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TRANSMUTATION

A novel about Eternal Love

Lydia Bisanti

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CHAPTER 1

Congratulations Mr. Eagle! You are the youngest chairman our company has ever had. I hope you are going to infuse new blood into good old IFI!”

René Eagle nodded, smiling. He had heard this a thousand times since the end of the *International Financial Institution’s* board meeting earlier this morning, during which he had been elected Chairman of the Board.

René Eagle was thirty nine years of age, a Harvard Business School graduate and a brilliant young man whose revolutionary ideas in the field of international finance had gained him an extraordinary reputation in the world of “big business”. René was not modest; he knew his worth and felt powerful. He was acutely aware of his superiority to the many prestigious men who surrounded him, flattered him and hated him. He was proud of being part of this super-powerful elite who led the world. René Eagle wanted to go even further, even higher, while remaining behind the scenes. Oh no! He wasn’t a bit interested in becoming President of the United States. He would leave that job to those who still believed in the elusive power of that office. René Eagle wanted the real power: money. He accepted the fact that he was born gifted and that his enormous success was the result of quasi supra-normal abilities which made him perceive things before they were formulated. This ability also extended to people: he *saw* through them, he *knew* what they had in mind and what they were going to do. It was an extraordinary strength which helped him more than once to either avoid a disaster or to engineer a

spectacular deal. Of course, there was a downside to this gift, as he could also spot his enemies in a blink. This had made him very suspicious and consequently, he did not trust anybody. As long as he could remember, he had isolated himself from others, and no one on earth could guess what he was thinking. This mental solitude did not bother him: he despised humans too deeply to have the desire to communicate with them intimately; he was self-sufficient and others were here only to serve him.

Nevertheless, he knew how to make himself loved, even idolized, by those who were on his side. He knew better than anyone how to stimulate his *men* and to take advantage of what they did best. He was much more than a *boss* to them; he was the *master*, the one who knows. There were no soft feelings towards René Eagle, one either adored him or hated him. As far as he himself was concerned, René Eagle had no feelings; he would either stimulate you or eliminate you. Everybody knew he was tough, but he was also fascinating even to his enemies who could only admire his genius.

With these thoughts in his mind he felt a great joy, as he shook hands, thanked and joked with all these people who were here to celebrate his election to the top of one of the most powerful financial institutions in the world. Oh, it had not been an easy win. The fight had been hard and many heads had fallen, but he had won and he knew he was up to the job.

That same evening a reception in his honor was planned and he wanted to go home to rest for awhile. The day had been stressful. He also wanted to savor his victory. His wife would be home, but that did not bother him since

she had learned, during the ten years of their marriage, when not to disturb him.

Ten years ago he had married Barbara because she was pretty, came from a prominent family and added to his social status. Furthermore, she had understood very quickly that his ambitions would always come first. For him, marriage was a necessity. He intended to keep his sexual freedom, but his wife would be the shield that would protect him from pushy women. In fact, he favored married women, particularly the wives of his associates: that was another way to dominate them. Did Barbara know about his extra-marital affairs? Probably, but she never mentioned anything. She knew that the best way to keep a man like René Eagle was to allow him complete freedom.

Their marriage had been rather smooth during these ten years. Also, he traveled so extensively that he always returned to her with pleasure. They had an adorable little girl who gave him pure joy when his *business* allowed him time to spend with his family.

While driving his new Mercedes to his townhouse on Sutton Place he thought what a happy and lucky man he was.

As soon as he opened the door to his house, he enjoyed its particular smell, a mixture of waxed wood and flowers. He loved his home, even though he never spent much time in it, but he had always wanted it to be luxurious, filled with all the modern gadgets that money could buy.

As he had guessed, Barbara was there, watching television in the den. Their daughter, Lisa, was at her grandmother's in California. Barbara was going to meet her in two days and would stay at her mother's for the rest of the summer. She was looking forward to going there; she

did not like New York because she was alone most of the time in the big house which she found too impersonal.

“Hi darling! How was the meeting?”

“As usual, boring! I had to put up with everybody’s fake enthusiasm and it made me tired. So, if you don’t mind, I’m going to take a nap before the reception.” He headed directly to his bedroom, leaving Barbara with her TV and her solitude.

The *Cotillion Room* of the Pierre Hotel was sparkling like a jewel and so was the crowd assembled there to celebrate René’s promotion. When René Eagle and his wife appeared, they all applauded enthusiastically. Barbara looked stunning in a long and simple black dress which enhanced her slim figure and her blond hair, making even brighter the diamond necklace she wore around her neck. René, elegant and handsome in his black tuxedo, with a triumphant smile on his face, walked with natural ease toward his colleagues. He was assaulted with hand shakes, congratulations, jokes, a whirl of lights and words which made him feel dizzy. But that was the price to pay for success. He knew it and he played the game. He was also scheduled to give a little speech which he neglected to prepare, trusting his gift for improvisation. He was led toward a podium and found himself in front of a microphone. There he was! He had to deliver... no time to think...

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we are here by the will of the people... and we shall not leave except by the power of the bayonet...”

Silence

“Don’t get me wrong. This quotation is not mine. It was pronounced on June 23, 1789 and it started the French Revolution...”

Timid laughs from the crowd.

“However, even though my mother is French, I have no blood link to Mirabeau and I don’t intend to lead a revolution, but rather a rebirth...”

Applause.

“For the past 30 years our company has operated on structures that have proven successful but which are now outdated. The company’s rebirth which had been entrusted to me means a complete internal re-organization as well as a different approach to international business. Our modern world is in constant transformation, nothing remains static and we must adapt to this ever changing world. That which is static cannot progress, and our administration’s goal is surely to progress. That’s why I am counting on you all to help me conquer the world; we will make it because we have a fantastic vehicle, IFI. It’s up to us, the drivers to take advantage of its powerful engine and drive it on a race track. No more peaceful little rides on country roads! The time for speed and excitement has come! I hope you will like my program! Thank you again for your trust in me. You won’t regret it!”

Everybody applauded this aggressive and unusual speech.

“They want new blood? They’ll get it” René told himself.

He left the podium and headed toward the bar. He needed a double scotch to unwind. He was about to order when a small hand presented him with a glass of scotch on the rocks. He turned to see whose hand it was and he discovered a lovely brunette wearing a pink evening dress. “How did you know what I wanted?” he asked, amused.

“I asked Mr. Norwick who seems to know your habits.” She was smiling at him, her big brown eyes filled with joy.

“What is your name, “*jolie demoiselle*?”

“Patricia Norwick, “*pour vous servir, cher Monsieur*”.

Steve Norwick was one of the biggest shareholders of IFI. He was feared and respected and René shared these feelings with everybody else. He knew Norwick had a daughter but he had never met her. He was flattered that she took interest in him, but his suspicious mind told him to watch out. He looked in her eyes and what he saw shocked him: he read such intense desire that he thought he could make love to her right there, in front of the crowd. René Eagle could not resist such a call. His response was immediate: he felt an overwhelming tension and an almost uncontrollable urge to release it. Did she understand that he was receptive to her call? She took his hand and started to walk toward the front door. He did not know what was happening. He followed her without seeing the curious looks on the guests’ faces. They left the *Cotillion Room* and walked through long corridors. Finally, she stopped in front of a door, took a key from her purse and he followed her into the hotel room.

As soon as the door was closed, Patricia came to him and proceeded to undress him nervously, while she slipped out of her dress under which she wore nothing at all. She pushed him on the bed, leaped on him and started to “ride” him like a Valkyrie, moaning and screaming. He responded to her passion with an equal passion and together they reached a rapturous orgasm.

Out of breath, he still could not believe what had just happened. Now she was resting next to him, without touching him.

“I wanted you as soon as I saw you” she said calmly. ‘You know, I can’t resist when it happens, and it usually never goes any further. I was told I am a nymphomaniac. So, I wish to forget what just happened. We won’t mention it anymore. So long!’”

She rushed to the bathroom and closed the door. He was astonished with her reaction but he did not try to understand. Women had always been an enigma to him and even when he thought he understood them, he had to admit: he was often wrong. He was able to manipulate the toughest businessmen but when it came to women, he was lost. Therefore, he had chosen to dominate them with no attempt to understand them. He could not live without women but he did not feel any particular sympathy for them. He used them. That’s all. Except that tonight, he felt that he was the one who had been used! He did not mind. For once, it was a delightful change.

Back in the *Cotillion Room* he saw Barbara rushing toward him.

“Where were you? Everybody was looking for you! You seem to... you look like you...”

“What? What do I look like? Leave me alone!”

He turned his back and walked toward a group of men talking.

The evening ended with no more incident and the Eagles returned home without exchanging a word. Barbara looked sad, but he thought she would get over it. Women are always jealous and he accepted it as a curse he had to live with.

CHAPTER 2

In the dark, Barbara was listening to her husband's regular breathing. He had fallen asleep like a baby, oblivious and selfish. He had not spoken to her since he had re-appeared at the Cotillion Room, his hair messy, his bow-tie dangling, a wild look on his face, an attitude she knew only too well. It was not the first time that he disappeared during a reception and Barbara was aware of what was going on. In ten years she had plenty of time to observe her brilliant husband and had come to the conclusion that he could not resist the sight of a skirt. In the beginning she was deeply hurt because she still believed in fidelity in marriage. Like every young girl, she had dreamed of a prince charming who would love her day after day, and forever. Very quickly she had come to reality, even before the end of their honeymoon.

With bitterness she remembered that first disappointment. The memory was still vivid and the pain she had experienced then was still present. She remembered... They had been in Paris a week. He had made her discover this wonderful city in the September sunlight. She remembered the *Quais de la Seine*, the *Place de la Concorde*, the *Champs Elysées*, the small cafés of the Latin Quarter. Images invaded her memory and she suddenly felt a profound nostalgia. Paris! "How I would like to return there and find my happiness again!" Unfortunately she would not find it with René, as he put an end to her dreams after just one week. It was a Saturday afternoon. They had walked in the streets of Paris and they

were returning to their hotel to rest a while before going to the theater later that evening. When they arrived in the lobby of the *Plaza Athénée* the concierge waved to René who walked toward him. He gave René a pink slip. When he read the message she saw him smile. He came back and told her to go to the room alone because he had to see someone for business reasons.

“I am sorry darling. They won’t leave me alone! It’s a pain in the neck but I have to do it. It’s very important for my career. Don’t worry; I’ll be back in an hour, tops.”

She watched him go and did not know why she felt worried. It was as if she was not going to see him again.

“Come on” she thought, “Don’t be stupid! It’s normal for business to follow him here since his company has a branch in Paris!” She went to their room, took off her clothes and lay down in bed. She was happy and full of love for her brand new husband who was incredibly handsome and promising a prestigious career. She was proud to have been chosen to be his wife and she thought she would be eternally grateful for it. Soothed by these comforting thoughts, she fell asleep. When she awoke, it was pitch dark. She switched the light on and looked at her watch: “Eight o’clock!” My God, where is he? He said an hour and it has been more than three hours since he left! And the theater starts at nine!”

Panicked, she jumped out of bed and called the reception desk to find out if René was in the lobby. She thought that maybe he did not want to wake her up and would wait for her downstairs. But no, Mr. Eagle was not there, nobody saw him and no, he did not call to leave a message.

Now she was really worried. She decided to prepare for the theater anyway, certain that he would be

back in time. She took a quick shower and dressed to go out. When she was ready, she sat on a chair and waited... one more hour...two hours...Every ten minutes she called the reception desk. She was going crazy and was about to ask the concierge to call the police, when the door opened and René appeared. He was pale and haggard, his clothes in disarray, his eyes glassy as if he had been drugged.

“Where were you? What happened to you? You look like you were in a fight!”

“That’s it” he said brusquely. “I was in a fight. I was mugged and knocked out. I woke up in the *Bois de Boulogne* and I walked back here, because I don’t have a cent on me.”

She believed him and rushed toward him to kiss him. He pushed her violently and went to the bathroom. Surprised by this unexpected reaction, she followed him, but he shut the door and said “leave me alone! I’m going to take a shower.”

Deeply hurt, she did not understand why he was angry with her. It was normal that he’d be furious but to reject her like that was inconceivable. Philosophically she thought that men have different attitudes and that she would learn how to recognize them with experience.

When he came out of the bathroom, completely naked, he was cheerful again. He came to her and held her in his arms.

“Sorry my little rabbit. I was brusque with you. But put yourself in my shoes: I have just been knocked out and I could not even defend myself! You must admit that it is insulting for a strong man like me!”

She melted with love and let her head roll against his chest.

“I hope you don’t hurt. Where did you get hit?”

“In the head, I think, because I have a big bump here, on the top of my head.”

She wanted to touch, but he pushed her hand.

“No! Don’t touch! It hurts. So my love, the theater is out of the question; I am going to take you to dinner to the *Tour d’Argent*. You will see it’s superb.”

It was as he said, a spectacular place, the view of *Notre Dame* was breathtaking and the cuisine was first class. Back in the hotel Barbara was ready to have fun for the rest of the night. Of course, she had slept for three hours in the afternoon and was wide awake now. But René was exhausted and did not acknowledge her timid approaches. He fell asleep instantly.

Barbara could not sleep. She got up to go to the bathroom. The clothes René was wearing in the afternoon were spread on the floor. Suddenly curious, Barbara took the pants and examined them carefully. She went through the pockets and was surprised to find René’s wallet, untouched, with all his IDs and money. In the other pocket she found the pink slip the concierge had given him. Her heart was pounding while she read the message and almost fainted when she understood its meaning. It was written in French and it said: “I am waiting for you today, as usual. Come as soon as you get this message.” It was signed “P”. Barbara knew that “P” was a woman! She knew it from the bottom of her heart and she remembered René’s expression when he read the message. It could not have been a business appointment that made him so happy! What was she going to do? She was completely shattered and wanted to wake him up to ask for an explanation, to beat him up, to...

René’s voice behind her made her jump.

“What are you doing here?”

His voice was hard and Babara did not recognize him. He looked at her with anger, even hate, and he took the pink slip from her hand.

“I forbid you to dig into my personal things! I forbid you to ask me any questions and if you don’t like it, go back to your mother’s. I don’t need a spy under my roof!”

“But..it’s impossible...you lied to me...you....”

“Stop it now! I want you to know something and I want you to remember it if you want to stay with me. I am a free man and I intend to keep it this way, and you or anyone else won’t change it. I married you because I want a family. I want to have children and I want you to be the mother of my children. That should be enough for you and you should be flattered that I chose you. Don’t ask for anything more and you will never regret being my wife. But if you don’t like it, you are free to go. I won’t hold you.”

He turned his back and went to bed. Barbara could not move, sitting on the toilet bowl, unable to think or to cry. How long did she stay like this? She could not tell and when she came back to reality, a throbbing thought was dancing in her head: “I married a monster! I have to go, leave him before it’s too late.”

In a daze she walked to the closet where her suitcases were. She did not want to stay one more minute with this odious individual. Get out of here, quick, go anywhere to spend the night and take the first flight to New York tomorrow! “I have money, I have my passport. I don’t need him! He can go to hell!”

While filling her suitcases, she was crying, overwhelmed with unbelievable pain. She was so absorbed

in her thoughts that she did not hear him when he came close to her. She screamed when he took her in his arms. She wanted to push him away but he was stronger than her and he squeezed her so tight that it hurt her. His lips smashed hers and his hand undressed her. He drew her to the bed and, without loosening his grip, he made her open her knees. She tried to resist this obvious rape but she could not. He was already inside her and was taking her with incredible violence. She wanted to scream, call for help, when she suddenly became of the absurdity of the situation: her “husband” was raping her. Legal rape! Nobody would help her. Nobody would believe her! He continued his frantic race on top of her. She had pain, and for a few seconds her attention concentrated on the part of her body that he was torturing. All of a sudden something extraordinary happened: a sensation that she had never experienced before invaded her and made her scream. But this was not pain. It was pleasure, so intense that she almost lost consciousness. She knew it was an orgasm, even though it was her first one, being a virgin until a week before. She was exhausted and, her eyes closed she could still feel the spasms of pleasure while René, relieved, rested on top of her.

They did not talk for a long while. He broke the silence.

“You liked it, didn’t you?”

“It was extraordinary. I did not know one could experience such a sensation.”

“You see” he said, while caressing her gently, “I can make you very happy if you are docile with me. I only want your happiness and you will never miss anything with me. You must only leave me free to do what I please and you should never ask any questions or try to find out

anything. If my body is unfaithful, my mind is not. You are my wife and you will stay my wife as long as I live”.

She curled up in his arms, tamed, willing to stay with him forever so that she could relive this mysterious and miraculous thing that he had just revealed to her.

Ten years had passed since that unforgettable night and its memory awoke an intense desire in her, sweeping away the bitterness she had felt since their return from the reception. She wanted him so badly that she started to touch him, thinking that she was crazy, that he deserved to be punished, but her desire was stronger than her anger. Her husband’s infidelities stimulated her sexually, and maybe this was her revenge over those women who just passed through his life, while she stayed.

Her insistent touching gave the results she was expecting and in minutes they were making love, and once more she fell under his spell.

CHAPTER 3

René, please! I am exhausted! Let's get out of here. I'll finish this report tomorrow, while you'll sleep on the plane".

It was Kathy, René's secretary. She had been with him since the beginning of his career because he hated to change secretaries. Kathy, he knew her well and she was devoted to him body and soul. From the start, he went to bed with her so as to know her better and therefore be able to control her. She was intelligent. She caught his thoughts at once and worked fast and well. She was so much in love with him that he could get anything from her. From time to time, when she had worked particularly hard, he took her to his "bachelor-studio" and he made love to her. She did not ask for anything more and he appreciated her discretion and her abnegation. He knew that she was on his side, no matter what might happen. So, he let her run the office as she pleased, hiring whomever she liked and firing mercilessly any pretty young clerk-typist who dared cast lustful eyes on her boss. She was his bodyguard and he liked that. Like Barbara, she acted as a protective shield; and he certainly needed protection, as he was unable to resist a pretty face, and more than once he had found it difficult to concentrate on his work! Of course, despite Kathy, he had a few quick affairs with some of the young secretaries. He had so much fun trying to hide them from Kathy. René loved anything forbidden. There was nothing more boring than an adventure without danger. So, he always created barriers for himself so that he could jump over them with delight.

Meanwhile, tonight he would have to “pay” Kathy for her effort, and he did not really feel like it. However, he trusted his imagination and he knew that she would go home feeling satisfied.

After he performed his “duty”, he went to the airport where he was expected by his inseparable Chuck Molliner, his right arm. Chuck and René had met at Harvard and Chuck had followed René in his career. He was brilliant, ambitious and devoted to René whom he considered his personal benefactor. He was willing to follow him all the way, as he was the perfect number two, indispensable for anybody aiming for the top.

That day they were both going to Paris to discuss an important deal for the new Chairman, and it would illustrate the new style that he wanted to impose on the company: to take enormous risks in order to earn big money. This was what he called “driving on a race track”. René was a gambler and he trusted his intuition and his luck. He also counted on Chuck’s advice which he valued more than anything else.

Comfortably installed in their first class seats, René Eagle and Chuck Molliner worked out a strategy to use with their Paris partners. By the time the airplane landed their plan of action was in place.

The meeting took place and was successful. The two friends returned to New York, triumphant, sure of their success. However, days went by and nothing was happening. They had many other meetings in New York and lots of phone calls and faxes with Paris, but the Parisians did not make any commitment. René could not figure out what was wrong, because their offer had been accepted by the Parisians. They had seemed very enthusiastic about it and they were ready to finalize the deal

immediately. René was very upset because this was an important deal for him, important for his credibility.

That week had been exhausting and today had been particularly unpleasant, as he had to preside at the monthly board meeting and was unable to answer all the questions he was asked. He went home, feeling uneasy. He picked up his mail and opened his door. Once in his home, strangely enough, he felt lonely. He would have loved to talk with someone, but there was no one. Chuck was as puzzled as he was and they had discussed the problem in the office. Absentmindedly he looked at his mail. Bills, junk mail and a letter.

“What is this?”

The letter was addressed to him, stamped with “strictly personal and confidential”. He opened the envelope and started to read, not believing what the letter said: “Dear Mr. Eagle,

You’ll probably find this letter absurd, but I ask you to read it. You don’t know me and I am not writing to you to ask for a favor but to tell you a dream I had about you.

I dreamt that you were piloting an airplane that moved very slowly on the ground. Most passengers were on the left of the aircraft, which caused it to lean dangerously to the left. I asked half of the passengers to go to the right of the plane so as to restore balance. They accepted and while they moved to the right, the plane swayed dangerously but finally it stabilized, gained speed and took off. During the ascent, a woman gave birth to a child and everybody applauded.

This is the dream I had and I believe it means something for you. My part in it is purely symbolic. This dream will give you the solution to a problem you are presently facing.

*Sincerely,
Lucia Albedo*

“Who is this crazy woman who tells me her dreams? That’s all I need right now! Dreams! Who does she think I am?”

He was furious that a stranger would interfere in his most intimate thoughts and would have the nerve to give him advice through a stupid dream. René did not believe in dreams. He only believed what he saw, and what he saw was the letter of an insane woman who had found an original way of getting in touch with him. If she thought that he was going to fall for it, she was wrong! Another victim of his charm...

“Why do they all fall in love with me?”

He threw the letter on the table and went to the bar to fix himself a drink. While doing so he could not help but think of this dream: “all the passengers are on the left of the craft which caused it to lean dangerously to the left”. Suddenly he understood what it meant. René had proposed to the Parisians to buy 75% of their business. The proposal was acceptable since their company was sinking, and the owners had accepted. However, if the dream meant something, it meant that the number of shares held by IFI was too high. If we would balance the distribution of the shares then we had a deal! That’s it! René rushed to the telephone and called Chuck. He told him his brilliant idea, keeping for himself the origin of it. Chuck agreed with enthusiasm.

“I think you found the solution! Let’s organize another meeting and make a new offer”.

That night, René was going to have a good sleep. He thought of this unknown Lucia with gratitude.

“Who is this woman? I should find out...”

And he fell asleep and had pleasant dreams...

The following day he had completely forgotten about his benefactress. The brilliant idea transmitted through a dream became his idea. He had even convinced himself that he would have thought of it and that he had even thought of it vaguely. So, he did not owe anything to anyone and this crazy woman who had dreams about him disappeared from his memory.

The meeting with the board members was positive. Everybody approved a reduction of shares and René was going back to Paris along with his inseparable Chuck, to make a new offer to their future partners.

During the flight René wanted to tell Chuck about the letter, but he changed his mind. It was strange, but he could not joke about it.

The meeting took place; the offer was accepted with enthusiasm, confirming that the dream had been right. The “plane” could take off now! Thank you Lucia...

CHAPTER 4

When they arrived at the hotel Rene found a message that read: “I’m waiting for you today, as usual”, signed “P”.

“Chuck, wait! There is something new. I can’t take the plane with you tonight. My sister is in Paris and wants to see me”.

“All right. How did she know you were here?”

“We spoke on the phone before we left and I told her I would be here if she wanted to call me. But I did not expect her to come from London just to see me. It must be serious”.

“Why? Does she have problems?”

“Yes, with her husband. Soon I’m going to know more. So long, and apologize for me tomorrow”.

As soon as Chuck disappeared in the elevator, René rushed to the public phone of the hotel and dialed a number.

“Hello Paula?”

“Oh! Darling! Am I glad to hear your voice! Are you coming?”

“Yes, in a half-hour. I’m just going to change and jump in a cab. See you soon my love!”

His heart was pounding with joy. “My sister, my love” he thought while changing clothes.

Fifteen minutes later he knocked at the door of their secret “nest” and his sister Paula appeared in front of him. He took her in his arms and kissed her with passion. Without a word they fell on the bed and made love, re-living once more a 26-year old adventure.

Paula was two years older than René and, when he was thirteen she initiated him into sexual games. Since then, the impossible love they had for each other did not diminish, even after their respective marriages. Paula was the only woman with whom René could communicate, the only one he understood and who could understand him. Their relationship was provocative and deeply erotic, and responded to their need for non-conformism and a challenge to their bourgeois upbringing. For René it was more than that. This incestuous relationship stimulated him sexually and Paula was the only woman who turned him on so intensely, even after twenty six years. Thanks to her, he felt powerful. She was his best protection against love, as he had made a vow never to be the victim of love. Paula he could love, because she was the only woman worthy of it. She was the only being on earth that he could trust. Paula was not any woman: she was his sister, his mirror image. With her he could open his heart whenever he needed to; she always said the words he expected. Yes, this kind of love was the closest thing to the perfection he was looking for in a relationship with a woman: to feel “complete”, because he was her and she was him.

Lying in bed, as close to each other as possible, he told her about the Lucia incident, this strange woman who had precognition dreams.

“What do you think of it? Do you think I should try to know more about her? She might have other interesting dreams?”

“I don’t think so. She would have told you. And if she had other dreams in the future, she will write to you. In my opinion, you should not try to see her; I don’t trust these women with so-called psychic abilities. They are

witches as far as I am concerned! Stay away from her, she might be a witch!”

“I guess you’re right. Also, I would have to admit that I believed in her dream! So, let destiny take care of it. I might meet her one day, who knows?”

After a wonderful night spent with his sister, he felt invigorated. At the airport, while waiting for his flight, he was having a cup of coffee at the bar. He was deep in his thoughts when a voice made him jump:

“Excuse-me, would you have a light please?”

He turned around and stayed in shock at the sight of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen: as tall as himself, a slim body in a tight white jumpsuit, a perfect oval face framed by long black hair, her eyes, violet-blue were looking at him, amused.

“Uh..yes, excuse-me, I don’t smoke”.

“It doesn’t matter” she said, “It was an excuse to talk to you”. Her voice was deep, almost masculine.

“That’s direct! Do you often pick up strangers?”

“No! Generally it’s the other way around. But I must say that I was intrigued because you remind me of someone I know”.

“One of your boyfriends, I suppose?”

“Oh! No” she said laughing. “It is a woman, and you two look so much alike that you could be twins!”

It was his turn to be intrigued. But before going any further, he thought it would be polite to introduce himself.

“My name is René Eagle, what is yours?”

“Angela Swann”

“Swann? That’s a famous name! are you related to the celebrated family?”

“Yes, my father is Harold Swann”

Harold Swann was one of the ten richest men in America. The wealth of the family started a hundred years ago. The great-grandfather Swann made a fortune building the first electrical companies in the country. Angela's father was now the head of the most important engineering company specializing in nuclear energy. René observed the young woman with an increased interest and, once more, was astonished by her great beauty. Yet, there was something cold about her, and despite her very sexy outfit there was nothing erotic about her. René was not particularly attracted by this kind of sculptural beauty, but decided to be agreeable to her because of her family connections. "You never know" he thought, "it would not be such a bad idea to have an opening into the Swann clan".

"You are going to New York? René asked.

"No, I'm waiting for a flight to the Balearic Islands. But I will be back to New York in three weeks and I would like to invite you to a party I am giving for my birthday. Give me your card, I'll send you an invitation".

Flattered, René gave her one of his business cards and he was going to thank her when a voice in the loud speaker announced his flight.

"I was delighted to meet you" he said, "and I will be very happy to see you when you return. I wish you a nice trip and a wonderful vacation in the Balearic Islands".

He kissed her hand in style while she was smiling at him.

"See you soon, René, may I call you René?"

"Of course, Angela... see you soon".

Back to his many occupations, René had completely forgotten Angela Swann. So he was surprised to

receive the invitation she had promised him. The reception was scheduled for October 8 in their Southampton house.

October 8 was a Saturday and the party started at 6:30 PM. Rene arrived alone at 7:00 and he was impressed by the luxury of this mansion. A driveway lined with trees led to the magnificent colonial house surrounded by a manicured French garden. When he reached the main door, a servant took his car and he was guided inside the house. Another servant in livery announced his name.

The brightness of the lights blinded him. The room, already filled with guests, was enormous and made him think of the *Chateau de Versailles*. “These people live like kings” he thought. He saw Angela walking toward him. She was amazingly beautiful in a long white dress made of a very light fabric, and this time he found her sexy. She was smiling at him.

“I am happy you could come, René. I am going to introduce you to my guests.

She took his arm and introduced him to many people, men and women, all incredibly beautiful. He was dizzy, not knowing where to look.

“Come have a drink, René! You must be thirsty”.

“Oh yes, thank you!”

“Sorry, René, I have to greet another guest, I’ll see you later”.

She left him and he ordered a scotch on the rocks. His glass in his hand, he leaned against a column to observe the guests. He began to move toward three beauties when he felt a hand touching his arm. He turned around and what he saw was beyond belief: he had the weird feeling of being in front of a mirror, except that his image had long blond hair and a blue evening dress.

“Good evening, my brother!”

“I can’t believe it!” he said. “I never saw such a resemblance! Even my sister does not look as much like me. I remember now, Angela told me about you! What is your name?”

“Angela did not tell you my name?”

“No, I don’t remember why. Oh! Yes, I remember now. We talked about something else and then my flight was announced and I had to go. What about you? Did you know you had a “look-alike”? Did she tell you?”

“Yes, she told me, but I already knew it. My name is Lucia Albedo. Do you remember this name?”

“Lucia Albedo...It is a beautiful name and it sounds familiar...wait, let me think...Yes! You wrote me this letter to tell me a dream. By the way, I have to tell you that thanks to you I solved a big problem. It’s fantastic! I still can’t believe what I see!”

He looked at her intensely and recognized himself in the slightest detail: the water-green color of the eyes, even the tiny wrinkles were there! The nose, the lips, the complexion! He found her so beautiful and he was reluctant to accept that she was his “twin”. He had never thought of himself as a handsome man, because he felt that beauty was not important for a man; he was much more interested in his intelligence than in his physical appearance. But tonight he understood why so many women were after him! He found himself very good looking! Yet, there was in her an expression, something soft that he would never have, and also an aura of mystery surrounded her, as if she were unreal.

He wanted to know more about her.

“Tell me about you Lucia. Who are you? How did you come to dream about me? How come you look so

much like me? Where do you come from? Tell me everything! I'm dying with curiosity”.

She had another of her sweet smiles and she took his hand that she squeezed in hers. Her contact made him feel strange; it had nothing sexual yet, it moved him deeply.

“Come with me” she said”, let's sit somewhere far from all these people”.

They entered a room next to the grand ballroom where they came from. They could hear a vague hubbub of voices and strains of music. They sat on a couch and, for a few minutes they remained silent. They did not touch each other; yet, René had the strange sensation that he was holding her in his arms. “Weird” he thought. I don't understand it”.

Then she started to talk.

“Lucia” she said, “means light and Albedo, means white. I was born the same day as you, same year, same time, but very far from here, In Cairo, Egypt. Since I was born, I was *prepared* for you. The time has come for you to find Unity...”

“I don't understand you, Lucia. What Unity? What are you talking about? You scare me! I hate what I don't understand”.

“I know, don't worry. I'll guide you so as to change your nature and when you will become strong and take the advantage, you will dominate me and make me like you...”

“What do you mean? Why do you want to guide me and change my nature? Who are you?”

He thought he was going out of his mind. “That does not make any sense! I have to get out of here!”

Suddenly, she took him in her arms and pressed her lips against his, and something unbelievable happened. He was no longer Rene, he had no physical body and yet, he

occupied the whole space, without limit. He perceived a white light, no, he did not perceive it, he was the light. He saw the stars, he touched them, he was the stars. He had an acute awareness of the Whole, as if he were the Universe: he knew its mechanism, he knew all that was, all that had been and all that will be, because he was in an eternal present, he “was” all that was...

When the sensation of his body returned, he realized he was alone in the room. He looked around him, looking for Lucia, but she had disappeared. He was still deeply moved by the experience he had just lived. It was no dream. He was, during a moment impossible to define, the whole universe. He forgot what he knew during this fleeting moment, but he remembered that he had had the exhilarating experience of Total Knowledge.

He went back to the ballroom to look for Lucia, but he could not find her anywhere. He asked Angela who did not know where her friend had disappeared.

Suddenly, he did not want to be there any longer. He wanted to go home and try to understand what had happened. He said good-bye to Angela and went home.

CHAPTER 5

Don't go too far Lisa! Be careful!" Lying down on a lounge-chair, Barbara watched Lisa playing with the sand near the water. It was the end of October and Malibu Beach was packed with people on this Saturday afternoon. While enjoying the warmth of the sun, Barbara thought of René whom she had not heard from in three weeks. She had called his office many times and no one knew where he was. Chuck told her that he had a call from René, three weeks earlier, on a Sunday, saying that he was going away for a few days, but he did not say where he was going. This was not the first time that René disappeared, but he usually came back after two or three days. Barbara was very upset and angry with her husband. She was growing more and more tired of his irresponsible behavior. In ten years, she had been through all possible humiliations, but this one was the worst: to disappear like this, for three weeks, leaving her and their daughter with no possibility of contacting him in case of an accident or other emergency! "He is a monster! A selfish monster! I can't stand it anymore! I hate him!"

A sudden scream from Lisa put an end to her bitter thoughts.

"Mummy! Mummy! I'm drowning!"

In panic, Barbara ran toward the ocean to save her little girl who was fighting with an enormous wave. She was about to dive when she saw a man grab Lisa by the waist and swim vigorously toward the beach. He came out of the water and Barbara, completely frantic, went to him

and snatched Lisa from him. Lisa clung to her mother's neck, crying hysterically.

"It's okay my baby. It's over." Barbara tried to calm Lisa when she realized that the man who had saved her daughter was standing in front of her.

"Oh! Thank you! I got so scared!"

"I understand. But I was next to her and she was in no danger, but she panicked."

Barbara examined the man and found him very attractive: tall, dark, big brown smiling eyes.

"After this emotion I need a drink" she said, smiling. "Do you want to join me? I have everything here."

"I'd love to. But let me introduce myself: Alex Ross".

"Glad to meet you Alex. My name is Barbara Eagle and this is Lisa."

"Hi Barbara! Hi Lisa" How do you feel now?"

Lisa hid her face in her mother's hair, refusing to answer.

A moment later, Barbara and Alex were sitting on the beach, a glass of cola in their hands, getting to know each other, while Lisa, exhausted, fell asleep next to them.

Alex told Barbara he was 40 years old, an MD specializing in pediatrics. He lived in Beverly Hills and had been divorced for four years. He also had a little girl whom he saw every other weekend.

In turn, Barbara talked about herself, about her husband and his latest prank. She felt at ease with this man that she hardly knew and confided in him as naturally as if he had been her best friend. She was so hungry for communication that she talked for more than an hour. When she realized it she felt terribly embarrassed.

“Oh! I’m sorry! I bored you with my problems! I don’t know what came over me. I usually do not talk so much.”

“Don’t worry! You did not bore me at all, and to prove it to you, I would like to take you to dinner tonight, if you do not have other plans.”

“I have no other plans and I’d be delighted to go out to dinner.”

That evening, Barbara felt happy, for the first time in a long time. While getting ready for her date with Alex, she found herself pretty and smiled at her image in the mirror. The doorbell rang. It was Alex.

“You are ravishing Barbara! I am very proud to be your escort!”

“Thank you! You’re not so bad either!”

When they arrived at the restaurant, they were welcomed personally by the owner and were given the best table. The meal was superb and the atmosphere very relaxed. Alex was telling jokes and Barbara felt alive. She had not been laughing for such a long time that she thought she did not know how to anymore. She looked at Alex with gratitude.

He seemed to read her mind and gently took her hand.

“You want to be happy Barbara, and I would like you to allow me to try to make you happy.”

For a second, Barbara panicked. She had never cheated on her husband and it was against her principles. She had never thought to avenge herself for her husband’s infidelity because she found the idea petty. But in front of Alex she was not thinking of revenge. She was terribly attracted to him and she was starving for love. So, she heard herself say:

“Do you think there is hope? I am so pessimistic!”

“Let’s go! I’ll take you to my place and we’ll find out.”

His place was a magnificent house in the heights of Beverly Hills, contemporary in style, with a very modern and comfortable interior. The living room in which they walked opened to a dark blue swimming pool with a Jacuzzi on the left.

Alex came closer to Barbara and took her in his arms. When he kissed her on the lips she felt overwhelmed with emotion. He started to undress her and whispered:

“Let’s go to the Jacuzzi.”

She followed him, having lost contact with reality. She only felt an immense happiness and was magnetically drawn to this man that she hardly knew. In the warm water of the Jacuzzi, he caressed her naked body, kissed her gently on the lips, on the neck. She abandoned herself to him and when he penetrated her she moaned with pleasure, clinging to him with passion. When she reached her orgasm she screamed, amazed that another man was making love to her. She felt a deep joy and an intense emotion that made her cry. He covered her face with gentle kisses, drinking her tears. He held her in his arms and took her out of the Jacuzzi to the couch in the living room. He continued to caress her and once more awakened her desire. He took her again and with an incredible patience, led her to her climax. She felt immensely happy. She had never experienced such a complete sensation in love making, because René always took her quickly, without any foreplay.

“I love you Alex..” she said without thinking.

“I love you too, since the first minute I saw you.”

CHAPTER 6

Chuck Molliner was in his office. He was preoccupied. In a few minutes, the monthly board meeting was going to start, and he was running out of excuses to justify the Chairman's absence.

"He exaggerates" he thought. "He puts me in an impossible situation. This time he went too far. I am beginning to be fed up with this guy! I never know where I stand with him and he never tells me anything he does. Who does he think he is?"

With anger, Chuck thought that he owed everything to René, and that he had promised himself to be faithful to him, no matter what. But with years gone by, Chuck had asserted himself by his own value, and he had proven it. He felt very secure that he could go on his own now, to finally stop being Mr. Eagle's slave, stop being at his disposal day and night, stop covering up for him constantly. Chuck's frustration was growing. He had to admit: he did not like René. He envied him ever since Harvard. He envied René's ability to succeed in everything, his casual way with teachers, with students, with girls too. Chuck was not as lucky! Chuck did not have rich parents who paid for his tuition, or for the latest model of a fashionable car, or gave him enough money to dazzle all the girls in campus. Chuck had to work hard to get a scholarship! And God knows how difficult it was to obtain a scholarship at Harvard. And he had paid it back, in two years, with his own sweat.

The telephone rang, interrupting his bitter thoughts.

“Mr. Molliner?”

“Speaking”

“Hold on, please, I’ll put you through to Mr. Daniel Martin”

Chuck panicked. Daniel Martin was the Chairman of Greenfield Trust Bank. Chuck had met him at a cocktail party a few months earlier, and they had a very interesting conversation during which Chuck had impressed Mr. Martin which his knowledge of international finance. Martin had told him, while they shook hand “If one day you look for a job, please call me! I’ll have a job for you”.

“Hello, Chuck? How are you?”

“I’m all right, thank you Mr. Martin. What can I do for you?”

“Chuck, I have a problem and I think you can help me solve it. Could you come to my office tomorrow morning?”

“Sure, at what time?”

“10:00 AM. Is it okay with you?”

“Okay! I’ll be there. I’ll be glad to help you.”

“You won’t regret it! See you tomorrow.”

When he hung up, Chuck was in seventh heaven. He fantasized “If he offers me a job, I’ll take it! And good-bye Mr. Eagle!”

The following morning, he went directly to his appointment with Daniel Martin. He had to admit, he was a little nervous.

“Hi Chuck” I’m so glad to see you again!”

Dan Martin shook his hand and preceded him to his office.

“I’m going to go straight to the point. Chuck I need you here to manage my international division, and I am offering you twice as much money as you are making now.

Don't say anything. I know how much you make. Think about it and give me your answer by the end of the week at the latest."

He stood up, indicating that the meeting was over. Chuck was speechless. When he finally could speak he said:

"I am very flattered that you thought of me, Dan. But why me?"

"I know your worth, Chuck, and I need someone like you. Good-bye. Think about it and call me soon."

Still in shock, Chuck went back to his office. He called Kathy to find out if there was any word from René.

"Nothing" she said angrily. "I wonder where this bastard could be!"

"My! My!" Chuck told himself, "Kathy is rebelling? That would be the day if she would leave him too! That's all this bastard deserves!"

As soon as she hung up, once again Kathy dialed the "secret" number of their "love nest". Nothing. She had tried all the numbers she had. There was no trace of René anywhere. She was furious because she was sure that he was somewhere with Nathalie, one of the secretaries who had disappeared a few days before her boss. She had noticed that René called Nathalie very often into his office, and when she came out of there, she wore a stupid smile on her face. That would not be the first time that René would disappear with one of the female employees. But it was the first time that he was away for so long. Kathy was worried, not for his health, no, this man was a real horse, but for his heart. Because, in her mind, if he extended his "vacation" with a woman, it meant that the impossible had happened: René was in love. And this, Kathy would not tolerate. She had always accepted his caprices, his escapades, his lies

when he tried to hide from her an affair with a secretary, because she knew (or at least she thought she knew) that she, Kathy, was indispensable, ever more than this bootlicker Chuck. She thought that René was afraid to lose her and that was the reason why he was so careful not to provoke her jealousy. He even resented her personal friends. But now she thought that these were illusions. He never loved her. He only played this game to have her under his thumb, to turn her into a slave. He used her for the past eight years. And now, he disappeared and did not have the courage to call her on the phone. Instead, he had called Chuck, and she felt deeply hurt. This time, it was too much. He had gone too far. She realized that she had wasted eight years of her youth because of him. At 38, she felt old, faded, and she thought that maybe the time had come for her to think of her future, to try to find a decent husband before it was too late. When she had arrived in New York, nine years earlier, she was full of hope. In her country there was war and no future, while here there was freedom and abundance. She had no regrets leaving her family behind, and when she found this job as assistant to René Eagle, she knew she was right to sacrifice everything else. Now she had second thoughts. Her parents kept begging her to go back to Lebanon, but she never had the courage even to visit them.

Suddenly, she felt remorseful, and impulsively took the telephone and dialed her parents' number in Beirut.

“Hello, Mom, It’s Kathy! How is everything there?”

“Kathy! Oh my God! Am I glad to hear your voice! I wrote you a letter yesterday, because here things don’t look too good. Your father is very ill and he wants to see you. Are you going to come this time?”

“Yes, I am coming. What’s wrong with Dad?”

“Unfortunately, it’s serious. The doctor said it could be cancer, but he is worse every day. Come quickly, before it’s too late.”

“I’m coming! As soon as I hung up I’ll make a reservation on the next flight and I’ll call you right back to tell you when I’ll be there.”

“Okay, I’ll wait for your call. Thanks Kathy! You don’t know how wonderful I feel to talk to you. Your father will be so happy!”

After she hung up with her mother, she dialed the travel agency, made her reservation for the first flight the following day, and called back Beirut.

“That’s it! The die is cast! When Mr. Eagle comes back, his faithful Kathy won’t be here to welcome him!”

She felt great to play this trick on him.

CHAPTER 7

René awoke with difficulty. His muscles were stiff and it seemed that he had slept for a century. He tried to remember where he was, as he could not recognize the room, a beautiful luxurious bedroom.

“Where am I” he thought, a bit worried. Thinking required a real effort and he could not remember what happened before he fell asleep. After a painful moment, memories started to come into focus, and suddenly he remembered everything.

It was just after the party at Angela Swann’s. He came home to think about the extraordinary experience he had lived and he also wanted to trace this mysterious Lucia. He was pouring himself a drink when the telephone rang. It was Lucia. She apologized for disappearing and gave a vague excuse to explain it. She also asked him if he would be available the following day to meet her in her apartment, as she wanted to talk to him. He accepted gladly, looking forward to hearing what she had to say.

The following day he went to her apartment. Lucia lived in an old brownstone on the Upper East Side. He rang the bell and a man, obviously a servant, let him to the living room, asking him to wait for Miss Albedo who would be here in a few minutes. When she appeared shortly after, René was once more mesmerized by the incredible resemblance. It was even more so that morning, as she wore pants and a man’s shirt, and she had put her hair up. She walked towards him with a warm smile and shook his hand.

“Good morning my dear twin. You are on time. Before we go any further I would like to ask you if you could free yourself for a couple of days, as I want you to come with me somewhere far from here. I want you to meet my Master; he prepared me for you. He will explain to you what happened last night and why.”

“Can’t you tell me yourself?”

“No! You must see him. It is very important that you see him.”

The memory of his experience of the night before dissolved his hesitation. He asked Lucia if he could use the phone and he called Chuck to let him know that he would be away for a few days. He had no desire to tell anything to Chuck, as this adventure was too far fetched to be talked about.

He went back to Lucia who asked him if he wanted a cup of coffee. He accepted. She called the servant and ordered the coffee, then invited René to sit on one of the comfortable leather couches. She sat next to him and lit a cigarette. When the butler came back with a cup of coffee, René took it and started to sip it with pleasure.

This was the end of his recollection. He did not know what happened next and why he was in this bedroom.

“Who is this mysterious woman? She manipulates me like a toy! And who is the “Master”? Why didn’t he come to me? Why did they drug me?”

Suddenly, he feared that he was in the hands of criminals who had kidnapped him for a ransom. “That’s crazy! I have to get out of here!” He tried to move but he was paralyzed. He really panicked and he was about to scream when the door opened and Lucia appeared. She looked stunning, wearing a green tunic, the same color as her eyes, her long blond hair flowing on her shoulders, and

she was holding in her hand a golden wand surmounted by a globe. She looked like a fairy.

“Happy Birthday” she said joyfully.

“What? What are you talking about? My birthday is November 7.”

“This is November 7!”

René thought he was still dreaming. It was October 9 before he lost contact with reality.

“What happened to me? How come I slept for a month? Who are you, witch?”

Lucia walked slowly toward the bed where René was lying, unable to make a move. He looked at her with fear, wondering what she was going to do. When she sat next to him, she raised her golden wand. Without saying a word she looked in his eyes intensely. With her wand, she drew in the air the shape of a cross, and suddenly René felt life coming back to his body. He rushed out of bed and was about to escape, when she hugged him and put her lips against his.

Once again, like the evening of the party, he felt transported to another dimension. This time he was aware of his identity but he had lost contact with his body. He felt “complete”, blissfully happy. Lucia was no longer Lucia, she was him. He had “absorbed” her in himself, and he knew they had accomplished the “*Great Work*”, the lead was transformed into gold, and he had become the Eagle whose eyes stare at the Sun.

When he came back to reality, he was alone in the room. Lucia had vanished. He was still under the spell and wondered why, as soon as he touched Lucia physically, this magical and incomprehensible thing occurred.

A light noise interrupted his thoughts. He turned around and saw, on the other side of the room, far from the

front door, an old man with a white beard, wearing a “djellabah”, obviously an Arab fallen from the sky.

“How did you get here? Who are you?” asked René, surprised.

“Would you like to walk through walls?” asked the old man, smiling.

“That’s an odd thing to say. Why would we have doors then?”

The old man walked toward René. “Sit down son. I’m going to answer the questions I read in your mind.”

René was impressed. From this man emanated an incredible strength René could not comprehend. He felt like a little boy and sat on a chair, speechless, awaiting the words of the “Master”, because René recognized the “Master” in this old man.

The Master started to speak, in a deep and surprisingly strong voice:

“Both experiences that you have had are just a glimpse of what you will be when you will have accomplished the *“Great Work”*. You have experienced Perfection, but to become Perfection, you will have to go through a number of tests. Until now, confusion and chaos have characterized your ideas and your actions. You thought you were free and powerful, but you know now that real freedom and real power transcend your limited condition.

“Why?” interrupted René, “why did you choose me? Who am I?”

“You are ready for the last stage of the *Great Work*. You still do not understand what it means, but very soon you will find the answer in yourself. The first tests will await you as soon as you leave this house. Go my son. Don’t be afraid, I will be with you all the way.”

The old man disappeared as he had come, miraculously. René thought he was dreaming. He, who never believed in anything, who had always prided himself on being a convinced atheist and Cartesian, had difficulty realizing that what he had just lived was real. The foundation of his philosophy was shaking, and he felt very confused. He was even more fearful of this unknown he had just discovered because he was as far from it as it was possible. He had always been convinced that nothing exists that reason cannot conceive, and reason can only conceive tangible things, measurable and of immediate use here, on earth, during the time between birth and death. For René, death was the end of the adventure and the return to ashes. If he had chosen to live at a maximum speed, to enjoy everything this world can offer, it was because he knew that once you were dead, it was over. This existential philosophy excluded any kind of magic, any kind of irrational manifestation, any kind of supra-normal experience. Yet, in a matter of days, he had plunged into irrationality; he had experienced a state of awareness that he did not dare call divine because he did not know what divine meant. Still, he knew that for an instant impossible to define, he had been God, if being God implied Total Knowledge. Identity with the Universe. Also a state where man/woman duality did not exist, because he was man and woman in one, complete, perfect, immensely happy to have found Unity. Evoking this instant, he felt a deep nostalgia for this state of being, and it occurred to him that he always dreamed of being complete, ever since he was a child. All of a sudden, he understood his attraction to his sister: she was the only woman in whom he found himself, as if she were part of him. But now he knew how relative and incomplete his *unity* with Paula was, and he thought that it

would be impossible for him to go back to this parody. As he knew now, it was a grotesque imitation which had nothing to do with the real experience.

The thought of his sister drew him back to reality. “My God! What happened in a month? How am I going to explain that I slept during all that time? I have to get out of here immediately!”

He left his room which opened into a corridor leading to a staircase. He rushed down the stairs and reached the living room where he had drunk the fated coffee. He did not meet anybody. He walked to the door and went out. Once in the street, he took a deep breath, relieved to be free. He realized that he was wearing the same clothes he had when he had arrived, a month earlier, and was surprised to see that they were in perfect condition, even though he remembered that he was wearing them when he woke up. That was not the only mystery he would have to solve in the coming days!

CHAPTER 8

He took a cab home where he intended to immerse himself in a nice hot bath, then call the office to find out what had happened in four weeks. He felt a bit nervous about facing reality and he wanted to think of a plausible story to explain his mysterious disappearance.

Relaxing in his bath he imagined all sorts of scenarios and finally decided to adopt this one: *At the Swann's party he met a man who pretended to be an Arab prince wanting to invest in the United States. They agreed to meet the following day and, once at the meeting place, he realized that it was a kidnapping. He was forced, at gun point, to call Chuck. Following the call, he was drugged and then taken to a secret place. He woke up in a bare room where someone fed him regularly. But no one would talk to him and he had no idea of what was expected from him. Then, yesterday, he was drugged again and upon waking up he found himself in his own bed.*

René was satisfied with this version of the facts and he trusted his imagination to find realistic details which would sound true.

As soon as he was ready, he walked to the phone, filled with apprehension. He felt terribly guilty for the first time in his life, even though he was not responsible for what had happened. But that did not change anything, as he could never tell anyone any part of his adventure. Painfully, he dialed Chuck's direct number and sighed with relief when he heard his voice.

“It’s me, René...”

“Thank God! René! Where have you been? Are you okay? What happened? Everybody was worried sick about you!”

“If you only knew, Chuck! Something incredible has happened to me. Nobody called while I was away? No ransom request or anything of that sort?”

“No! Absolutely nothing. We considered a kidnapping, but since there was no request for a ransom, we gave up the idea. Please, tell me...”

René reported the version he had imagined and added to it as many details as he could think of, hoping that Chuck would believe him. When he finished talking, Chuck’s voice was serious.

“I know now why you were kidnapped. Do you remember the deal we were discussing just before you disappeared?”

“Yes, the oil refinery in Venezuela”.

“That’s the one. Well, we missed the deal because, while you were away, another group stole it from us. Therefore, I think that these people are responsible for your misfortune. They probably wanted to eliminate you for the time they needed to close the deal, and the agreement was signed yesterday. That’s why they let you go. You were no longer a threat!”

“For heaven’s sake!” René exclaimed, “it makes sense! The bastards!”

All of a sudden René wondered if the scenario he had invented was so farfetched. Why if Lucia and her “Master” were paid by the rival group?

“What’s the name of the group?” he asked Chuck.

“Davidson-Wacker.”

“Of course! Who else? These bastards! They’d try anything! Okay Chuck! Action! Arrange a meeting for three o’clock this afternoon. I owe everybody explanations. See you later!”

After he hang up, he started to cogitate and grew angrier and angrier. How stupid he had been to believe in “magic”! They fooled him alright, these “magicians”! It was just for money, nothing else! Who are these people? Who is this Lucia and who is this man who walks through walls? René was more and more convinced that he had dreamed all that, that he had never lived these paranormal experiences. Lucia must have drugged him at the party, as she did at her apartment. Her apartment? He looked at his watch and realized that he had three more hours before the meeting. He wanted to clarify his thoughts and decided to visit Lucia. He promised himself not to touch anything in that house and to stay alert.

He jumped in a cab and gave Lucia’s address. He remembered very well all the details of the brownstone, outside and inside, so, to his stupefaction, the taxi stopped in front of a forty-story building. He checked the address. It was right. He could not believe his eyes! He recognized the street and the other buildings, but the series of brownstones on the right side of the street had disappeared, replaced by this tall modern apartment building.

“Tell me” he asked the taxi driver, “Do you know this building?”

“Yes, I have brought clients here many times”.

“When was it built?”

The driver looked at René, amused.

“Where do you come from? This building was built five years ago and it was a big deal, because they had to demolish the whole block and among the brownstones there

was a landmark which the city refused to have demolished.”

“Which one was it?”

“The second one on the block. The first one was old and run down, and the third one was not any better. But the one in the middle was a real jewel, with sculptures, cast iron...”

René was not listening anymore. The description of the driver matched what he remembered of the brownstone. The mystery was thicker and René was losing his senses.

“Okay driver, take me home, Sutton Place.”

Once he got home, he sat at his desk and tried to recollect all his memories since he first met Lucia. Nothing rational had happened since that day. First of all, the incredible resemblance between Lucia and himself; he had never heard of anything like that before. There were “look-alikes”, but Lucia was much more than that: she was his exact replica in a female version. Furthermore, Lucia herself was so strange, with her enigmatic way of talking. He recalled something she had said on their first encounter that he still had not been able to figure out: *“I will guide you so as to change your nature and when you’ll become strong and take the advantage, you will dominate me and make me like you...”* This incomprehensible sentence was vivid in his mind. What did she mean by that? Then he evoked what happened next, when she kissed him, this indescribable experience out of time and space. He had never lost consciousness and he still could feel the sensation, as vividly as it had been then.

René was a man of action and he always solved his problems through action. He had no time to waste cogitating. He decided to call Angela Swann and to get

more information on Lucia. After all, Angela was her friend and she should know something.

When she recognized his voice on the telephone, Angela exclaimed:

“René! I haven’t heard from you in ages! How have you been?”

“I am ashamed Angela. I should have called you earlier to thank you for your party, but I had to fly overseas for an emergency and I just came back. How are you?”

“Wonderful! I met the man of my life and we are planning to get married in the Spring. I am so happy! It’s my friend Lucia, your “double”, who introduced me to this marvelous man!”

“Congratulations! I am very happy for you. By the way, how is Lucia? I would love to see her again because I am so intrigued with our resemblance. At your party, I did not have a chance to speak with her at length, because she suddenly disappeared...”

Angela laughed.

“That’s her all right! She always disappears and nobody knows how to get in touch with her. I never met anyone as mysterious. So my dear, if you expect me to tell you where to find her, I can’t help you!”

“But how did you meet her? How did you become friends?”

“Last year, for my birthday, I had a party, as I do every year, and she came with one of my guests. Strangely, I was immediately attracted to her, as if she was magnetic, and I could not stay away from her, not even to greet my guests. Suddenly, she looked me in the eyes and started to talk about my life, my past and my present...even my most secret thoughts. Then she revealed to me that in exactly one year and one week, I would meet the man of my life. I

wanted to ask her more questions, but I was speechless. She said: “Don’t ask any question! Don’t ask how I know these things. Just remember that I am your friend and I will always be at your side when you need me.” And it was true, because since that day, every time I had a problem, she would manifest herself, either on the phone, or miraculously, she would be where I was, at the restaurant, at friends’, in the street, anywhere! And each time she would disappear as she had come: like magic. I was never able to make her talk about herself, and those who knew her before I did told me the same story, and they did not know any better.”

“It is really bizarre! But she must live somewhere? Someone must have taken her home once?”

“No, René, she always disappears without anybody noticing as soon as she has “accomplished” her mission. Because she only shows up when it is necessary for the persons that she has “chosen.” Why does she choose some and not others? I’ll never know! What about you, René? She must have chosen you, I am sure, even only because of your extraordinary resemblance. When I saw you at the airport, I thought it was her, dressed as a man, and that she was coming to help me for any reason. You know, it happened more than once and I would not have been surprised, even though she had never dressed as a man before. That’s why I asked you for a light. I could not possibly call you Lucia! And I was right, you were not Lucia!”

“That’s what I am wondering...” René whispered.

“What? What do you mean?”

“Oh! Nothing! I think that she also “chose” me, but to me she creates problems instead of solving them!”

“Please, tell me! What happened to you? I’m always fascinated with anything involving Lucia. She is my fairy, my guardian angel, and I can’t imagine she could harm anybody.”

“I can’t tell you now, Angela. I have to sort it out for myself first. That’s why I called you. I was hoping you could give me some information which would have helped me.”

“Did I help?”

“Yes and no. You have confirmed that she exists, that I have not dreamt meeting her, but the mystery is still there. Thanks a lot Angela and I hope to see you soon.”

“Bye, René, and good luck. Don’t hesitate to call me if I can be of any help.

René hang up, disappointed. He had learnt something though: Lucia had granted him “special” privileges that she did not grant anyone else, at least as far as Angela knew. With everyone else, Lucia played the role of fairy godmother, but with him...What did she play? He would have liked to know...

He looked at his watch: “God! It’s 2:30! I’m going to be late for the meeting!”

CHAPTER 9

Arrangements for the three o'clock meeting had been made, and Chuck had briefly related to the executives in attendance what had happened to their chairman.

Now he was waiting for René to arrive. He was wondering if this was the right time to tell René about the job offer, but decided that he would wait a few days. He had until the end of the week to give his answer to Dan Martin. Chuck was no longer angry with René now that he knew the reason for his disappearance. But it did not change his deep feelings. He knew that time had come for him to move on, and he had decided to accept Dab Martin's offer.

He walked toward the conference room and glanced at Kathy's office. She had not come back from Lebanon and Chuck thought that René was going to be disappointed not to find her. "Well!" he thought, "René must go through a bad period!" However, Chuck knew that his boss would always come out of any ordeal as a winner.

All the executive staff was there and conversations stopped as soon as Chuck entered the room. One could read inquisitive expectation on all the faces, and when René appeared, everybody got up. René felt terribly embarrassed. He walked to his seat and sat down, imitated by all the rest.

"Hi!" He said, "I missed you!"

Nervous laughs in the audience.

"I am delighted to see you! I thought I would not see you again. Let me tell you what happened to me."

René told his story, including the political reasons they had discovered in connection with the kidnapping. While he was talking, René became more and more secure and very soon he was René Eagle, Chairman of IFI. After an hour, everybody was convinced that what they heard was the truth, including René himself, as he had no doubt that his kidnapping by Lucia was financed by the rival group Davidson-Wacker.

At the end of the meeting, all of the executives came to shake René's hand and assure him of their complete cooperation. He felt relieved. The nightmare was over. He was back to his old self and in control of his little world.

He went to his office and called Kathy through the intercom. He was in a good mood and happy to see her. He even thought that maybe tonight he would take her to their "love nest" to ask her for forgiveness...To his surprise, when the door opened, Nancy, the new secretary hired by Kathy a few days before his "kidnapping", was standing there.

"Hi! Nancy, where is Kathy?"

"Good afternoon Mr. Eagle. I thought you knew. Kathy left last week for Lebanon to visit her sick father. She should be back in a few days."

"Okay! Thank you. Please bring me the mail and messages received while I was away."

"Yes Sir, right away..."

René was disappointed. Really, this was not his lucky day! And it was his birthday! Suddenly, Barbara and Lisa came to his mind, and he realized that he did not think of them once since his return to reality. He asked Nancy if there was any call from his wife today.

“No Sir, but she called many times while you were away. She was very worried.”

“Thanks.”

He dialed Barbara’s number in L.A.

“Hi Honey! It’s me! Your beloved husband!

Silence at the other end, then Barbara’s voice, icy cold:

“You are still alive?”

“Listen, darling. I understand your anger, but this time it’s not my fault. Let me tell you what happened to me.”

Once more he told the story, now perfected, of his pseudo-kidnapping.

“Oh! My God! It’s unbelievable!” Barbara exclaimed. “I am so sorry I was angry at you!”

“Maybe you can take the first flight to New York tomorrow so that you may give me some tender loving care in person!”

“Okay! I’ll call you to tell you at what time we’ll be in New York.”

René was elated. He felt liberated from an evil spell and swore to chase from his memory all that had happened these last few weeks. He did not want to think about it, or try to understand it. Lucia and the man who walked through walls were a dream, a nightmare; reality was back, as tangible as this pile of mail the secretary just put on his desk. He immersed himself in the reading and forgot everything else.

Barbara was crushed. She had imagined everything, except that her husband could be in danger, and she felt terribly guilty to have doubted him so much and to have cheated on him with pleasure. The thought of Alex plunged

her into sorrow. She knew she had to leave him for good, because she loved him so much, she would not be able to hide her feelings from René. René was her husband and she had promised him fidelity. But she did not love him! He mistreated her since the beginning of their relationship.

With Alex, she felt loved. He was so good. He understood her and gave her all that she had dreamed of. No! She could not renounce him! She could not go back to her husband as if nothing had happened to her this past week. Just the thought of having sex with René revolted her. All of a sudden, she was determined to tell René as soon as she would get to New York. She grabbed the telephone and called Alex.

“Please! Come as soon as you can” she implored. My husband is back and he had all sorts of problems. He wants me to go back to New York tomorrow. Please come! I need you! I am going crazy!”

“I’ll be right there, my love! I will cancel my last appointments and be there in a half hour.”

Barbara was alone at home. Her mother and Lisa were in San Diego for a few days. That’s why she had taken the liberty of asking Alex to come. Her mother was unaware of her liaison with Alex and Lisa had completely forgotten the man who saved her life.

Alex arrived as quickly as he could. As soon as he entered the apartment, Barbara rushed into his arms, sobbing.

“Alex! Alex! My love! I don’t want to leave you! I don’t want to go back to New York! I don’t want to see him anymore!”

“Calm down! Be reasonable. You know you have to go back to New York. What happened to your husband?”

Still in tears, Barbara narrated René’s kidnapping.

“He wants tender loving care. From me! How could I do that if I think of you, if it is you I want?”

“Barbara, please! You have to make an effort. He needs you right now and you have to be near him. When he is back on track, then you’ll be able to tell him about us. You can’t do it now, he must be pretty shaken. Did you make your reservations?”

“No! I did not have the courage, and Lisa won’t be able to come anyway, since she is in San Diego. I forgot to tell René.”

Well, we are going to get Lisa tonight. We will be in San Diego in a few hours. You cannot deprive your husband of his daughter. Pull yourself together! Be an adult!”

She looked at him, surprised. It was the first time he was tough with her, but she realized he was right. She called the travel agency and made the reservation for the following day. She then called San Diego and told her mother that she was coming to get Lisa, explaining the reason for this unexpected decision. After she hung up the phone, she turned to Alex who was watching her with love in his eyes.

“Alex” she said in a soft voice. “I don’t know when I’ll be back here, but before I go, I want to make love with you, once more, as if for the last time.”

“It won’t be the last time, my darling. We have all our life ahead of us. But I don’t mind a glimpse of the future!”

CHAPTER 10

René was still immersed in the reading of the mail when the door opened and Chuck Molliner appeared. “Sorry to disturb you, René, but I have to go now. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay! Say hello to Martha for me.”

After Chuck left, René felt uneasy, almost sad, this was highly unusual for him. Today was his birthday and it was the first time that nobody remembered it. Any other time it would not have bothered him because he hated this kind of sentimental demonstration. Tonight though, he would have loved to be surrounded and celebrated by his family and friends, so he could feel completely submerged in his old reality after such a long absence. He was still confused and had never felt this way before.

“Did I dream all that? Am I going crazy? Do I have hallucinations which I take for real? No way! It was real! I was somewhere for a month! Where was I? Who are these people who drugged me, who manipulated me like a toy? I hate this! God! I hope I won’t see them again and this nightmare will be forgotten for ever! I miss Barbara. That’s enough now! Let’s get out of here and go have a drink!”

Satisfied with this decision, he put his mail aside and left his office, determined to celebrate his birthday by himself, even though he did not intend to stay alone too long. He knew a very elegant bar, a hangout for men and women of good upbringing among whom he hope to find companionship.

A moment later, he was sitting at the bar of the Carlyle Hotel, in front of a scotch on the rocks, looking around to see who he was going to talk to first. Nothing. Nobody inspiring. He decided to change scenery and was about to leave, when a pretty brunette sat next to him.

“Thank God” he said, laughing, “I was beginning to give up! May I buy you a drink? Today is my birthday and I would love to celebrate it with you. My name is René Eagle.”

The pretty brunette looked amused and smiled.

“I am Virginie Roussel and I wish you a happy birthday. Yes, I accept your offer and I would like a glass of Merlot, thank you...”

She had an adorable French accent and her eyes sparkled with wit.

“You are French!” René said in her language. “It’s wonderful! My mother is French and I have always had a soft spot for your country. Do you live in New York?”

“No, I live in Paris. I was here for a few days and I am going back tomorrow night.”

“What a pity! Anyway, I hope you are free for dinner tonight.”

“Sure, why not?”

They talked while drinking their liquor. René felt better and better. His confidence was quickly coming back and again he could face the future. He learned from Virginie that she was single, that she had her own public relations firm and that she was in New York for business. After an hour and a few scotches, René felt a little weak, and he realized that he had not had a meal since...a month ago!

“Let’s go eat! I’m starving!”

He chose a quaint French restaurant and they both ate with great appetite. They laughed, joked and had a lot of fun. When the dessert came, René became romantic and took her hand. She did not stop him, looking at him with affection, and he knew she was ready. He was going to take her home, not his real home, but the love nest he kept for this kind of brief encounter.

Moments later, they were in bed, completely naked, and they made passionate love. Life was coming back in René. He made love to this woman he hardly knew as if she were the last woman on earth after a cataclysm. Virginie did not know how important she was at that moment. She could not understand why he said crazy things which made no sense. But she did not try to understand, enjoying the fantastic pleasure he was giving her.

Exhausted, resting close to each other, they remained silent for awhile. Then she talked first.

“I don’t know you René, but I feel things. I am a bit psychic, you know? I sense confusion in you, as if you had to make a very important choice, and the one thing you fear the most is the one that attracts you the most. You have a battle ahead of you and you are going to win...do not despair.”

René was astonished with what he heard. He looked at her, puzzled.

“What kind of battle? What else can you tell me?”

He surprised himself with this question. Any other time, he would have told her to mind her own business, but now he could not help being sensitive to anything that might shed some light to what was going on, even if advice had to come through psychic phenomena. After what he went through, nothing was irrational anymore.

Virginie's face was serious and it was obvious that she was concentrating very hard.

"I don't understand" she said, almost with pain, "I just feel that times are going to be very tough for you in the near future, but I sense some kind of protection over you...I know you should not be afraid...that what happens is good for you, even if it does not seem this way to you. That's all I can tell you. It's just a feeling, maybe I'm completely wrong. Forgive me! I should not have told you..."

"No! Don't apologize. You are right, I am confused and perhaps you are the only person in the world I can confide in, because you don't know me and, strangely enough, I don't think you will laugh at me...So, relax and listen to my story."

He related to her everything that had happened to him since he first got the letter from Lucia. While remembering every detail of his adventure, he grew more and more upset and convinced that this had not been a dream.

Virginie listened with intense attention, and when he finished, she put her arms around him.

"Poor you! I understand why you are confused! It's crazy, but I believe you, and I believe these things happened. I think you have to finish something you have started in another life..."

He interrupted her, pushing her away from him.

"Don't tell me that nonsense! I don't believe in other lives! Rather, these people have magical powers and they are using them on me to drive me insane! For what purpose? I don't know, but I'll find out..."

"Look, I can't tell you much, but I have read a book on Hermetism, and they talk about the "Great Work" and

transmuting lead into gold. Maybe you should read it, because your story seems to be very much linked to that.”

René did not answer. He felt he had been wrong to tell his story to this girl who could not give him any clarification, except to tell him to read a book! That’s all he needed now! He was angry with her and he got up and rushed to the bathroom.

“Get dressed! He cried to her. “I’ll take you back to your hotel.”

In the car, they remained silent. The charm had been broken. They were strangers and they both felt uneasy. When the car stopped in front of the hotel, she kissed him on the cheek.

“Bye, René. Thank you for the evening and good luck...”

“Yeah! Bye!” and he drove off.

Back in his apartment, he went directly to bed, determined not to think of anything and to have a good night sleep. Tomorrow would be another day, and Barbara and Lisa would be in New York. Everything would return to normal and what that stupid girl had told him about rough times ahead was pure fantasy. Yet, in a strange way, he felt relieved to have been able to tell his story to a stranger. The burden was easier to carry.

CHAPTER 11

The day at the office went by very quickly. He was going to the airport to get his wife and child, so he left early. While driving to JFK he felt happy at the thought of seeing Barbara and Lisa.

The plane arrived on time, and soon he saw them coming out of the gate. He rushed toward them, took them both in his arms, kissing them and displaying emotions he did not know he was capable of. During the ride back, he asked all sorts of questions, wanting to know everything they had done in California. Lisa was excited and answered him, adding jokes and anecdotes, so he did not notice that Barbara was not very talkative.

The evening was pleasant. They had a nice dinner prepared by the cook especially hired by René for the occasion. He wanted to have his family at home, in an environment he was familiar with and where he felt protected.

After dinner, they went to the den and watched television for a while. Sitting between Barbara and Lisa, holding them tight, René was enjoying this moment like never before. He promised himself that from now on he was going to spend more time with his family. After his unreal adventures, he needed grounding, and home was the best place to find it.

Lisa fell asleep in his arms, exhausted with all the excitement.

“I’ll take her to bed,” René said to his wife. “Why don’t you wait for me in the bedroom?”

Barbara nodded and walked out of the den. René got up, as gently as he could, holding Lisa in his arms, and went to put her in bed. He kissed her on the forehead and, before leaving the room, looked at her for a long while.

In the bedroom, Barbara was waiting for him in her night gown, sitting on the bed, a blank look on her face. René did not notice it. He sat next to her, took her in his arms and kissed her with passion.

“I missed you Barbara! I love you...”

In ten years of marriage he had never said these words. Barbara burst into tears and René misunderstood her emotion.

“Come,” he said, “let’s make love. We have a lot of catching up to do...”

She started sobbing uncontrollably, unable to say a word. Touched with what he thought were tears of love, he held her tight, waiting for her to calm down.

“Okay Baby! I am back! Don’t cry anymore. I know, I haven’t been the best husband, but I am going to change, you’ll see.”

“No! René! Why? Why? Why...now?” She was crying even harder. “René! No! I can’t.....I can’t stop crying.”

He had never seen his wife act like this. He knew she must have been worried about him, and the emotion of seeing him back was probably too intense to control, but he could not understand why she was pushing him away from her while asking “why?”. He concluded that she was still in shock and decided to leave her alone.

Okay, sweetheart. Why don’t you try to sleep now, and we will catch up tomorrow. Okay?”

“Ye.....s” she sobbed.” Tomorrow! I’m sorry... good night...”

As soon as he turned his back, René fell asleep. Barbara was always amazed to see how fast René could switch from talking to sleeping, like a machine turned on and off. She certainly was not able to sleep with all the emotions overwhelming her. The image of Alex was haunting her; his soft voice, his gentle touch. No! she could not play the game! She was unable to lie...and now, René was telling her “I love you”...this was the last thing she would have wanted to hear from him. Never, in ten years, had he said it once! And now, just now, when she wished to hate him so that she could throw in his face that she loved another man. Why now? She could not tell him now! She also realized that she still loved René, despite everything he had done to her. She loved him because he was her husband, the father of her child, because she had been brought up in the belief that a husband is sacred and that you should stick to him, no matter what. And Alex? What about him? What about the way she felt compelled to him? The thought of the ecstasy she had experienced with Alex made her cry even harder. She felt guilty towards René, but she could not help wanting Alex more than anything in the world. What torture! What was she going to tell René? Yes! She had to tell René. Tell René? Hurt him after what he went through? No! She couldn't!

“My God!” she prayed “I'm going crazy! Please tell me what to do, send me a sign! Please!

She cried silently for another hour, praying to God to give her the strength to find the right attitude, then, exhausted, she fell asleep and had a strange dream.

She was walking on a country road which split into two roads, and she did not know which one to take. She was surrounded by yellow fog and frightened. All of a sudden she heard a voice, coming from nowhere, telling her:

“Look, the road on the right is the past, the one on the left is the future...it’s easy...”

She woke up, shaking, and she knew that God had given her the answer, the sign she had asked for. It was clear, it was easy! You do not go back to the past... you can only choose the future! And the future was Alex. She felt relieved, her guilt gone. God had told her the way, God forgave her. Tomorrow she would tell René.

He woke her up with kisses, his hands nervously pushing away the night gown. For a split second she thought it was Alex, but she realized it was her husband, and her dream came to her mind. She suddenly sat on the bed and covered her face with her hands, while he looked at her, surprised.

“What’s happening, sweetheart? You had a bad dream?”

“Yes... a terrible dream” she said hesitantly.

She was still half asleep and her mind was foggy, but she had one thought: she must tell him now! Before he made love to her... She could not bear the idea of having sex with another man. René was a stranger; Alex was her man.

“René, please. Forgive me... I don’t love you anymore... I love another man...”

She had said it. Now she could breathe freely. God had given her permission. God had forgiven her...

René stared at her in shock. He jumped out of bed, grabbed his bathrobe and put it on. He was moving like a robot, mechanically. Then he looked at her again, came near her and started to shake her by the shoulders.

“Are you crazy? What are you talking about? You are my wife! There is no other man! You can’t do that to me! I won’t allow it!”

She started crying and tried to free herself. But he was holding her tight, hurting her.

“René! Please... you’re hurting me! It’s your fault. You never loved me! You always left me alone, and I met a man... he loves me....he....”

“Stop it! I don’t want to hear it! You are mine and will stay mine! No man in the world can change that!”

He was furious and wanted to smash her. She was sobbing and looked pathetic, but he would not let her go and kept shaking her. Suddenly, she managed to escape from his grip, got out of bed and stood right in front of him, with fire in her eyes:

“I am not your property! You do not own me! I love another man and I want to divorce you and marry him! And you won’t be able to stop me, because God gave me permission!.

He could not believe it. He had never seen Barbara so determined, but he was not going to be impressed by that. He always won with her, and he would win this time too.

“Okay” he said calmly. “We’ll talk about that later. I have to go to work now. I’ll see you tonight.”

CHAPTER 12

René opened the garage door to get his car, then changed his mind. He was too upset to drive; he would take a cab instead. Minutes later, comfortably seated in a taxi, he could let his mind wander. He was still under the shock of Barbara's revelation. Never, in the ten years that he had been married to her, had he imagined that she could even look at another man. He had chosen her because her upbringing and level of intelligence were supposed to prevent such a thing. For her, he was the best catch she could dream of, and he made sure to remind her of this at every opportunity. He had "tamed" her since the beginning of their relationship, and he thought he was safe forever. This was why he did not really believe that she was lost for him. She might have a temporary infatuation for another man, but René was the "master"; he would conquer her all over again. This thought made him feel better, as he loved challenges, and this one was definitely up his alley.

Fifteen minutes later he was in his office, his mind completely freed from anything personal or upsetting. He took the file he was working on the day before, and started to work intensely. It was only eight o'clock and he had a whole hour before the telephone would start ringing and the staff would come in and out of his office.

Today was Wednesday and Chuck had decided to talk to René about Dan Martin's offer. As he had expected, René seemed to have completely recovered from his ordeal, and he was back in control of the company. Chuck could

not wait any longer, as Dan Martin had called the night before to urge him to make a decision by Thursday at the latest. So, he had no choice, and he had made up his mind anyway: he was going to accept the new job. He could not pass up this unique opportunity and René would understand it. After all, this was only business and nobody is irreplaceable. He was confident René would find the right person to take his job.

Nevertheless, he had butterflies in his stomach when he called René on the phone to ask him if he were free to see him. It was 8:15 am and the personnel had not arrived yet, but he knew René was there because he had seen the light in his office.

“Of course, Chuck, you can come.”

When he entered René’s office, Chuck felt very uneasy. It was stupid, but he had the weird sensation of being a murderer about to stab his victim. He saw René at his desk, smiling at him, and he had the sudden urge to escape.

“So, Chuck, what’s up?” asked René. “You seem upset, what’s going on?”

René’s sixth sense had captured Chuck’s emotional turmoil and he had the acute feeling that he was going to hear some bad news.

“René, I want.... I hope Barbara and Lisa arrived safely last night...”

“Yah! Yah! You did not come to tell me that, did you?”

“No... uh..... It’s not easy..... uh I was offered a job by Dan Martin...”

“You what? Dan Martin? Our competitor? He offered you a job? What job?”

“To manage the international department.”

René remained silent for a few minutes, his eyes examining the ceiling, his face completely blank. He finally talked.

“What did you decide?”

Chuck was more and more embarrassed.

“I did not give any answer yet, I wanted to talk to you first.”

Chuck spoke with difficulty, hating himself for what he was doing.

“So, now you told me. What have you decided? How much money did they offer you?”

“Twice as much as here...”

“Boy! They really want you, don’t they? That’s an offer you can’t refuse, can you?”

“it’s...difficult to pass...”

“Look Chuck, any other time I would have fought to keep you here. But not today. Today, nothing really matters. So, I wish you good luck in your new job. I know you’ll do very well. Maybe it’s time for you to move on, and for me...”

Chuck felt so relieved that he would have like to hug his friend, but the sadness he saw in his eyes stopped him. He had never seen any emotion in René’s eyes since he had known him, long ago.

“René! Anything I can do for you?”

“No. This time even you can’t help me. But don’t worry! I always come out on top. So, good luck to you. When will you start?”

“I don’t know. I presume soon. In any case, I’ll stay until you find someone to replace me.”

“No, you don’t have to... you can use the money.”

“Thanks René. I... I... don’t know how to...”

“Please, don’t add anything... go!”

Chuck left the office, still not believing how easy it had been. Yet, he was discontent, remorseful and could not help wondering why René had offered no resistance. That was not like René. Something was wrong with him...

As soon as Chuck was out of his office, René took his head in his hands and closed his eyes. He was having a nightmare and soon he was going to wake up, and everything would be normal. When did it start? A month ago, when he met his “double”. The words of the old man came back to his mind: *“The first tests will await you as soon as you leave this house...”*

Then he remembered Virginie Roussel, the psychic woman who told him that tough times were ahead of him. Was this what they meant? That his wife and Chuck were leaving him? Chuck, he did not really care. He knew many people who wanted his job, and he was going to be replaced in no time. But Barbara? No! Barbara was not going to leave him! For her he was ready to fight, and he would win!

A knock at his door brought him back to reality.

“Come in...”

Nancy opened the door and stayed there, holding a sheet of paper in her hand. She looked pale and frightened.

“What’s going on Nancy? Why do you look at me like that?”

He had the feeling of another catastrophe falling on his head. Nancy walked toward his desk and handed him the fax she was holding. He read it and the world seemed to collapse around him. The fax read:

Dear Mr. Eagle,

Something terrible happened yesterday. A bomb exploded in a department store where Kathy was shopping,

and she was badly injured. She died this morning. Before she passed away she gave me your name and fax number and asked me to advise you immediately.

*Saida Hadded
Nurse
Beirut Hospital*

That was it. That was the last blow and he could not endure any more grief. He stared at Nancy who was now crying openly.

“Nancy, send a telegram to Kathy’s family and order flowers. I’m leaving the office for awhile. Cancel my ten o’clock appointment. I’ll be back this afternoon.”

He got up and rushed out of the office, leaving Nancy completely stunned.

He had to get out of there. He had to walk in the streets; he had to have a drink. No! It wasn’t real! Not death! He could not cope with death, he could not fight death! Why? For the first time in his life he was bleeding inside. Three blows on the same day! He did not think he would be able to come out of it alive. He had never suffered before. It was a new and very unpleasant state and he did not know what to do. He saw a bar and went inside, asked for a scotch, determined to get drunk so as to forget this nightmare. After the third drink he felt better, ready to face reality, to rescue what was he could still rescue.

He was about to leave the bar, determined to go home and try to talk some sense into Barbara, when someone suddenly materialized next to him. He immediately recognized the old Arab who walked through the walls. This time also he appeared miraculously.

“Greetings” said the old man, “remember me?”

“How could I forget you? Since I saw you last the sky has fallen on my head. I need explanations from you...”

The old man smiled and put his hand on René’s arm. René felt penetrated with warmth, as if the old man’s hand was hot iron. At the same time, his pain vanished, replaced with calm serenity. Then, the old man spoke:

“What you have lost today is your gain for tomorrow. To enter the Path of the Absolute, you have to be like a new born, naked and innocent. Your destiny is far beyond what you thought it would be. You are much more than you think you are, and much less too. Much more, because you possess the potential to be the Universal Man, the Philosopher’s Stone which is Absolute itself. You are also much less than you think you are, because in your impure state, you are nothing. Now you have to transmute dross into gold...”

René was listening, hypnotized. Yet, he was able to understand every word of the Master, not with his mind, but with his soul. He wanted to say something, but the Master disappeared as he had come.

René looked around and saw the bartender who was staring at him.

“Tell me, Bartender, did you see a man next to me just now?”

The bartender seemed even more puzzled.

“A man? No! I did not see anybody, but I saw you speak to a shadow. Are you okay?”

“Yes, I am okay.” René paid his check and left, followed by the stare of the bartender.

“I think I’m going crazy.” René was walking in the street, reminiscing what the Master had told him, but also what the bartender had seen. “I have hallucinations...what

is reality? What is illusion? Yes, I think I'm going crazy! I have to see a psychiatrist."

He decided to go home and talk to Barbara. Suddenly, he stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. He had a vision, as clear as if he were there: he saw Barbara come out of the townhouse, holding Lisa's hand on one side and a big suitcase on the other hand. He saw them get into a cab and heard Barbara's voice saying "Kennedy Airport, please." The taxi drove off and the vision disappeared.

In a trance, he hailed a cab and gave his address. Once in front of the house, he nervously opened the door, calling Barbara's name. Nobody answered. His eye caught an enveloped on the table. He opened it and it said:

René:

Forgive me. I could not face you again. I am going back to California. What I told you this morning is true. I love another man and I can't help it. I'll call you when I get home."

Forgive me.

Barbara

René was crushed. At the same time, a feeling of fatality invaded him. All his energy had left him and he wanted to sleep, sleep until the end of time.

CHAPTER 13

Where am I? Why is everything red?" René was floating in air, surrounded by some sort of red cloud. He tried to touch the ground, but found none.

Strange shapes kept moving in the background. He did not have the sensation of his body, yet he could see his hands, his feet. He was trying to make some sense of what he saw when a shadow appeared far away, slowly moving toward him. The shape was vaguely human, even though it did not seem to have more consistence than the cloud, constantly changing with each movement. When it finally reached him, it stopped and René almost screamed: the face was the only steady feature of this vanishing form, and this face was René's face, looking at him right in the eyes.

"What is this? Who are you? Where am I?" René's voice was filled with apprehension. The thought crossed his mind that he might be dead and that this was....

"No, you're not dead..."

The sound of his own voice filled his ears, coming from the shadow that had his face.

"I am you," continued the shadow. "You are my continuation. I am your past, you are my future. *Our* future is in your hands. I know, nothing in your present life had prepared you for what must happen. It's my fault. I let Maya take control of me at the time of the switch. Because of this mistake, we might not be able to reach the goal: the barrier of your ego is too strong. Please. Break it! Kill it! Do not waste another lifetime. You have to accomplish the "Great Work" now!"

The shadow disappeared and so did the red cloud. René was back in his apartment, still shaking. The experience was like a vivid dream, almost real, but still a dream. Yet, René was not sleeping when it occurred: he was reading Barbara's letter. In fact, he was still standing next to the table, holding the letter in his hand.

“What's wrong with me? I'm going crazy!”

He was more and more convinced that he was losing his mind. His reason could not accept his visions as having any kind of reality. So, if it was illusion, then he was very sick and needed help.

He walked toward the telephone, determined to call a psychiatrist and make an appointment for this afternoon. This was an emergency case. He reached for the receiver when the phone rang.

“Who is this?” he asked, irritated by the interruption.

“Mr. Eagle, It's Nancy. I wanted to remind you that you have an important appointment with Mr. Foulcham at three o'clock in your office. I wanted to make sure that you remembered.

“Yeah! I remember. I was on my way.”

He hung up angrily. He had completely forgotten. But reality was pulling him again, and he saw an opportunity to test himself, to find out if he could still function in a normal situation. He would call the psychiatrist later.

He arrived at his office just in time for his appointment. Mr. Foulcham was already there, waiting for him.

Ed Foulcham was a rich investor who had been doing business with the company for over twenty years. He had requested an appointment to discuss important losses

his investments had suffered recently. He was threatening to take his business elsewhere unless something was done to correct the mistakes which had been made. René's job was to reassure this important account.

“Good afternoon Mr. Foulcham. Please come in.”

René was trying to be as pleasant as he could, which required a real effort on his part.

“Do you care for a cup of coffee?”

“No, thanks”, Mr. Foulcham replied impatiently. “Let's come to the point. Have you had a chance to study my account?”

René had studied the account and losses were the result of the ongoing recession this country was experiencing. Foulcham was very conservative and believed only in real estate investments. Unfortunately, this was the field that most suffered from the failing economy. René was going to try to convince Mr. Foulcham to take a new path.

“Mr. Foulcham.....” started René.

He suddenly stopped, bewildered by a vision he was having. He “saw” Foulcham lying on a hospital bed, dead.

“Mr. Foulcham” René said, almost shouting, “Mr. Foulcham! Forget about business for a while and take care of unfinished business in your personal life! Your health...”

“Mr. Eagle!” interrupted Foulcham, furious, “are you out of your mind? I won't allow you to pursue any further...”

“Please!” implored René, “listen to me! I can save you... you're very ill! You must go to your doctor right away...”

“Stop it!” Foulcham’s face had turned red. He got up and suddenly put his hands on his chest while gasping for air, and then he collapsed, stricken by a heart attack.

The rest was like a nightmare. When the paramedics came to take Foulcham to the hospital, René knew what the outcome would be. He felt powerless, because he could not save this man, and guilty, even though he was not responsible for what had happened. In fact, Foulcham’s only chance to save his own life would have been to listen to René with calm and faith. Instead, his violent reaction precipitated the crisis.

René was devastated. What was the purpose of these “visions” if they could not help prevent anything? Sitting at his desk, holding his head in his hands, he did not hear his co-workers come into his office.

“Mr. Eagle”, asked Nancy, “what happened exactly?”

“I don’t know” René replied in a very low voice. “I had a vision of him dead in a hospital. I tried to warn him, but he got mad and collapsed.”

“Are you alright, Mr. Eagle” asked Nancy, looking worried.

Everybody was staring at him in amazement. They looked at each other and it was obvious they all thought their boss was going crazy. René realized he was the object of curiosity and suddenly he got angry.

“What are you doing here? Go back to work!”

Frightened, they all left the office. René got up from his chair and started to walk back and forth, trying to understand what was happening to him. He could not take it any longer. What was illusion? What was reality? Why these visions? And why did he tell his staff about them? He was unable to control himself and he realized that he was

jeopardizing his reputation, destroying everything he had worked for all his life. He was scared.

The telephone stopped the course of his thoughts. Like a zombie, he took the receiver and he “saw” Barbara on the other end. She was sitting on a couch, next to a man in his forties who was holding her hand.

“René, is it you?”

“Yes Barbara. I’m here. He was so shattered that he could hardly talk. He could see her as if she were in the same room. He saw her expression, the man’s face, the lamp on the table, next to the telephone.

“René,” she said in a shaky voice, “I am.... I’m sorry...I left you like I did...I don’t know what...”

“Don’t say anything, Barbara. I understand. You love this man sitting next to you, and he loves you like I never did...”

“What are you talking about” What man...” she was astonished.

“I can see you, Barbara...you are wearing your blue Valentino dress and you are holding Alex’s hand. His name is Alex, isn’t it?”

“I can’t believe it! How can you guess?”

“I don’t guess, Barbara, I see...Don’t ask me how! I don’t understand it myself. I just want to wish you happiness with Alex. I am out of your life. Give my love to Lisa. I’ll come to see her soon.”

He hung up, feeling completely exhausted, and wanting to cry.

CHAPTER 14

When he awoke the following morning, he could not remember how he had gotten home from the office or what he did before falling asleep. The last thing he remembered was the phone call with Barbara. Then, it was a blank, as if he had been drugged like on that fated day that he had gone to see Lucia. The thought of Lucia made him suspicious as to how long he had been sleeping. He picked up the phone and called the office.

“Hi Nancy. Anything new?”

“Mr. Eagle! Where have you been? I’ve been trying to find you for three days! I’m glad you called, because the Board meeting is for this morning at 11:00 and you have to attend it.”

“Thank you Nancy, I’ll be there.”

After he hung up, René got up and started to look around all over the house to find a trace of Lucia. He was sure she was hiding somewhere. But he found nothing and nobody. He was unable to recall anything and this made him feel frustrated and angry. He was sure that this “time out” was another trick of Lucia and her “master”. Or was it? Could it be, instead, that he had gone completely mad and that everything that had happened to him since this past October was pure fantasy? Suddenly he saw the clock on the wall and realized he was going to be late for the meeting. He was ready in no time and rushed to the office.

When he arrived in the conference room, they were all there, the ten of them, waiting for him.

“Good morning!” René said in a joyful voice.
“Sorry I’m late! I overslept!”

Silence and glances...

“Let’s get started. Bennett, what’s on the agenda?”

Bennett, who was sitting next to René, seemed embarrassed.

“Uh...first we would like to ask you about the circumstances before Mr. Foulcham’s death. He died shortly after his arrival at the hospital. These are some rumors around the office that you might have upset him to the point of provoking his heart attack. This rumor has also reached Foulcham’s partners, and they expect an explanation.”

René looked at each one of them. There were seven men and three women. They all had stern expressions on their faces, and this angered him.

“I did not provoke his heart attack, if this is what everybody thinks. He was going to have it right there, and I saw it before it happened. I had a “vision”! you know what it is? It’s not so unusual! Don’t you have visions sometimes?”

Alan Reed, who was René’s worst detractor, got up from his seat and screamed:

“Visions, hey? That’s what the rumor says...that you are somewhat irrational lately. We understand you have had rough times, but we don’t expect our chairman to flip like a child!”

A wave of rage invaded René and he immediately knew that he was going to regret what he was about to say, but he was unable to control himself, as if a demon had taken possession of his body and had an irresistible urge to destroy. He looked around and his head filled up with

images of these people's lives, their pasts, their presents and their futures.

"Reed", René said, staring at his enemy. "All your manipulating won't help you, because the power you sniff through your nose is destroying your brains! Soon you will find out the extent of the damage. Sorry, but you are the victim of a cosmic cleansing aimed at this polluted society. No! Don't interrupt me! I have a message for each one of you! Do you want to hear?"

A collective scream came out of the ten attendants.

"No! Shut up! You are insane!!"

Their faces were green with fear and they all got up to rush out of the conference room.

"Don't move!" René shouted. "I have a message that applies to all of you. Hear me out! You are all ambitious money makers, and greed is your credo. However, my "vision" of your future is dreary, because all that you believe in will be destroyed, and you people will be an endangered species. In a few years, what is left of you will be in a zoo, for people to study as remnants of a dead civilization. So, my advice to you is "re-cycle"! While you still can! As for me, I'm out of here! I don't belong to this world anymore! So long..."

He jumped out of his chair and rushed out of the conference room, leaving the others astonished and speechless.

Nancy saw him run through her office, heading for the elevators. He looked scary and she closed the door behind him, because she did not have the heart to witness this awful transformation.

Once in the street, René walked blindly; he was in a daze and his head was about to explode. He had just destroyed the last thing that kept him attached to this life.

There was nothing left to destroy, except himself, before he became dangerous to innocent bystanders. While heading toward his home, he was organizing his suicide in his mind. He remembered that he had a gun in his bedroom. He had never used it, but today he would. It was going to be quick and painless, and his nightmare would be over.

Once in his apartment, he went directly to his bedroom and walked to the bureau where the gun was hidden. Nervously, he opened the drawer and saw it. For a few long minutes he looked at the black instrument of death. There it was, the answer to his desperation. René had made his decision; he had no other alternative. He was going to reach for the gun, when a framed picture on the bureau caught his eyes. It was a portrait of his now broken family: Barbara with her gentle smile, Lisa with her innocent beauty, and himself, triumphant and fulfilled.

Memories invaded his mind. He remembered his wedding day, Barbara's eyes sparkling with joy when he unveiled her face to kiss her at the closing of the wedding ceremony. He remembered their honeymoon in Paris, and his heart filled with pain at the thought of the first disappointment he caused her. He remembered the birth of Lisa and the pride he had felt when he held her in his arms for the first time. He remembered all that he had then, now gone forever. An overwhelming sadness submerged him and he was about to cry. He resisted the urge to let himself go and suddenly his sadness turned into anger; anger at himself for having destroyed all that counted in his life. How could one be so stupid? No! He did not deserve to live. His hand plunged into the drawer and seized the gun. He held it against his temple and was about to pull the trigger.

“Stop it!” urged a strong voice, just behind René.

He turned around and saw the “Master”, standing in front of him, a stern look on his face.

“Suicide is real death”, he said, “because it leads to stagnation. Your solution is to kill your ego, not your body.”

René was not even surprised to see the “Master”. Nothing surprised him anymore. He was living in irrationality and had no more strength to fight it. He accepted the presence of the “Master” as one of his “visions”: it had no reality.

“Ego! Ego! I’ve heard that before! How do you kill your ego without killing yourself?”

“Stop resisting, René. You think you are insane because you refuse to accept anything beyond what you call “reality”. Your lack of humility is what’s killing you. You thought you knew it all, René Eagle! You thought you could control anything and anybody! You were a king in your little world which you knew inside-out. But you’re nothing, René Eagle! Just an appearance in a world of illusion! Because your “reality” is just another illusion! Relax, René Eagle! You are much more than what you think you are, but infinitely much less than what your limited mind has led you to believe. You had a few glimpses of another reality, but you have rejected it as being “irrational”. It’s time to give in, René Eagle, and to fulfill your true destiny.”

René was listening, mesmerized. Suddenly he understood. It was as if a thick fog was lifted from his brains. Acceptance was the key. As long as he refused this “other reality”, his nightmare would continue and he would never be able to control his life. He realized that there was an alternative, and that Lucia and the Master had been trying, all along, to show him the way. He had fought them,

holding them responsible for his misfortune. But were they responsible? Barbara had left him because he had been a terrible husband. Chuck had left him because he had taken advantage of him for years. Kathy died because her time had come. Lucia made him experience another level of consciousness and told him that he was ready for it. The Master had warned him of the ordeals that were about to happen. But René's ego was too stubborn to listen. It wanted to cling only to things he knew, rejecting anything it could not explain.

Now, for the first time, René wanted to know more about the mysterious experiences he had lived. He wanted to know what was going to happen next. He wanted to know who he really was.

“Well, “Master”, he said, “I think I know what you want from me. René Eagle is dead. What is my real name?”

“René is your name; it means “reborn”, and very soon you will be the eagle whose eyes can stare at the sun.”

CHAPTER 15

They were flying like birds. The Master was holding René's hand while they flew over strange worlds, in all shapes and colors, each different from one another. René was staring, dazzled by the beauty revealed to him. After what seemed to be a very long time and an incredible distance, they stopped above a black ocean, immense and frightening. The light was dim and grey and the air was chilly. René and the Master were hanging in the void, weightless. The Master spoke:

“We are here at the beginning of Manifestation. All the worlds that you saw are contained in this ocean.”

All of a sudden, a gigantic cross appeared over the ocean. The cross was made of bright yellow light. The longer vertical axis resembled a ladder, with clearly defined steps, while the horizontal axis was a straight line.

René was in awe, waiting for the Master to explain to him what this cross meant.

“What you see is a representation of the different planes of existence that each being has to experience. These planes are symbolized by the steps on the vertical axis of the cross. The horizontal axis represents the individual possibilities contained in any given plane of existence. The time has come for you to climb the ladder of existence and relive all of your past lives up to the present, because you cannot project yourself into the future if you do not, first, take possession of your past.”

René was back in his present reality, his memory filled with the marvels he had just seen. He looked for the Master, but he had disappeared, as usual, once his task was achieved. René felt exhilarated. He was just beginning to grasp the magnitude of “true” Reality, and even though the Master had not revealed to him the final goal of the journey, René knew that his former “selves” had done all the work and that he was the last link to a long chain. This new awareness filled him with enthusiasm and he wanted to share his joy with someone who could understand. The image of his sister Paula came to his mind. Yes, by all means, she was the one he was going to share his joy with. He was going to call her on the phone, when the door bell rang.

“Who could it be” he thought, slightly irritated.

He opened the door and he saw Paula, standing there, a big smile on her face.

“Paula! I can’t believe it! I was just going to call you!”

They fell in each other’s arms.

“My darling brother! I was so worried about you! I tried to call you several times here and at your office, but could never find you! Where have you been? I finally called Barbara in California and she told me about the two of you. So I jumped on the first flight to New York, and here I am! Am I glad to see you! Let me look at you.”

She stepped back and observed him from head to toe.

“God! You look tired and messy! I don’t recognize you! What’s going on?”

René realized he could read her mind, and he saw how worried she was. But he also understood that he could not say anything to her about his experiences, because she

would not understand and would think he was insane. So, he reassured her:

“I’m messy because I was taking a nap. Come in! let’s have a drink.”

He took her small suitcase and brought it inside. She had come directly from the airport and intended to stay with him for a few days.

He prepared two drinks and sat in front of her.

“So, tell me”, she said, “what happened with Barbara?”

“There is not much to say. You know, I never really cared for her. So, she met a nice man who loves her and she fell for it. I don’t blame her. It’s really my fault. It’s no big deal. Life goes on and I wish her well.”

René could see Paula’s relief. She smiled and went to sit next to him. She took him in her arms and kissed his lips with passion. He panicked and his reaction was to push her away with disgust. The last thing he wanted was sex. As gently as he could, he pulled himself away from her and said:

“No, Paula! Not now! I’m not in the mood. Maybe later. Let’s talk a little and enjoy our drink, then we’ll see.”

“That’s not like you, darling! You’re always ready!”

Ignoring his protest, she pressed her body against his, caressing his face. He could read her burning desire and he felt guilty. After all, she was his true lover since childhood, and he owed it to her to have experienced his most magical moments. So, he was going to make an effort and please her.

He put his arms around her and kissed her on the lips. She moaned with pleasure and offered herself, while her hand reached for his crotch. This contact made him

jump to his feet. He was distressed, unable to control his repugnance.

“I can’t do it! I can’t! forgive me.”

Anger flared in Paula’s eyes.

“Are you in love? You must be in love! Tell me! Who is she?”

“No, Paula, I’m not in love. I’m going though hard times right now. Everything in my life is falling apart, and really, I’m not in the mood for sex.”

“I’m sorry! I was being selfish! Your secretary told me about your professional problems. I hope you will find a solution so that we can go back to our favorite games...”

“No, Paula, I don’t think so. Things have changed and we must put an end to this...”

“No way! Don’t tell me that! It’s impossible! We have a pact, you don’t remember? I won’t allow you to forget it!”

She was furious, her face filled with tears. René felt sorry for her, but he knew he had to end the game they had played for twenty six years.

“Paula, before anything else, you are my sister and my friend, and that’s all I need now.”

She was sobbing and came next to him, putting her head on his shoulder.

“You are right, René. You are my brother and I love you as such. Maybe things will go back to normal, soon. Call me to let me know how you are doing. I have to go now. I’ll talk to you soon.”

She took her suitcase and walked to the door, still crying and hurting. René did not stop her, even though he knew that she had not planned to go anywhere else. She would take the next plane to London and he would probably never see her again. The only relationship she

wanted to have with him was sexual and she was convinced that he would go back to her. When he closed the door behind her, René turned this page of his life forever. That too, had to go.

He went back to the living room and sat on the couch to finish his drink. He evoked Lucia and the divine experience he knew every time she touched him. This was the kind of “union” he was ready for, and Lucia was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. He concentrated on her image, hoping that she would materialize in front of him. Instead, he jumped into another dimension.

CHAPTER 16

At first, René was very confused, as he was unable to make any sense of the situation he was in, then he realized that he was inside an alien body, heavy and uncomfortable. It was pitch dark and he felt claustrophobic. He was beginning to panic, when the words of the Master came to his mind: “The time has come for you to climb the ladder of existence and relive all of your past lives up to the present...” and he understood that the journey had just started.

The creature he was inhabiting was his original form, at the beginning of his Manifestation. It was a very basic and animal-like being, yet it was no animal because it already had a sense of individuality and a volitive purpose. Then René identified with it: he became the creature and experienced all of its life, up to its death.

This was the first step of an exhilarating voyage that made René leap from one of his previous lives to the next, each time actually becoming the individual he had been in the past. So many of them, all different in shape and form, none of them human as he knew it. So many worlds, all strange and inconceivable, each step of the ladder of existence being a new experience, in a new form, in a new dimension. He was never twice in the same world, so vast was the Universal Possibility. Yet, despite the differences and the diversity of living conditions, Knowledge was constant from one life to another, and the purpose of each existence was the return to Unity. Along with Lucia, his

mate through a multitude of lifetimes, René had worked toward this ultimate goal.

When he returned to the present, René was no longer the man he had been before. He looked at himself in the mirror and was surprised to see his familiar body. Nothing had changed in appearance, yet everything was transformed. He was now “complete”, no longer a fragment of a being lost in space and time. He had a beginning and a continuation. It was as if the angle of his vision had gone from 180 degrees to 360 degrees. Knowledge had a new meaning for him: Knowledge was “being”. Knowledge was “bliss”.

CHAPTER 17

René was walking in the streets of New York, feeling wonderful and wishing to share it with the rest of the world. It was evening and the city sparkled like a jewel with its multicolored Christmas lights. He smiled at people and stopped in front of store windows to admire their festive decorations. That made him think of Lisa, whom he had not seen much since she was born, and he suddenly had the urge to see her, right now. He felt a shock going through his body and, at the same time, New York disappeared and he found himself in a room. For a split second he was lost, then he recognized Lisa's bedroom in the California house. The child was in bed and René heard her voice.

“Daddy! Daddy! Where are you? I want to see you...”

His heart jumped. He walked to the bed and she saw him.

“Oh Daddy! You are Here! I did not hear you come. I am so happy to see you. Look, I have a fever. I am sick and my throat is killing me!”

While she was talking, she took René's hand and put it on her forehead. It was burning.

“You're going to be okay, sweetheart!” René kept his hand for a few minutes on Lisa's forehead. He could feel the heat diminishing until the fever was completely gone.

“Dad! What did you do? I have no more pain in my throat and I feel great! I’m not sick anymore!! Daddy! Daddy! You’re terrific.”

She got out of bed and started to jump around, laughing and screaming so loud that Barbara, alerted, appeared at the door, looking worried. René had heard her before she opened the door and hid behind the thick curtain.

“What’s going on here? Why are you up? Go back to bed! You’re sick!”

“No! No! I’m not sick anymore! Daddy cured me!”

“You’re hallucinating! Lisa! Go back to bed!”

She tried to grab Lisa who escaped and started to run around the room, still laughing and chanting:

“Daddy’s here! Daddy’s here!”

The look on Barbara’s face became even more worried. She was about to call Alex to the rescue, when René came out of hiding. She saw him and stepped back, putting her hands over her chest, as if she was having a heart attack.

“Re...né.... What.... How did you... My God! I’m hallucinating too!”

“No Barbara. You’re not hallucinating. I am here alright, and it is true, I healed Lisa. Don’t be afraid, I’ll explain to you how this is possible.”

René knew, right at that moment, that he was going to share his “secret” with them. He knew how to make them accept everything he wanted, because he had the power to control their minds. He also wanted Alex to be present when he would divulge his secret, since Alex was now part of his family.

“Barbara”, he said, “why don’t you ask Alex to come here?”

“Okay, okay...” She seemed hypnotized. She opened the door and called Alex.

When he entered the room, Alex saw René and astonishment appeared in his eyes.

“What...who are you? How did you get here?”

René walked toward Alex and extended his hand.

“My name is René Eagle. I am glad to meet you in person.”

Alex shook René’s hand absentmindedly, an expression of incredulity on his face. As soon as his hand touched René’s hand, he felt relaxed and at ease, as if René’s presence was normal.

“I’m glad to meet you too. I’ve heard a lot about you” said Alex in a casual voice.

“And I know all about you” said René, looking at Alex directly in the eyes. “I know your past, your present and your future, because I can see with my third eye, right here, in the middle of my forehead.”

While talking, René touched his forehead and an eye appeared, right between his normal two eyes.

“How did you do that?” asked Alex, mesmerized. The three of them circled around René, observing him as if he were an alien from another planet. Lisa stopped jumping, aware of something strange going on.

“It is a long story” René continued. “It started before I was born. I cannot give you any details, but you must know that I have been going through a major transformation. Among the results of this transformation, is my ability to travel in space, to read people’s minds and to communicate through telepathy. I can also see the past and the future, because I have transcended the barrier of time. I know, it is hard for you to believe, so I am going to make it

very simple for you to understand. Come closer to me and extend your hands.”

They obeyed, fascinated. René gathered their hands in his hands and his energy penetrated them, his mind merged with their minds.

When he released his grip, an expression of bliss lingered on their faces. They had experienced Total Knowledge, in the same manner as René had experienced it when Lucia kissed him for the first time. The only difference in the present case was that Barbara, Alex and Lisa would never question the reality of their journey and its effect would remain with them forever.

“The three of you are going to live a very happy life. I will come to visit you as often as possible to tell you more about the mysteries of the Universe. I have to go now. So long!”

The echo of René’s voice was still in the room. Alex, Barbara and Lisa looked at each other then at the spot where René had disappeared. They were speechless because no words could describe what they felt. Alex extended his arms and embraced Barbara and Lisa, and the three of them stayed in this embrace for a very long time.

CHAPTER 18

René materialized in his living room. He sat on his favorite couch and savored the moment. He had the power! He could do almost anything he wanted. It was such an exciting feeling that he had the urge to try, just a little bit, for the fun of it. Could he become invisible? He went in front of the mirror and looked at his image. Then he concentrated and looked again. The image had disappeared and when he stretched his arms, he could not see them. Yet, he could feel his body. He wondered whether he could leap somewhere and still remain invisible. He thought of a bar where he used to go sometimes, after work, and suddenly, he was there, still invisible. The bar was filled with people, and very noisy. He looked around and chose to stand at the bar, next to two men who were having an animated conversation.

“Believe me”, asserted the older looking man. “This is what’s going to happen in this country. Permissiveness has gone too far! It’s destroying us!”

“You’re crazy” said the other one. “What you call permissiveness, I call freedom and this is what makes this country so great!”

René could not resist. He had to intervene, so he did.

“Yeah!” he said, “permissiveness is indeed destroying the world, and freedom is not what you think! Look at me! I am free!!”

The two men looked around, puzzled. There was no man near them, only women.

“You said something?” asked the younger man to the woman on his right.

“No, I don’t talk to strangers!”

“So, who talked?” said the other man?

“It’s me!” said René jokingly, “but you can’t see me because I am invisible! The invisible man! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

René was laughing, amused by the two men’s expressions. He switched their glasses and said:

“So long Amigos! Have a Merry Christmas!”

And he leaped back to his apartment, still laughing. He made himself visible again and went to the bar to fix himself a drink. He felt terrific and wanted to experiment with his newly acquired powers. What else could he try? The choice was endless, as he realized he could do almost anything, change the world if he wanted to. But the world was not to be changed, because each being on this planet had to fulfill its own destiny, according to the “Master Plan”. René was no longer bound to this plan. Thanks to his former “selves”, he had escaped the curse of the wheel of existences. The powers he had acquired were only a consequence of this transformation, not the goal. The goal was the “Great Work”, and Lucia was the key. It was time to meet her again.

He concentrated on her and suddenly she was there, in front of him, his perfect double with long hair.

“Here you are! Finally! I was waiting for you!”

She looked beautiful, dressed in a long white chiffon dress, her blond hair covering her shoulders. René wanted to touch her to see if she was real.

“No! Not now!” she said, stepping back.

“I know, “Master”! Excuse me! I still have my old reflexes... Where is your djellabah?”

She smiled. "It is not necessary anymore... I have guided you and now you have become strong... We will soon be one. Come with me."

Instantaneously they materialized on an island in the middle of which stood a White Mountain shining in the moonlight.

Without a word, they walked toward the mountain. When they reached it, a stone moved back from its side and an opening appeared. A path was clearly defined, which they followed. It led to an immense circular cavern that had no ceiling, as if the mountain were hollow. In the center of the cave stood a large podium made of white marble. René and Lucia climbed the seven steps which acceded to it, and they stopped. At the far edge of the podium, twelve men were standing, wearing long white robes. Each one was holding a wand surmounted by a golden globe on which was carved a sign of the zodiac. Suddenly, a flash of light came from above, and a white throne came slowly down and stopped in the middle of the podium, facing René and Lucia. The man sitting on the throne was of great beauty, dressed in a long red robe studded with diamonds. On his right hand he held a wand surmounted by a golden Sun, and on the left hand, a wand surmounted by a silver Moon crescent.

The King stood up, extended his arms to form a cross, and then slowly brought them in front of him until the Sun and the Moon touched each other. The contact provoked a bright light and the Moon disappeared into the Sun.

Simultaneously, René and Lucia faced each other, stepped forward until their bodies came in contact. A thunder shook the cave, while René and Lucia became one. The Body started to glow until it became pure light,

shooting up to the top of the cavern which opened to the sky.

Like a comet, the Body of Light disappeared among the stars.

THE END

About the Story



Androgyne

During the “Golden Age” of our humanity, inner transmutation was an experience which everyone lived spontaneously and intimately. Humans were born “androgyne”, male and female principles unified in one body. They were “perfect” and immortal. The succession of the cycles resulted in a gradual deterioration of spiritual values, and human beings became “separated”. Instead of being one, both male and female, they became two distinct mortal creatures. Since this mythical time, men and women have been longing for their totality. It is this feeling of being incomplete, that draws men and women toward one another, to accomplish the “fusion” of the two in one, through the sexual act. In the Hermetic Tradition, the alchemical marriage was not presented as a vague fusion, but as a meeting face to face slowly transformed by the "Art" into a union of complementaries. Special spiritual practices were used to achieve this union and the goal was the restoration of the primordial perfection. The human being who has realized all the aspects of his individuality has transcended his human condition and he becomes “supra-human”, no longer subjected to any human limitations. He is able to be in different places at the same time, to communicate telepathically with anyone of his choice, or to accomplish what we would call “miracles”, because he can act at all levels of the human state. A human being who has reached this state is called the “Universal Man” in the Muslim tradition, the “Perfect Man” in the Taoist tradition and the “Androgyne” in the Hermetic tradition. He has reintegrated the Primordial Perfection, the paradisiacal state of Adam before the creation of Eve, when he was man and woman in one, a perfect image of His creator. He is the Primordial Man of the Golden Age.

About the Author

Lydia Bisanti's interest in metaphysics started in the seventies when she discovered the writings of Rene Guenon, a French metaphysician who presented oriental doctrines in a form that westerners could understand. She immersed herself in these studies and chose to put them into practice by becoming an astrologer. Astrology is a sacred science, fully metaphysical in nature.

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★★★★☆ **A good spiritual story**, January 23, 2006

Reviewer: [S V SWAMY "swamy-reviews"](#) (Hyderabad, India) -

Transmutation is about transformation of the individual man to a Universal Man. The hero of the novel, Rene Eagle goes through a series of personal catastrophes (as seen through normal eyes) which push him over the precipice and help his ego to refine/ dissolve/ sublime.

Transmutation is used in alchemy and in nuclear science. It means changing one element (a base metal like lead or iron) into another noble element (like gold). The Philosopher's Stone is a 'mythical' object which is supposed to help the alchemist to transmute a base metal like iron and lead to gold.

Philosophically, it is the transmutation of an egoistic soul (which because of its limited vision is naturally selfish) into an Universal Soul (a soul which becomes the whole universe and thus has no scope for being selfish). The purpose of each soul is to transmute itself into the Universal Soul. To achieve that, the ego has to achieve a sacred union with that missing complement soul, to which it is compellingly drawn. Till then, shadows of such soul (egos that have some semblance to that real mate) will attract the individual, resulting in infatuations, addictions etc. The objective of various prayers, meditations and other

rituals is to prepare the individual ego for this sacred union, which is the real fulfilling union. Eternal Love is the natural result of such a union. Till then, the ego goes through several planes of existence.

The author succeeds in bringing out these concepts well, which are not really new to eastern minds. The story is well told and grips the reader throughout. Rene becomes Siva, the three-eyed God (the third eye representing true knowledge and wisdom), though the author doesn't use that specific name.

The book could have been edited better, but fortunately the communication comes through. I strongly recommend this slim volume if you have any leanings towards spiritual matters. Even without the spirit, the novel is a good read.