

Call
me

Alain Bezançon

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By

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Chapter 1

Milos weakly raised his eyelids for the trouble of re-establishing his spatio-temporal bearings.

The space around him, vaguely resembling the departure hall of an airport, resounded with the impersonal silence of strangers in transit to somewhere else. The hushed roar of the huge aircrafts' ballet was punctuated by the suavely polyglot announcements of the service personnel, as they were affectionately described by the flying elite.

"All airports resemble each other," he thought while searching for the visual bearings to help him discover in which one he found himself. A look outside gave him the answer.

"Most of the fuselages are painted blue, white, and red... France, Paris Charles de Gaulle!" he concluded, reassured of having found an answer that would allow him to set his feet down in reality once again.

Slowly, his mind, heavy with the mists of the time-change and with the weight of many years of the life of an eternal night-owl, began to function again. Some images began to filter through the gap of his rediscovered consciousness.

"A car, me inside, torrential rain against the windows. Black rain says the chauffeur with white gloves. Outside gigantic forms pile enormous bricks onto ships. An airport, men with surgical masks pass before screens that reflect their silhouettes in the infra-red spectrum. Hong Kong!" Milos said.

Then his consciousness resurfaced and the details of his life became clear once again.

Milos was in transit through Paris, his destination New York and his departure point Hong Kong, the last point on his Asia/Pacific tour, which had led him to Hobart, Port Moresby, Penang, Calbayog City, and Tainan.

Milos presented himself like a postmodern nihilist, while always, however, remaining very discreet about his occupation. He was one of the most well-known VJ's of the Feelers underground scene. The term "VJ," universally pronounced "VeeJay," made him smile, and he could not stop himself from associating it with an Indian name and from imagining himself in a turban officiating before a mob in a trance. VJ, for Vibration Jockey, gave a much more literal sense back to the exploding expression. The Feelers were adepts of extreme sensations, who, thanks to nano-implants at the level of the central nervous system, had the capacity to enter into physical resonance with certain vibrations.

A violent mountain storm, a category 5 tornado, the G-force of supersonic acceleration, a magnitude 7 earthquake, were comparisons that the Feelers used often to describe their "XtremVibes" to neophytes. Each Feeler, endowed with his implant, could modulate the intensity of physical perceptions, with the

only limit the capacity of the organs to survive. There is no need to point out that old Feelers did not exist and that the life expectancy of a Feeler addicted to XtremVibes did not surpass a dozen sessions.

This totally illegal, and thus more exciting, movement had been born a few months earlier and had ravaged the heart of the gilded, but nevertheless idle, youth of the planet. Milos had scented this gold mine and rapidly developed a range of vibrations very much appreciated by the tribe of initiates who went into the trance as often as possible, in places kept secret until the last minute. Milos had to travel constantly to follow the migrations of the adepts and to profit as quickly as possible from this manna which, according to him, would not last more than a few months, due to the eventual lack of participants and because of the pressure from the authorities to stop this scourge decimating the dizzy and stumbling youth.

In Hong Kong, Milos' last stop in Asia, the trance had taken place in public in the middle of the day in a crowd where a group of Feelers, wanting to brave the ban even more brashly and to augment the level of adrenaline in their organs already manhandled by a bulimia of low frequency vibrations, had mingled. That year, the Chinese New Year parade had curiously provoked an abnormally high number of cardiac arrests and aneurysms among subjects only twenty years old, who did not belong to the populations normally at risk.

Milos had left Hong Kong quickly, knowing that the police would not be slow in making the connection to the Feelers, and like all self-respecting paranoiacs, he felt himself to be already followed and under surveillance.

Despite being a self-proclaimed nihilist, Milos did not share the suicidal tendencies of his clients and began to judge this endlessly growing taste for taking large risks as a little too extreme.

Milos gave himself another two or three trances before removing his reverence from the Feelers and passing on to something else. Participating in the destruction of the elite by helping all these sons and daughters of good families to say to hell with the world at an accelerated pace had something satisfying about it. He had the tranquil conscience of an arms dealer. He ran a business; some would even say that he was an artist. He supplied the arms and his clients joyously pulled the trigger. But a part of him could not banish the distaste in seeing these kids destroy themselves.

Looking to kill both time and the black ideas which were beginning to show their vicious faces, Milos turned to observe his immediate environment. The vestiges of the waiting passengers who had fought ennui before him lay on the open seats. The international press of the day was abundantly scattered and magazines, better armed to resist the repeated assaults of negligent hands, still shined with their eye-catching covers of glossy paper.

Milo's mother was Czech, his father Russian, and despite having lived principally in the United States, Milos had the Eastern European heritage of his parents. That was perhaps the unconscious reason why he was drawn by a magazine on which Cyrillic characters outrageously decorated the cover, which he was unable to decipher.

He began to leaf through it, and through his fingers scrolled the sports cars, exotic palaces, sumptuous jewelry, and ultra-chic restaurants, saying to himself that it was typical of the content aimed at his high-class clients among the Feelers.

Through the random flipping of the pages he was captivated by her jaded look and a deliciously melancholy face, fixed on an inaccessible horizon. Her delicately hemmed mouth, barely open, seemed to whisper a sweet secret to an imaginary confidant. The straight, mischievous nose framed by high, slightly prominent cheekbones accentuated the hollows of her cheeks. Her alabaster, almost bluish skin-tone was set off by fine, curly, red-flamed hair, offering an outline of fire to this improbable porcelain.

In the course of his life Milos had crossed path with all sorts of creatures among the most beautiful specimens of the feminine sex, and his list of conquests was quite respectable.

But the woman's face, whose curves his fingers now ran over, resonated with him in a different manner. He felt that he knew her, with a recognition entirely certain of never having met her before.

"Eros and Thanatos forged this golem in fire and ice to torment poor mortals," Milos philosophized.

"If I still have a soul to be damned I would offer it without hesitation to the alchemist, the author of this creation, so that I could encounter her in flesh and blood."

Some words in Russian above the photo would have described what this impious icon was meant to give value to, but Milos did not succeed in deciphering the calligraphic enigma. At the bottom of the page a note which seemed to be handwritten drew his attention.

"Call Me. 212 555 9978. Eva."

Milos thought that it was part of the composition of the advertisement, but with a closer look he saw that the note was really written with a pen.

"Hey, the alchemist! I did not even sign with my own blood," he said to himself with irony.

212 was the area code for New York City, Milos' destination.

After mocking himself copiously, curiosity won over cynicism and self-derision, and he dialed the number.

Chapter 2

Milos woke up at the moment the plane touched the tarmac at JFK in New York.

Eva, he said as he opened his eyes. The magazine rested on his knees. He grabbed it and frenetically searched for Eva's face as if to convince himself of her reality.

She was still there, chiseled in four-color process, and now he added a voice to this face.

The number he had written down the evening before was not an advertising message, nor an answering service, nor a tone with no response. The vocal box had delivered its sibylline message after nine rings, as if to discourage the impatient.

"Оставить сообщение" had exuded a husky, but definitely feminine, purr, which contrasted strangely with Eva's physique, if the voice was actually that of the woman in the photo Milos was looking at. He had recognized the Russian without succeeding in translating the message. Hearing the language of his father had led Milos back to his early childhood, a period of his life which remained a sanctuary of joyous innocence.

All this resembled a serious hoax, and yet Milos could not succeed in effacing Eva's face, which shone in his mind like the last lighthouse before the coast of shipwrecks that his life had become.

In the taxi that now took him to his hotel where he planned to sleep for 48 hours without interruptions in order to make up for the weeks of frantic somnambulism, he dialed, promising himself it was for the last time, Eva's number, not knowing very well what he was hoping for. The paths of his mind became as torturous as the meanders of the saffron head-gear of the Indian driver who carried him through the glass canyons of the Big Apple.

Six, seven, eight, nine rings, Milos counted as he waited for the now familiar laconic message.

"Hello," said the husky voice of a woman.

Milos was dumbfounded for a few seconds before responding.

"Eva?"

"Yes, who is speaking?"

The accent was Russian, the intonation clean and distinct, the timbre clear and a bit vibrant, all of which provoked in Milos a torrent of evocations rushing out from a source that he thought had dried up many lives before.

“My name is Milos, I am in New York, I found your number in a magazine in Paris,” he said, grasping the surrealism of the situation.

There was silence at the other end of the line.

“Listen, I am busy and I do not have time for jokes in poor taste.”

“Wait! I am not joking. I have this magazine in my hands and...”

“What magazine?” Eva cut in.

“I don’t know...”

“Goodbye,” said Eva drily.

“Russian! The magazine is Russian and I do not read that language.”

In place of the fateful click, Milos heard Eva’s breath pausing and then continuing.

“There is a photo and your number underneath.”

“A photo?”

“Yes, a woman, with red hair, very pale skin, green eyes, prominent cheekbones.”

Again, there was silence by way of response, and finally,

“Tomorrow, 2:00, Grand Central, track 18, bring the magazine.”

Click.

Chapter 3

Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, are the habitual steps through which people confronted with unacceptable situations, like the prospect of their own death or that of someone close to them, must pass.

Following the sudden disappearance of Jason, his twenty year-old son, Hector was firmly stuck in anger. By the time he moved toward acceptance and mourning, he had consumed himself with all the variations of anger. Pure rage had given place to a hatred that was cold, visceral, and greedy for revenge.

The death of his son was, for Hector, a tearing, a gaping wound, a brutal amputation of a part of himself. But for a man of his stature it was also an intolerable affront to his power and to his fortune; a personal attack reminding him of the long-forgotten humility of his belonging to the little tribe of mortals, all equal and nude before the grim reaper.

Hector could not bring Jason back from the dead, but he was ready to traverse the nine circles of Dante's hell to find and punish those who had dared to deprive him of his only child, forever and without his permission.

Jason had a slight heart murmur, certainly not enough to provoke the cardiac arrest that had struck him down. He drank in moderation and he did not use drugs, as far as Hector knew. His body had been found on a beach in Baja California. There was no trace of aggression, no witnesses to tell what had happened. The area was very isolated, and the local inspectors had quickly closed their investigation.

All this was much too banal and too simple for Hector, who refused to leave it there and put his own team in place to find the truth behind the mirror of appearances.

Not being able to take on death directly, he would have to make the guilty ones suffer in flesh and in blood to make them pay for their irreparable deed.

There were, on some part of this Earth, some people who had information about Jason's real cause of death, and Hector put to work all the means at his disposal to find them. And his means were considerable.

Chapter 4

The Kirov in St. Petersburg had maintained, through the centuries, its tradition of excellence, and had known how to renew the ancestral genre of ballet by adopting the revolution of fusion style.

Eva had devoted the greater part of her young life to the venerable institution, sacrificing everything to her art. She was one of the very first dancers to venture along the path of the fusion style and was considered to be a rising star destined for the highest summits. But Eva was a strong and independent spirit, and the Kirovian orthodoxy weighed so heavily upon her that she decided to fly with her own wings by pursuing her fusion experiments in an independent manner.

Beyond a simple artistic step, the fusion approach was for Eva the very essence of her existence. It forced to unceasingly push her physical and mental limits, and thus forced upon her a veritable asceticism, which left little room for the habitual preoccupations of a young woman of 23.

Fusion ballet was more of an event than conventional and codified ballet, in which the finish was known in advance by the passive spectators assembled in an enclosed space.

On the contrary, each time it was a unique demonstration of creative human genius, combining, in a natural framework, dance, chant, musical interpretation, but also a certain form of luminous sculpture.

The fusion dancer, freed from gravity, used all three dimensions in an improvisation directly influenced by the emotions of the spectators as well as the telluric energies emanating from the place of performance.

She transcended the moment of time by catalyzing the multiple energies of her environment and fusing them through the prism of her own sensibility in a multidisciplinary expression of her talent.

The spectators, in numbers limited to a hundred, felt extremely privileged to be able to participate in such experiences, and several months before the performance, as a point of honor, they prepared themselves psychologically to transmit the best of themselves to the dancer and to contribute as well to the success of the ephemeral work.

It was impossible to record or to transmit the performances, which gave them even more value in a world where individuals were beginning to doubt their own individuality.

For many this act was as much mystical as purely artistic. In the small community of fusion ballet aficionados, the dancers were considered as supernatural guides capable of revealing, in the space of the performance, a parallel universe whose weft was woven of sublimity and harmony.

After a little while in New York, Eva was contacted by a patron of the arts who was interested in the most avant-garde art forms. The man wished to meet in order to discuss a possible collaboration, which would allow Eva to make her first performance as an independent dancer.

When the day of the rendezvous arrived, Eva had slept little the night before, her sleep troubled by the excitement of the new project and also by the untimely telephone call. She needed to fix her voice messaging. Of course her invitation to "Leave a message" in Russian would not tend to incite her correspondents to follow the instruction.

A few moments before leaving her apartment she was troubled by this strange conversation with the man whom she had nevertheless consented to meet a few minutes later.

Chapter 5

To the same extent that Milos found airports in general insipid, Grand Central Station was for him a veritable neo-classical cathedral dedicated to Hermes and Chronos, who must have enjoyed the incessant mass of these busy pilgrims who venerated them without knowing it.

The immense hall was a crossroads of the destinies of those arriving from all corners of the country armed with their dreams and their illusions and those returning to where they had come from used up by the asperities of life. Milos asked himself if, when they exchanged looks, they recognized each other, and in the space of the batting of an eyelid sent their own images into the past for the one, and into the future for the other.

Milos observed the slow inexorable movement of the needles of one of the numerous clocks which blossomed on the monumental walls of the terminal. Soon he would be able to speak with Eva in person, to see her and to prove that all this was not simply a fantastic hallucination.

The magazine firmly lodged in his arms, he advanced to track 18 in search of the fiery hair which he waited to see from one moment to the next.

At 2:00, a train stopped at the platform. Passengers disembarked while others boarded. Milos tried to not lose his footing in the human flood. This unexpected chaos was exasperating and he began to seriously doubt his chances of finding Eva.

“Track 18, 2:04,” said a recorded voice announcing the immediate departure of the express train to Boston, when he perceived a graceful and leaping form rushing into a car at the other end of the platform. He thought he made out a red blur, but could not be sure. There was no more than a few seconds before the closing of the doors.

“I’ve always wanted to visit Boston!” he said to himself as he stepped up onto the train.

Chapter 6

In the course of the last few weeks the private investigation team dispatched by Hector had made considerable progress. The circumstances of Jason's death had become much more clear.

The progressive discovery of the odious reality was a veritable torture for Hector. Each new piece of news which lifted a bit of the mystery was an extra stab in the heart of the bereaved father.

The report from the in-depth medical analysis was clear: Jason had died of a myocardial infarction provoked by an over-stimulation of exogenous origin. Minute traces of nano-implants left no doubt about Jason's belonging to the world of the Feelers, a fact which Hector discovered in the most terrible way.

The investigators, leaving nothing to chance, had identified the provenance of the implants. They had been fabricated by secret laboratories, which procured the components of the bases on the black market, itself supplied in a totally illicit manner by factories unloading their unsold stocks. These factories were the flower of Hector's empire.

To the guilt of not having known how to stop his son from becoming an XtremVibes addict, was added that of having contributed indirectly to his tragic demise.

He almost regretted having launched himself on this search for truth, the lie and denial having been more comfortable. But the grief was too strong, and had to be appeased by the suffering of the guilty ones.

The fabricators of the implants were impersonal entities. Hector needed to exercise his vengeance on another human being, and the VJs were the perfect target. He needed to find the VJ who had led Jason in his last trance.

Hector had used his networks of influence in all arenas, risked his relationships, twisted arms, greased palms, used his best bloodhounds, spent without counting, and he had found him.

The investigation phase over, Hector had launched the phase of action, which was to lead to the ultimate and most awaited stage of execution.

Chapter 7

She had uncommon physical and mental aptitudes, but for Eva, being on time remained an extraordinary exploit. Evidently she had grossly underestimated the time necessary to get to Grand Central, but had still succeeded in barely catching her train.

Alone in her seat, she saw the parade of buildings without souls pass by, and mused on her missed rendezvous with the stranger with the magazine. Her curiosity would probably remain unsatisfied.

At that precise moment a magazine materialized on the unoccupied seat next to her, followed immediately by a voice.

“Hello Eva. I am very happy to be able to meet you at last. Thanks for accepting my invitation.”

The man took back his contemporary art magazine and sat down facing her.

“Virgil!” Eva responded, confused at having been taken by surprise.

“I have followed your career with much interest for several months, and I am sincerely impressed with your talent.”

For a long time habituated to the monastic rigor of the Kirov and to its iron discipline which wore down less well-forged personalities, Eva was not used to someone being interested in her person. She had the candid coolness of exceptional beings who no longer take notice of their potential.

Virgil did not correspond to the romantic image that she had of a patron of the arts. A partially bald man in his fifties, of average size and weight, dressed in a sober dark gray suit, with a grey, trimmed beard complementing a face creased by deep wrinkles. Eva did not notice a ring on his bony fingers, not even a watch on his wrist. He would pass completely unnoticed if not for his strange look.

Eva was captivated by his blue, almost grey eyes, which seemed to her like untainted mirrors reflecting the whole world and dissimulating the observer. The warmth of his smile contrasted with the sad expression on his face, which reminded Eva of a winter trip between St. Petersburg and Helsinki where the low sky and the frozen sea congealed into a pale atmosphere between dawn and dusk.

“Do you always hold your meetings on trains?” asked Eva with a smile.

“Why do two things at once when you can do three?” asked Virgil with irony.

“That must be the type of principle that let you become wealthy.”

“Wealth is absurd if it is not used to promote beauty. That leads us to your project, which I hope will become our project before we arrive in Boston.

Eva did not ask herself too many questions. This man seemed ready to help her transform her dream into reality and she would not let this chance pass.

“Well, Virgil, here is how I imagine my next performance.”

Chapter 8

Milos has traversed half of the cars in search of Eva, who remained impossible to find. Finding Eva had become a feverish obsession. Since Paris, the existence of this woman had developed in his mind like a virus making a profound transformation in his consciousness.

He was split between the ardent desire to find her and the fear of finally discovering only a chimera, or worse still, of being disappointed by reality.

Entering the restaurant car, Milos was taken by a sort of vertigo, his head empty, his stomach full of lead, his throat dry, the beating of his heart resonating in time with the rhythm of the car bumping along the uneven rails. He was in mental apnea, and Eva was there before him only a few meters away.

She advanced in his direction, floating through the air with a graceful step, supple and feline with that capacity of curving space and time around her, becoming the involuntary center of attention of her immediate universe.

Her clothes seemed to be taken right off the page of a fairy tale. She wore a tight green silk blouse whose wide collar showed her delicate neck to great advantage and exposed the edge of her fine and muscular shoulders, over which streamed a cascade of strawberry blond hair. On her feet she wore high boots of brown suede which revealed the perfect curve of her calves, and invariably led one's look upwards to her thighs, whose finely chiseled muscles undulated under a carmine satin fabric.

The haughty way she held her head reinforced her allure of a Cossack princess. Her only jewelry was her emerald eyes, which fueled the inferno consuming Milos' soul.

Beginning to breathe again, Milos took note of the man who accompanied her and with whom she was in deep discussion.

The two took a table and Milos imitated then so he could continue to observe Eva.

She spoke with passion and her face was resplendent with life, betraying no doubt, no fear, no falsity.

After a few moments the man got up and Milos seized the opportunity to finally break his anonymity.

Virgil had absented himself to make some telephone calls, and Eva saw a stranger approach her table. The man was tall, very slender, and did not seem to have slept more than three hours in the last year.

"I'm Milos, we spoke earlier today."

"The man with the magazine. Sorry for the missed meeting. Sit down, I'll buy you a drink."

Milos did so, and then were rejoined by Virgil.

Chapter 9

“Virgil, this is Milos, an acquaintance from New York who wandered onto the same train as us today,” said Eva without any shadow of hesitation.

“Really?” said Virgil, who planted his eyes on those of Milos for a few seconds too long.

“Nice to meet you,” said Milos, thinking to himself that Virgil must have stolen such eyes from a barracuda.

“What leads you to Boston, Milos?” Virgil inquired.

Milos turned to Eva and noted the sketch of a smile forming a deliciously mischievous pout.

“Some business that I want to clear up.”

“What kind of business are you in?” Virgil continued automatically.

“So Virgil, what do you think of my performance project?” Eva interrupted, visibly wanting to avoid putting Milos in too uncomfortable a situation.

Virgil let his eyes rest for a few more seconds on Milos’ face, as if to immerse himself in it.

“My dear Eva, your ideas are fascinating and I am dying of desire to see them become reality. I am going to make some arrangements, and if everything passes as I hope, you will be able to make your new performance in thirty hours.”

Eva, incredulous, sat with her mouth open. Even in her craziest dreams she had not imagined being able to pursue her career as an independent dancer as quickly, or in such conditions. She expected to have to spend years working on minor productions, just looking for the means to set up the necessary infrastructure for the organization of a fusion ballet. And here was Virgil, coming out of nowhere, offering her dream on a platter.

“Virgil, but how? I can’t believe it!”

“In a few minutes we will arrive in Boston where my team is waiting to take us to the place of the performance.”

“Where?” exclaimed Eva, who had a thousand questions to ask and whose excitement had abolished all rationality.

"I would like our next destination to remain a surprise, but so that you will be able to prepare yourself mentally, I can give you a clue."

"Virgil, please!" Eva whimpered like a capricious little girl.

"The performance will take place by an ocean."

"But the equipment, the scene, the public, my preparation?" Suddenly all the material constraints of the performance erupted in Eva's head, not to mention the enormous nerve of launching on such an adventure in so short a time.

"All the logistics will be ready. Don't worry about it. All you have to do is simply concentrate on the essence of your art."

Virgil and Eva continued to talk for a few minutes, the patron of the arts trying to channel the artist's explosion of enthusiasm. Then they remembered the presence of Milos, who had drunk in their words silently, distilling a mass of information and trying to give it all some sense. Following the discussion between Eva and Virgil, Milos began to understand the nature of their relationship, but he had not yet succeeded in understanding his role.

Eva considered Milos. He was an enigma that had still not been resolved. The priority was of course the performance, but she would surely find a moment for a private conversation with him.

"I would like Milos to accompany us," Eva said to the two men.

"Do I really have any choice?" responded Milos, plunging his eyes into Eva's in search of a response.

"So you agree," Eva concluded, turning toward Virgil, miming the authoritarian diva who will not tolerate a refusal.

"Your desires are my command, Eva," said Virgil with false servility as he threw Milos a look which tied his stomach in knots.

Chapter 10

The limousine which awaited them at the station in Boston led them to a small airport where they boarded a luxurious private jet to a destination known only to Virgil.

On board, Eva was isolated in her cabin to devote the few hours of the flight to a deep meditation, which was her way of preparing for her performance.

Virgil had taken a desk isolated from the rest of the plane and had to finalize the preparations for the improvised ballet.

Milos finished a meal worthy of the greatest restaurants. Lost in thought, he was as if hypnotized by the movement of amber liquid whose perfume scent wafted up the sides of the bohemian crystal of the glass lodged in his hand.

He took a sip of Armagnac, but the fire of the alcohol could not dominate the ardent inferno which little by little consumed each part of his being. Underneath the fire brooded the frozen wave of his paranoia, which urged him to leave these two strangers and regain his solitude as quickly as possible. It was the only thing capable of assuring him that semblance of security, like that of prisoners in an isolation cell at a maximum-security prison.

Milos had placed himself in his own slide towards death for years now. The last months spent in the world of the Feelers had accelerated his process of self-destruction. He was at the threshold of the point of no return. He was playing Russian roulette with more and more bullets.

But now there was Eva, and even though she was as Russian as the roulette, she inspired him with much less morbid thoughts.

The food, the alcohol, the purring of the engines, and his accumulated fatigue were finally enough for Milos to slip into the sleep of those sunk into a coma.

The husky voice that had become familiar took him from the arms of Morpheus. She was seated on the seat facing him and was leaning forward to speak to him. Her face was very close to his.

“Do you have it with you?” she said without preamble.

“What are you talking about?” responded Milos, his mind still foggy, and in the grips of a terrible migraine.

“The magazine.”

“Yes, of course, the magazine,” he said, beginning to search the pockets of his coat.

He took it out and put it on a table before Eva, scrutinizing her expression as she flipped the pages before arriving at that of the famous photograph.

Eva observed the document and shook her head.

“All this makes no sense. You said you found this magazine in Paris and I have never set foot there. Of course it is me in the photo, but I have no memory of who could have taken it, or where. I have never given a contract to this magazine to use my image. But the writing and the telephone number are mine.”

“Who are you, Milos, and what do you want from me?”

Virgil appeared and notified them of their imminent landing, which put an end to their conversation.

Chapter 11

Strapped in his seat, Milos tried to find some landmarks to identify the place where they were about to arrive.

Virgil had spoken of an ocean and they had flown about 4 hours towards the southwest, which should have put them somewhere along the American west coast.

It was still night and looking outside furnished no useful clue. Milos was even more worried to not see the normal lights of airport runways.

The jet began its final approach and landed without the least bump in the absolute night.

Milos, completely disoriented, left the aircraft accompanied by Virgil and Eva, and they joined a group of vehicles stationed a small distance away. The temperature was warm and a breeze dirty with dust reminded Milos of a place in the desert he had visited a few months earlier.

The jet, which had not shut down its engines, began to move, and in a few seconds was nothing more than an incandescent point in the nothingness.

The trio took their places in an imposing SUV that resembled an evil scarab. Two other scarabs escorted them and the convoy moved rapidly along the runway that their jet had just departed from. The runway never seemed to end, and Milos realized that they were on a road visibly open to traffic.

Eva seemed to find the experience wildly exciting, but Milos found that Virgil seemed more like a spy-master in service of an occult power than an amateur patron of the fine arts.

They rolled along in silence towards the west for another 45 minutes. Eva soaked up the energy of the region in a semi-conscious state. Virgil stared at Milos with an increasing intensity, which left him more and more ill at ease.

The day dawned on a desert landscape as they arrived at their destination. Behind them to infinity, ochre sand dunes lay lazily here and there, punctuated by some anemic-looking cacti. Before them the desert and the Pacific Ocean crashed in an age-old combat, and the result was a striking beauty which filled Eva with joy and plunged Milos into a frozen abyss of pure panic.

“Welcome to Garra del Diablo, Baja California,” exclaimed Virgil, savoring the expression of terror congealed on Milos’ features.

Chapter 12

The performance of the fusion ballet was planned for the same evening and Eva spent the day inspecting and testing the installations put in place by a small army of technicians who disappeared as if by magic once their task was accomplished. She reserved the last hours before the beginning of the ballet to prepare herself mentally and physically, forbidding anyone to interrupt her.

A yacht had dropped anchor, and on the deck once could see the fifty invitees who were going to have the chance to participate in the spectacle that evening.

Virgil had disappeared into one of the tents set up to shelter the invitees and the personnel.

Milos was alone on the beach and was seized by a terrible anguish. He had no means of fleeing this evil place. The Feelers had chosen it precisely for its total isolation. At the time of the trance, Milos had approved this choice, being reassured by its isolation and amused by its name: Garra del Diablo (Claw of the Devil). That evening, one more Feeler had pushed his XtremVibe for one vibration too far, and remained on the beach after the others' departure. The claw had caught up with him, like so many others whose vibrations the VJ Milos had led. For him it was just one more anonymous kid who would never see the sun rise again. But someone had done a great evil to lead Milos back to that place. "If it's for some kind of revenge, why not just have killed me?" he wondered.

Virgil and Eva must be the instruments or the leaders of this machination. Too many questions, not enough answers, and above all no escape route. And if all this was only a gigantic coincidence? Eva could not be led to this, not the Eva who was so pure.

Chapter 13

The sun had embraced the ocean, and on the beach the participants in the spectacle were assembled around the stage. A religious silence reigned, which Milos could not stop himself from finding fatal. He would have liked so much to speak to Eva and to see her before she made her performance.

The stage was illuminated with the last rays of the falling star, and Eva materialized in its center. She held her arms perfectly straight along her body and was completely nude. Her skin radiated with a spectral illumination, as if she was covered with a sheen of moonlight. The silence was now complete among the audience, and Eva let it penetrate in all dimensions. The ocean breeze swept her hair. The rhythm of her heart followed that of the tide. She tasted the salt air that filled her lungs and raised her chest. Facing the setting sun, her eyes captured the last solar rays. Then she spread her arms as if to welcome her public, to embrace it, and to invite it to enter into communion with her.

Closing her eyes she raised her arms towards the ceiling and opened her consciousness to the emotions of the public, letting herself be cradled for a few moments as she tried to isolate those on which she would rely to launch her improvisation.

Finally she joined her hands above her head and completed her immersion in the environment of the performance, capturing the telluric pulses which emanated from the inside of the earth and traversed each fiber of her being with the force of an invisible geyser.

At that point she reached a superior state of consciousness, and slowly, her body liberated itself from gravity and rose several meters above the stage, leaving a train of the powder of evanescent diamonds. She began to turn slowly around herself at the moment when the extremely deep sonority of a sacred Tibetan horn came to purify the assemblage of participants in this pagan ceremony.

Milos was subjugated by the oneiric spectacle and could not remove his eyes from the levitating body of Eva.

It was that moment that Virgil chose to come speak to him.

Milos tensed, ready for anything, and above all for fear.

Virgil looked him in the eye. The untainted mirror had disappeared, and Milos could read there the rage and the hatred barely contained and dissimulated behind a smooth mask. That evening it seemed to Milos that the devil had decided to take out more than his claws.

“He was called Jason, he was twenty years old, he died in this place, you killed him, he was my son.” His voice had the sharpness of a knife that was about to slash the last hopes that Milos had of leaving Garra del Diablo alive.

Eva, still weightless, had begun to execute a series of movements of classical dance accompanied by perfectly synchronized music which seemed to emanate from her body.

“So you are going to kill me in turn?” said Milos in a white voice, posing a purely rhetorical question of which he was sure of the response. He turned his regard away from the tormented abysses that Virgil’s eyes had become where he saw only his own destruction to focus on Eva, which had brought him back to life over the course of the last few hours spent in her company.

“I am not going to kill you. She is going to.” Virgil struck like the bullfighter driving in the last sword before the final stroke.

Eva captured a new field of emotions coming from the audience. The energies were strong, somber, intense, dramatic, and thus very interesting to use. The blackness of the night began to set in and she judged the moment ideal to change the course of her improvisation by letting herself be carried away by this wave of shadows. She let herself fall onto the stage and undertook a composition which evoked a hunted animal. She ran, stumbled, struggled, imprinting on the space of the enveloping night blood-red marks which rested in suspension after her passage and little by little formed a tragic, moving sculpture.

“You lie!” cried Milos, who was still captivated by Eva’s performance and who felt himself almost physically submerged by the emotions that she provoked, as if they were amplified.

“You are right, I should reestablish one truth. My real name is Hector. But that is not really important for you. I searched for you, I found you, and I gave you Eva because one cannot kill someone who is already dead. I offered you that which you no longer hoped for. I gave you back the taste of life. And this evening I am going to take all this away like you took away my son.”

The flux of emotions on which Eva traced her performance was more and more terrible; it was a torrent of lava in fusion that had just struck a swamp of fear. At this moment she had the choice of continuing to make the fusion on this deleterious theme, or to orient her dance in a lighter direction. She decided to push her experiment still farther and to abandon herself completely to this chaotic pulse which rose inside her like a savage orgasm.

Milos was completely captivated by Eva, who had transformed herself into a veritable succubus shaken by a voodoo convulsion. The words of Hector reached him through the noise of his super-amplified emotions. His breathing was staccato and a cold sweat burned his feverish eyes.

“I hope that you appreciated your last meal on board my plane. My chef conceived it especially for you by adding a pinch of last-generation nano-implants which henceforth will be part of your cortex.” Hector enjoyed the growing suffering that devoured Milos.

Eva's body, which had again levitated, was shaken by violent spasms pushing her extremities to the point of dislocation. Yet her movements followed a wild choreography tamed by a sonorous weft, which conferred a troubling estheticism to the ensemble.

She then reached the paroxysm of the fusion, rearing up, arms and legs crossed facing the starless sky, elevating herself in the air, carried by the last beats of Milos' mad heart.

The end

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