic like Clémence Lemonier, a mother of a large family, a perfect wife, with the political and social responsibilities that she had in the *New Catholic Family* group, could have died in the ignominious conditions that had been deliberately invented for her following a dirty, outrageous and despicable production, constituted above all a decisive warning, a first act of "total war": 1 By this, the enemy was telling us that he already knew that Clémence Lemonier had been chosen to maintain permanent contact between Catholic society, to which she herself obviously belonged, and the 174

safety

group

represented,

at

by François d'Espart. The enemy even knew that François d'Espart was no longer unaware of the real reasons for Laurence's assassination in Spain.

Mercier-Duvernois, nor the way in which he himself had been manipulated subsequently, *until now*.

The masks had come off. No doubt the final confrontation was about to , and in a situation of singularly scabrous inferiority for François d'Espart and the DEA, who had no idea of the enemy they were being invited to confront in such a decisive and *final* manner.

For if, through ignominious liquidation of Clémence Lemonier, the enemy had just demonstrated that it possessed in-depth, immediately operational information on the

François d'Espart's activities and those of his friends from *the Comunidad del Sagrado Corazon de Jesús y del Corazon Inmaculado de Maria*, in Ventador, Spain, as well as those of the Paris DES, François and his friends knew absolutely nothing about those they were mobilising to confront. And not only did they know nothing about them, they didn't even have the slightest clue as to who they were dealing with.

There was no way of approaching them, of making contact, of counter-attacking. All they could do was swim blindly in the empty darkness. It was truly a nightmare situation. And what's more, it was also a situation of extreme urgency.

On the same day, a second summit meeting was held on the top floor of the Rue Lauriston, bringing together the heads of the DBS from 10pm until late into the night. At the end of this tense and tumultuous evening session, which was unusually tense for the group, François wanted to walk home alone to cool off, breathe in the night air and relax. He had headache and his eyes were burning, no doubt because of the dreaded cigarette he had just been smoking for so long. He had his P38 in his belt, and they had all gone underground, like every time they had to 175

crossing a "high alert zone". Ten metres behind him, the two young detectives, his bodyguards, glided silently along, like vague shadows, each on one side of the street. The full moon illuminated the streets powerfully, almost as if in broad daylight, and there was a kind of magic in warm late autumn air. Mysterious smells wafted over the houses, along the empty streets, from the Bois de Boulogne, a powerful odour of wet earth, of the forest opening up to the night, of dead leaves. The windows were wide open on the second floor,

a young woman was singing alone in the dark, in the middle of a great silence heavy with secret expectation. For it was certain that something was bound to happen. Yes, absolutely certain.

As he walked down the Rue Lauriston, towards a completely deserted hour of the morning, François, who was going to have to take the Rue Copernic to reach the Place Victor Hugo and Jenny's current home, repeated to himself the conclusion reached by the staff of the DES after three hours of arduous discussions, perhaps for want of anything else: that François had to take the first plane to Madrid the next morning, to meet Don Ceferino Cortez y Malagar, to see whether he could
and if that proves impossible, that he should go immediately south to join Father Luis Saénz at the headquarters of his mysterious *Comunidad del Sagrado Corazon de Jesús y del Inmaculado Corazon de Maria*, in mountains above Puerto de la Duquesa, in the village of Ventador.

Angélique du Saint-Esprit had to tell François at all costs everything she had not thought necessary to confide in him during their first conspiratorial meeting in Boulogne about the counter-Initiatic secret society, of declared satanic orientation and, what is more, verified, which was to be held directly responsible for the murder of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois in Spain and, subsequently, for the ignominious liquidation of Clémence Lemonier.

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in Surenes, in that infamous brothel where he had been dragged by force.

The fact that they keep attacking women," observed Tony Richmond later in the evening, "is extremely revealing: it's an unconscious projection of their fundamental hatred of women.

of the divine person of Mary, the projection of the struggle of the Apocalypse between the Beast and the Woman 'crowned with stars', who is none other than the Queen of Heaven". And, he would later say, "... they will always be recognisable by their criminal detestation of woman, whom they do nothing but insult, defile, bruise and trample, and in whom endlessly attack the figure of Mary who is beyond their reach...".

François had understood perfectly well that Angelica of the Holy Spirit knew everything about the ontological enemy lurking in the deep shadow of non-being, and that she was only waiting for the right opportunity to reveal everything to him and, through him, to the DES, whom she no doubt intended to make the ram's head of the all-out counter-offensive she dreamed of undertaking against those of the Power of Darkness : what he had to do, the only thing to try, was to succeed in reconnecting with the Dark Power. which had been interrupted by the disguised murder of his Paris liaison, Clémence Lemonier.

The more he thought about it, the more an extraordinary spiritual exaltation took hold of Francis, who was in the process of understanding the true transcendental dimensions of the combat in which he was already engaged, which was in a way the very combat of the Apocalypse, the combat of the "Two Standards" of the secret exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. At the same time, a sudden inspiration had brought home to him the idea, not yet clearly grasped, that what should be expected from now on was the secret incarnation of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, and he unconsciously related this idea to the impromptu appearance, in his own life, of Angelica of the Holy Spirit: a light resulted, as if emanating from within him from a "divine" source.

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an inner sun that he didn't have the courage to face. A *sophianic light*, so soft and so strong, that he could not see it.

violence. And how he would have loved to be able to dwell on it, to insist on the furtive contemplation of this strange light! But for the , other preoccupations were taking over, forcing him to face them.

As he left the rue Lauriston and turned into the rue Copernic, François realised that something was wrong. But then not at all. It was like a permanent earthquake, the pavement shook more and more under his feet; a strange whitish luminescence, like polished pewter, rose above the Réservoir d'Eau de Passy, whose high walls bordered the rue Copernic. The water in the Reservoir seemed to be boiling on the spot, stirring more and more violently, billowing waves, bundles of water overflowing the upper basin, flooding the street, while a lugubrious noise could be heard coming from inside the basin and under the ground, like great rising waters, irresistible, from unknown depths, blind masses of water preparing to sweep away everything in their path.

At the same time, the wall of the Reservoir along the Rue Copernicus took on a reddish hue, as it were becoming incandescent, burning from within.

Black flakes swirled in the air, like dead leaves, like burnt paper, sometimes coming together like short-lived swarms, like wet, sticky, foul-smelling rags, rising up from everywhere, carried by a small burning wind, most suspicious, which tried to prevent us from breathing.

But it was the transformations of the Reservoir Wall, mysteriously brought to incandescence, that held François' attention the most, and that preoccupied him all the more as it seemed that a sort of whirlwind was trying to declare itself at the top of the wall.

in the middle of the wall, carrying bricks and shattered stones in its circular path, thus marking

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as a space designed to receive something within it, to reveal who knows what sign of great terror, of black counter-annunciation. The wall was indeed in labour, and the very thing that was the secret of all this convulsive, infernal manifestation was about to be born there. And it did. There was then a terrible explosion, as if a whole section of the wall had just collapsed into its own occult depths, and François, who was at that moment walking along the left-hand pavement of the Rue Copernic down towards the Place Victor Hugo, saw appear, on the other side of the street, on the high wall of the Réservoir de Passy, the immense, ghastly, hallucinatory image of a face inscribed there in shadows of intense blackness, but as if crawling beneath its surface.

Things really seemed to be getting tougher, suddenly going beyond the immediate reality of things. How could François not know who he was dealing with?

: that livid face with its disproportionately high forehead, its lowered eyelids showing only two narrow bars of intense, searing, deadly white light; the thin, purplish lips, smiling a smile of terrifying, intolerable cruelty, whispering muffled threats, infinitely sacrilegious proposals in an unknown language, and the eagle's beak nose, certainly noble, but darkly savage, inhuman, bestial; That face, from which emanated a formidable black radiance, and whose glassy gaze struck him down as if it wanted to annihilate him on the spot, could only be that of the Lord of Darkness.

Did he appreciate the extravagant and dangerous honour that was being bestowed on him, did he grasp its full meaning?

However, apart from a slight uneasiness and a sort of physical disgust, a nausea, a disgust, François felt nothing at all before the staggering spectacle of this apparition from depths of Hell, not the slightest fear, nothing, nothing at all. He didn't feel at all concerned, and he even stopped looking at what was before him. As if nothing had happened.

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This terrifying face-to-face confrontation marked, however - and with such sudden and unheard-of violence - an abysmal break in the inner temporality of this world.

There was definitely going to be trouble.

Worn out and , François was not going to be able to close his eyes all night.

Alone in the empty flat, all his thoughts obsessively gathered around the reactivated memory of Laurence Mercier-Duvernois, whose atrocious symbol he could not stop finding in himself: her naked body, suspended, bloody, in the trees in the gardens of Dr Adolfo Neuhaus's clinic in Castellon el Alto, the very symbol of his defeat without redemption or forgiveness, of his *defeat in eternity*.

Now, in the fact that he had to go there once again, to find a second time the predestined places of what had happened, then, irrevocable, definitively stopped, it nevertheless seemed to him to contain something like a supreme secret that he was unable to elucidate, to really grasp its meaning or the message that was being sent to him - he knew perfectly well - occultly, from the invisible, and directly related to the encounter he had just had in the indecipherable person of Angelique of the Holy Spirit. For it was she who was in fact drawing him back, once again, to the scene of the earlier tragedy. There, it seemed to him, was a kind of resurrection mystery of which he was aware.

sensed the blinding light to come, way or . He was also beginning to understand why he had been chosen, for what *ultimate mission*, why he had been chosen, and what was now expected of him. And it was then that François d'Espart was reminded of this, through a sudden emergence from the depths of his being.

the literary image that had made him unconsciously take the spectral apparition of the Mystery of Iniquity's own face for something he had already seen, for although he had not, strictly speaking, ever seen it, the image of the whole apparition was not unfamiliar to him, the passage having come back to him in the memory of André Biély's extraordinary novel, *Saint*

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Petersburg, where the infernal figure of "a Chinese" - no doubt V.I. Lenin - had prophetically appeared to the novel's main character as a mysterious "Chinese".

the wall of the room in which he was conspiratorially hiding.

It's true, now that it was all coming back to him, that the atrociously premonitory figure of the 'Chinese' appearing on the wall in André Biély's novel had obsessed him for years.

Now, the fact that the same infernal figure had just appeared to him on the wall of the Passy water reservoirs seemed to contain the same threatening message as in the distant night of Saint Petersburg: that a change in history, rising up from its ultimate depths, was secretly being prepared, and that the time for the manifestation of this change was now increasingly imminent. In fact, this corresponded perfectly with his own idea of the current situation, with all the recent events contributing to make this almost openly clear. Even his departure this morning for Madrid, which seemed to

He knew why he was going, what he would find and where it all inexorably lead him next.

So he told himself that as soon as he returned from Madrid he would have to write a confidential memo to the central command group of the *Direction Evaluation Stratégie*, in which he would draw attention to the possibility of an attempt at immediate revolutionary change, of a subversive nature, in France. For it was now absolutely certain that events would follow, that we should, as they say, already expect the worst. That the worst was already here. And that *perhaps there was nothing more to be done*.

But at the same time, something else made him believe that his trip to Spain was going to change the current so much that all these premonitions, as certain as they were at the time, would be swept away in one fell swoop to make room for others 181

It was clear to him that he was heading for an absolute revival. The fact that he was going to Spain that morning meant that he was heading for *absolute renewal*. That all his life he had done nothing but move towards this absolute renewal.

However, François refused to accept the unbelievable outrage, interloped and scabrous, that had just been inflicted on him by the appearance of the Face of the Abyss on the wall of the Réservoirs d'Eau de Passy, considering it to be null and void, which had earned him nothing but disdainful and icy indifference, a dark infinite disgust. But, at the same time, this infernal provocation had suddenly given him, as if by reaction, a limpid, dazzling vision, as if suspended in , of a smiling young woman, not unknown to him and whom he also knew was not of this world, no, not quite of this world, somebody

who looked like Angelica of the Holy Spirit, and whose presence there, right in front of him, plunged him into an extraordinary state of extreme, paradisiacal bliss, and this was precisely the sign he was waiting for so that he could really take up the fight he already knew was now his, the fight for the *Return of Time*.

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