

AYLCEE TARHA

THE ELEVATOR

Story Two

of

'Lost Stories'



Éditions Aylcée-Tarha@Aylcée-Tarha-Éditions

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dualities, a romantic novel
- Clara, a Witch's Love, a fantasy tale
- Clara and the Stone Circle, a fantasy tale
- Advent Farandole, a calendar
- The Watchtower, a fantasy novel
- The Elemental Peoples, a collection of tales
- Lost Stories, a text collection
- Epidamus, a fantasy novel

DEDICATION

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This text can be downloaded FREE of charge directly from my website by adults, parents, family members, friends, etc., who remain solely responsible for opening the minds of their children (specifically, those between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, in their teens).

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A story that could happen to any of us, with varying degrees of nuance, in the face of this news about a plausible, highly fictionalized news story.

Clotilde was tired of everything: her life, her environment, her job, her car, her public transportation, her loves, her parties, her friends, her family, her leisure activities, sports, fitness, her trips abroad, her relationships, her clients, her health in short, everything! She knew she was harboring a real urban depression, a major breakdown, an adulterous crisis!

Everything was playing on repeat in her head! A hellish whirlwind!

The day had started very badly: morning of a change of alarm, barely eaten breakfast, a cold shower due to a water outage due to construction in her building, her car at the garage, waiting at the bus shelter for a packed bus, and then rushing into the office! As a result, the day had become unbearable, with clients acting on edge, nervous, and insulting! Here she was witnessing endless frustration.

Even the jokes of her colleagues no longer cheered her up.

Barely a few minutes to quickly eat a chicken, salad, and mustard sandwich with applesauce and drink a coffee! The afternoon passed between bathroom breaks and complex files to process, interspersed with phone calls! Not a single moment of respite! No time to look out the window either! Yet another work meeting with her boss finished her off!

She was tired, exhausted, drained, rinsed, dried out...

And then came the final straw: when she got home that evening, the rain started. It was already pouring! Nothing mattered anymore: everything was crumbling around her and inside her. The worst part was that she had managed to escape from a lot of hardship, troubles, and unemployment. Her health had shaken her for a while, but there too she had managed to recover. All her bitterness was inexorably catching up with her.

So many positive forces were slowly unraveling!

She felt herself suddenly losing her footing: the beginnings of a romantic relationship with Patrick, the man she'd met by

chance, had hurt her, torn her apart when he confessed to her one evening as a farewell after giving in to the couch, that he was married and had been having fun with her. She'd trusted him! He'd left before she could say what she really thought. That complete coward had lied to her, disguising the truth to his own advantage.

What a bitter failure for her, her heart, her body, her soul!

She was walking back to her apartment, alone and exhausted, dragging the world's misery behind her, glued to her heels. She'd stopped in a clothing and accessories store with the firm intention of buying an umbrella, but she'd left immediately, her mind completely sterile. And here she was again, walking along the asphalt, with no real goal other than to get back home as quickly as possible.

This day had been very trying for his nerves!

The customers approaching the reception desk of the multinational company where she had worked for many years had been particularly cantankerous, very mocking, and uncontrollable, while the department heads remained unmoved, without assisting her. She had been forced to act as a buffer between everyone, and she emerged broken, battered, and distraught. She wouldn't last long at this pace.

She sensed danger, a peril to overcome!

Clotilde couldn't explain it; that was just how it was. Usually, her intuition didn't deceive her. She quickened her pace, almost mechanically. The light rain soaked through her light, unsuitable clothing for the stormy weather. She was on a dimly lit street, a stone's throw from her home, when she distinctly heard hurried footsteps behind her. She instinctively leaned against the wall.

Mechanically, she turns around, surprised that he doesn't overtake her, but she sees a male shadow. Becoming frightened, she walks and runs, accelerating their pace: out of breath, they take off without having agreed. A long shudder shakes her and, somehow, she finally finds herself

in front of his residence without knowing how. She forces her way into the entrance, feeling a little reassured.

This nameless, formless shadow, yet larger than her, had just stopped moving, and she felt a moment of genuine panic. Huddled behind a marble column, she felt her heart pound. 'He's stopped, he's hesitating, looking up and... coming?! No, it can't be, he can't do that...' She stopped breathing heavily, trying to regulate herself more and more slowly.

The shadow hesitated, procrastinated, left, then retraced its steps.

He didn't know whether to enter or head off toward another building porch. Then, with a single leap, he decided to push open the glass door and cursed impatiently. He had just kicked a large pot of greenery and had apparently hurt himself enough to swear like that. Clotilde took advantage of this sonorous interlude to emerge from the darkness, making him believe she was waiting for one of the elevators.

At the same time, light streamed in from the lobby, struck by him.

She resolutely pressed the call button and positioned herself so as to see the jerky movements of this strange stranger. As soon as the timer started, he spotted this slim, hunched-over figure. It intrigued him despite himself, overlooking it because of the physical shock he had just received. He half turned and caught a glimpse of a perfectly oval face framed by straggling hair.

Their color ranged from red to brown with blond highlights.

This hairstyle signified a soul imbued with a vague, ephemeral freedom, lightly curled in uneven waves, with locks in total movement. A smile played on her full lips... 'What a beautiful girl!' She thought she'd keep him at a distance while scrutinizing his every move and escape in time in case of a surprise attack. 'He's taller and stronger than me,' she mused, frightened.

-Excuse me, miss. Could you give me some information?

-Y-Yes, perhaps sir. What do you want to know?

-Am I at 14 rue des églantiers? Building B7?

-Y-Yes, of course. Who are you looking for? There are no rentals.

-I'm going to the home of one of my sisters, Madame Lespinède.

-It's right here. She's on the 5th floor. Elevator or stairs.

-Good. Thank you very much, uh? Miss...?

She didn't have time to answer him before the cabin door opened in front of her and she rushed inside. He reacted faster than her and burst inside before she had even put her finger on the trigger. He took the lead and dialed 5, then let her dial 7. The machine moved quietly. The cabin was cramped, uncomfortable, and austere.

'What a lout, ill-mannered, ill-disposed, uncouth bear...'

He leaned against the left wall, manly; she found herself relegated to the right at the back. Irresolute but discreet, he stared questioningly at a point above her, perplexed. She looked attentively at the tips of her small, wet feet. He felt sorry for her, reserved about her fate, forcing himself to avert his gaze so as not to inconvenience her further. He felt emotionally for her extreme fragility. She suddenly blushed.

A sudden jerk and the car stopped, suspended in mid-air by a thread.

At the moment, no one flinched an inch, stunned by the action, the surprise playing out so well. He fumbled for the buttons and calmly pressed the on/off button. No results. Then he tried the emergency button. Nothing either. He tried several more times. Nothing at all. He pressed each button with two fingers at the same time. Nothing. Not the slightest warning signal. This was getting scary.

-Miss, I think we're destined to stay together a little longer. So let's be calm and united.

-Dear sir, I think so too, but since the alarm didn't work at first, we should either keep quiet and pray, waiting for

someone to need this naughty elevator, or shout from time to time, or both alternately. What do you prefer as a solution?

-We'll shout for now. We'll see later. Okay?

-Let's go. Help! Help! Help! Help!

-You know you have a lovely voice, miss?

-Thank you, but for now, it's best to get out of this situation. A real mess, you must admit, dear sir!

-Yes, you're probably right. Help! Hey, here we are, locked in! Free us! Help, damn it!

For about thirty minutes, they called out loudly and with conviction, yet nothing echoed their voices. They banged on the walls, repressed each button like mad, but nothing worked. They were beginning to worry, but neither of them wanted to truly accept it. Their situation was serious: the circumstances were becoming terribly awkward. They were becoming increasingly close.

No one spoke; they were thinking separately.

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For about thirty minutes, they called out loudly and with conviction, yet nothing echoed their voices. They banged on the walls, re-pressed each button like madmen, but nothing clicked. They were beginning to worry, but neither of them wanted to truly accept it. Their situation was serious: the circumstances were becoming terribly awkward. Promiscuity was setting in.

No one spoke; they were thinking separately.

Both of them were gathering ideas, analyzing them. The air remained heavy, the atmosphere overheated, nerves on edge. He took off his jacket, hoping to be more flexible in his movements. She did the same, pretending, shivering in her rain-soaked clothes. They exhaled, expelling their stress, then tried several movements to relax. They were furious about this stupid event.

At the end of their workday, it was the climax!

-Miss...? Ooh ooh! Don't faint, okay?

-Y-Yes...? Uh... Sir? What's wrong with you now?

-Could we introduce ourselves, just so we can say something? It's not very clever, but at least we're here.

-Y-Yes, why not? Then start, I'll answer.

-Well, I'm Norbert Lagrange, at your service, young lady.

-My name is Clotilde Dastermat, Mr. Norbert.

-Pleased to meet you. And what do you do for a living? Out of town?

-I'm a receptionist at Spencer & Company.

-I'm the CEO of CBA International's food store branches. Incognito.

-And how old are you? To have such a position? Are you studying?

-I just turned thirty-first and am single. I don't have time for trifles, you see! And you?

-I'm twenty-seven years old and single, much to the chagrin of my parents, who are expecting grandchildren every year.

-You have an accent. What region are you from then?

-Southeast. It's been almost three years now since I landed here for work. I prefer the southern sun.

-It's a shame for them, but fortunate for me today! Nice to meet you like this!

-And you, are you from Chalon? Are you going back to your roots?

-Well, yes, a true one! Burgundian to the core!

-Nice to meet you in this particular case.

-Do you think we'll be stuck in this cabin for long? Otherwise, it'll become problematic.

-It's still possible. It's a possibility that shouldn't be overlooked.

-So let's not rule it out. Especially since my sister isn't expecting me. I wanted to surprise her and take her out tonight.

-Oh, and our cell phones, how silly of me! Shall we try a text message?

-Y-Yes, my bad too. Oh, it's dead!

-Phew, mine is, still one bar! Yay! I'll make the call!

-Bravo! Go ahead: to the fire department, the police, the emergency room...

-Okay, shh, it's ringing! Oh, they hung up! I'll call back!

-I don't think this will work, we're cloistered, walled off!

The mind invents a cord connecting them to life and death.

Clotilde watched him in the dim light, the subdued light plunging them into semi-darkness. The shadows mingled, touched, and then departed. A dance between light and dark could not have been better. His more than pleasing physique, his clothes accustomed to supple and fluid movements, made him appear broader than he actually was. He was a wild beast in real life.

He represented everyday adventure all by himself.

His shoulders stood out against the elevator windows, giving him the air of a pirate. His legs, squeezed into fitted pants, and his powerful torso offered the image of a man assured of his destiny. His slightest gesture was imbued with a certain vigor within an exemplary rigor. He embodied protection and security in this narrow, confined space, isolating them from others.

This situation remained atypical in its content!

What prevailed above all was the feeling of freedom he offered in his gestures, his attire, and his words. The young woman was not insensitive to his charm, far from it. But she was also afraid of him, afraid of getting burned, afraid of letting herself go, afraid of falling in love. 'This girl is a mystery... So cute and yet so lonely, I would say.' The young man weighed his thoughts in front of the stranger.

Everyone was asking questions, without articulating them.

She intrigued him a bit: 'Why or how had she managed her life alone until now?' He, who had everything he needed to succeed, and here, in this miraculously confined space he shared with her, was imprisoned. 'What a strange coincidence, all the same.' Her smile widened slightly. He had just taken several sensual shots of her and him, presently kissing passionately.

She thought that as a couple they would have cuddled up...

'Ah, if only she were my girlfriend, we wouldn't have wasted our time like this on futile chatter, but would have used

space and time very differently.' The sardonic crease that deepened at the corner of her thin lips became particularly talkative for anyone who wanted to know the truth about the thoughts that were troubling her. This little extra was unusual in itself, since they had never seen or crossed paths. She dreamed of his arms around her, pressed tightly against each other.

A connection was beginning to emerge between them. The minutes passed slowly, the hours ticked by, tending toward a true solitude as a duo. They sometimes looked at each other, sizing each other up indifferently, often chatted pointlessly, remaining almost silent, losing themselves in their more or less unspeakable thoughts. A rift was forming between them, almost inevitably.

The air was becoming murky and warm, almost unbearable.

Both of them, in turn, instinctively, were having increasingly bawdy and indiscreet remarks, to the point where they no longer dared to look deep into each other's eyes for fear of revealing too much and embarrassing others. 'But would it really be embarrassing?' The fact remained that the longer they waited, the more the air between them would become electric. Their palpable attraction paralyzed them.

A ban on approaching them increased their adrenaline.

However, in the truly oppressive state of their emotional situation, no one could blame them for having broken a few basic rules of decorum and common sense necessary for their survival! Chasing certain images from her mind, Clotilde gradually moved closer to this very masculine partner in forced imprisonment. Norbert felt an invigorating rush from this physically close proximity. Two caged tigers with an emotional twist revolving around the primitive.

-What are you doing? Our cell phones aren't transmitting. There's no one who can help us in this ordeal.

-I've realized that since. Only I can't stay like this without trying anything other than screaming at my leisure. I'm

trying to remember American TV series that fit our current situation. It's just that neither of us is a potential MacGyver!

-We realized what was within our reach. Shouts, calls, vociferations. Then silence and chatter between us. What would we try to accomplish now? Say it.

-I'm there. The elevator exit cover is on the ceiling of the car. That would bring us a little more fresh air. The grille should come off without too much difficulty.

-How are you going to do it? It's high enough, isn't it? It's much too high to reach, isn't it?

-By giving you a leg up! It's up to you to take it apart!

-Okay, so what? Do you think I'll go up top?

-First things first, shall we, miss?

-Okay, it's a good thing I'm wearing pants tonight.

-Come on, are you ready? Let me hoist you up to the trapdoor.

-I'm ready, and you? I'll take off my shoes, that's better.

-Put your foot here on my hands, there, perfect! It's like you've done this every day of your life...

-Stop, will you, and hold on tight. Thank you.

-No problem about that, don't worry, I won't let go.

-And now that I'm touching it, what am I supposed to do?

-Push, turn, pull, try all sorts of maneuvers so that the grate loosens noticeably and gives you the opportunity to move slightly, the goal being to make the air flow better. We'll feel better afterward. I'm sure of it.

-Well, I'm only trying to please you and pass the time. I push, nothing. I pull, nothing. I turn...

-That will always be accomplished. Who knows, with luck...
Hmm, you smell good: what is this perfume?

-Very successful, you should be thinking. It's Chanel No. 5.

Clotilde spares no effort and achieves a rather poor result. The air vent has a dual effect: to ventilate and to keep the circuit closed. The fins inside have blocked themselves due to a lack of electricity, and after several unsuccessful attempts, she feels a gust of air coming towards her. She suddenly feels invigorated, reassured by her skill. She becomes useful in the adventure!

Her spirits return, as does her confidence.

Norbert feels her feminine scent tickle his nostrils and senses. All the while he supports her in these futile efforts, he has images, each more erotic than the last. So much so that when she makes a move to come down, he literally pushes her against him. Without further thought, he takes her lips and wraps his arms around her, tasting her with delight. She had wanted this so much...

He gives in to it with such desire that she yields, consenting.

Beyond all reasoning, all logic, their fingers flutter, caressing their hair, entwining themselves in the strands, the nape of their necks, giving them intoxicating sensations they've never experienced before. Their sensuality teases their nerves, drawing them step by step toward another world. This very special universe, dear to lovers, transports them to shores as wild as they themselves. Their physical relationship is unbridled, unfettered by any morality.

Their legs and thighs brush against each other, touch, recognize each other, and intertwine at will. Their chests and torsos are wild with each other, demanding much more. With all their senses on alert, they let themselves be carried away for once by their repressed emotions, the frustrations of these years of solitude and work. Their hands seek to discover a secret, to half-open previously unexplored doors.

Uninhibited breasts rise up before this unfulfilled desire.

Their kisses find the royal road, the one that holds the key to bodies and hearts in total openness. Their physical attraction reveals itself to them like a wave crashing over their daily lives, a devastating cyclone. Their mingled breaths envelop them cozily, instilling within them heightened passions. They forget where they are, swept away by the storm that engulfs them, bodies and possessions offended.

She feels the sex swell with this audacious man.

Soft air on their shoulders, light touches of their backs, like outstretched angel wings, precise caresses on necks soaked

in sweat, a quivering spine, a dizzying point of throbbing emotions, a welcome source of the dominant place: the gift of self, the talent to receive without asking unnecessary questions at such a moment. They savor each other avidly...

The carnal love of man for woman remains eternal.

The appreciation seems entirely savory and mischievous on both sides, both feminine and masculine. They move in rhythm, with identical perceptions, fully knowing how to participate: taboos, prohibitions, modesty no longer exist, being out of place between them. Their bodies, their desires, their wishes, their hopes subsist above lustful passions, the bygone respect of rebellious senses.

A sexual avalanche overwhelms them, drowns them, strikes them down.

Their physiologies outpace them, catch up with them, and only let go after inaugurating a new facet. Their discoveries continue: soon it's the glutes that occupy them for a good while. Furtive caresses, manual dance on bumpy mounds, increasingly assertive and possessive. An effective ritual between movement and palpation, interspersed with kisses and moans.

The ideal sound of love, frozen, filters through this cocoon of steel.

The most incendiary onomatopoeia, so burning, overheating, completes the prevailing erotic climate. Their lips never tire, nibbling each other, further accentuating the pleasure their hands and fingers give the rest of each other's bodies. They hunger for each other, an unquenchable thirst for the other's suffering desires. They remain attentive to each other, constantly willing, gifted with incessant brushing.

Such constant back-and-forth is akin to an outpouring of the senses, of sensations emitted, to the limits of what is bearable!

They move apart, return, and leave again to better explore a new phase of eroticism, a beautiful flight into the as yet unknown sampling of skin. Norbert's hands regain possession of Clotilde's full breasts, with their high, firm nipples, erect as if inviting him to touch them, something he does not hold back. As for her, she cuddles him with her open thigh on his leg.

Her hands cling to his buttocks, seized by dizziness.

Gentle movements, irritating, unnerving, weighing the reliability of each other's underlying desires, their own scents mingle with their deepest, most insistent, most incisive, most insane emotions... A noise from outside suddenly pierces their memories and they abruptly separate, as if caught in the act, like two teenagers on a spree without parental consent.

The miracle of reconciliation has just shattered!

They pay attention to the various sounds that suddenly reach them. They feel excessively embarrassed by the heat of their previous actions. Suddenly, breaking this negative silence, Norbert drums like a madman on one of the walls of the cabin: this is their chance, to be out in the open air, finally! But by the greatest of coincidences or misfortunes, the sounds fade, progressively and muffled.

Their difficult wait resumes with renewed vigor...

It was worse than before: they knew what they were yearning for! This unenacted finale, whose morality and inept restraints prevented them from ever again caressing each other, smelling each other, or investing further into the opposing camp... Only the flesh remains so weak compared to reflection. The nascent hopes are too close not to force destiny. This malignant fate whose effect, unfortunately, cannot be fully urged.

The cabin shrank in the face of their felt desires!

They stare at each other like enemies waging war against themselves. Two wild beasts escaped from their cage,

fiercely defending an invisible territory. They stare wordlessly at their defense, their existence, their death. He, a virile male, gasps with hope of success. She, delicate and cunning, wishes to conclude. These two warriors truly desire to see this delicious and fantastical duel through to the end.

What a fantastic test-fantasy to make love here!

The stillness in which they stand, the fixedness of their lost eyes, their equally tense bodies, everything conspires to force them to surrender. They lack only a burst of energy, a circumstance, a fact, a gesture... to fall into each other's arms and reenact the scene they so cruelly had to end. This surge came without anyone doing anything, with a simple flick of the wrist.

Above them, it flickers, then spaces out, and ends...

The already low glow of the ceiling light emits faint, flickers, then finally stops illuminating: the complete darkness adds to the unusual atmosphere in which they find themselves. This is enough to embolden them: which of the two grabs the other? Neither of them can say for sure. It happens, and it's all they wanted. A shock for Norbert, a touch of chic for Clotilde: love?!

Whispered murmurs invade the minimalist space left in disarray, the small sensual tapping approaches reinvent themselves, sexual experiences relive themselves very differently. Their luscious lips taste and savor each other with even more delight than before. This allows for a sense of meaning to the actions performed, offering a relative security to guide oneself with an ambiguous zest of reason.

This is no longer the case now, under a protective darkness.

Possible deviations from each are permissible as long as both parties are in tacit agreement. Their gestures monopolize every last bit of the cabin, of skin, of desire, of bits of sensuality brought in waves of precise caresses, emphasizing the importance of non-stop. The line is undeniably crossed

between these characters, so humanly virile and drunk on solitude to finally be filled.

Their difference? Being identical in the face of passionate love.

Their unbridled, their physical and emotional development becomes sexual, without taboos, without barriers: only desire, excitement, touch, taste in the tumultuous sense of the term. They are no longer anything but two animalistic individuals wishing to reach the final level of their primary desire: physically carnal love! Clotilde incidentally teases Norbert, who bends to the rhythmic movements of her body.

As the final stage comes, he anticipates and unfolds his game.

She hopes for this display, this virility: their hands curve around each other's sex, and nothing matters more than this highly sensual touch, bordering on the sexual aspect of the act in progress. Only the senses govern their behavior. She comes to savor him naturally, to have a little fun with him, just as he does the same, and when, standing against the corner of the booth, he finally takes her!

It was an outpouring of joy and ecstasy for both of them!

They are united in a genuine passion. Fatigue envelops them, their gestures become gentler, the anticipation has just triumphed royally. They embrace for long minutes, as if their lives depended on it, only relaxing when sleep overcomes them. They collapse on the floor, each embraced, flowing toward a soft, airy place, with charming dreams opening their sated unconscious.

-Get up. It sounds like there's a noise. I just heard a tapping. Light but present. Come on, stand up.

-Mmm... What is it? Repeat more quietly, please...

-Here, listen a little... Do you hear? Someone's here.

-Yes... but I'm tired, very tired... so tired...

-Okay, I get it. I'll take care of it...

-Would be nice, yes... tired... very tired... yes...

He struggles to get up from his half-lying position and begins banging loudly on the elevator wall, yelling so that the outside world can hear him. Clotilde sits up with difficulty and puts her head in her hands, fatalistic and sleepy despite everything. She covers her ears with her hands, curling up in a huddle. Norbert, meanwhile, continues to bang violently and shout.

Like a jack-in-the-box, he redoubles his efforts!

Sounds reach them from time to time, stealthily, noises gradually approaching their position. Knocks finally respond to the untimely assaults of the young man, who has some doubts about his actions. Clotilde gradually comes to terms with the circumstances and joins him to assist him together. They detect where the 'answers' are coming from: the upper floor!

-They're right above us! Yay, safe and sound!

-Yes, that seems to be it. Our time of solitude is over. Our daily lives will resume, that's it.

-Yes, but I regret it a little. Before we're saved, can I see you again? I need you, I need time.

-You really want it? Really? So you think so?

-Of course, let's see. For me, this represents much more than an adventure with happy endings. Unless you don't want it... Then I'll step aside, but it will be difficult for me.

-How can you believe that? I don't give myself to the first person who comes along! Uh, uh... at least not usually!

-Our situation has brought with it some hassles while also offering us a romantic opportunity. Let's experience it... together!

-Okay, kiss me, I need that to believe that this wasn't a dream. We'll see each other again too... who knows?

-I didn't dare ask you... Will you wait for me a bit, won't you?

-Twice rather than once, Norbert. Yes, I hope for you, at least.

-I'll come back as soon as I organize another schedule.

-I promise, it will be wonderful between us, I can feel it. -I'm so afraid of losing sight of you, if you only knew, it's so vital.

-Me too, it's one last test to pass: get ready!

The emergency services arrive and enter the building, or at least the elevator shaft. They talk among the employees and the people in charge of civil protection. They call Norbert, who presses the red button on their orders. The first attempt is unsuccessful. A second makes the cabin shudder. Clotilde turns pale but bites her lip, not wanting to scream in terror. A third sends them plummeting down another floor.

Norbert presses the black button without success...

The firefighters shout at them to stay in the center and if possible close to each other. The doors are jammed: there's a screech, a sort of click, a jolt throws them lower, then higher, before reaching the right notch. They're both sweating, huddled together, praying. They hear a crash, and then it comes from above: the gate is lifted, and a rescuer reaches in and throws two ropes with hooks.

He orders them to hook the rope around each of them...

They'll be pulled to him: Clotilde first, then Norbert second. They're above the car and glimpse a gaping opening two meters away. The firefighter checks the hook and asks the others to pull. They're evacuated as their rescuer arrives behind them. No sooner are they all safe than a huge crash fills the air: the elevator has crashed underground! The adventure is over.

The future is bright between them. Norbert was surrounded by his loved ones and couldn't see her again that night. The snack lasted a good part of the night, saved by neighbors who thought they heard suspicious noises inside some of the apartments. They are delighted but need to sleep and recover. The firefighters and the police rescued them almost in good shape: it's a great reward for them too.

Even though they remain drawn and hungry, the duo is keeping a low profile about what happened. Only they know the true story of this strange story. Clotilde goes to her door, opens it, and, tired of all the commotion, falls asleep right

away on her living room bench. Early in the morning, still with her head in her socks, she is awakened by a discreet knock on the doorframe.

She opens it calmly, rumpled as she is, completely oblivious to her current outfit. And finds herself face to face with... her ex!

-Patrick? What are you doing here? So early in the morning, too?"

-I've been thinking, and I've just left my wife for you. I realized I can't live without you, and... here I am! You see, I even have my things with me in these bags!" -But it's over between us and... it's out of the question...

-Only fools never change their minds.

-Yes, but it's been over two months since we ended our relationship, and you broke it off all by yourself.

-You mean to tell me that our meeting was nothing to you? Is that it?... For me, it was something else entirely.

-I'm letting you know that you're the one who left me! Besides, without hearing from you, I've reconsidered the situation and am quite happy about it, despite everything. I also think sometimes, you see, and... now I'm exhausted from a very eventful day and night. You're leaving and that's it: over!

-Let me in for a moment, please. Just enough time to change your mind... I'll put my bags away and we'll talk, okay?"

-I don't want you at all anymore and I... want you to leave for good, once and for all! That's clear!

-Hello, Clotilde! So, my darling? Did you sleep well? Not me.

-Nor-Norbert? You? What are you doing here? You were supposed to be back late!

-Yes, sweetheart. I'm fine here. Who is he? Is he bothering you?"

-My ex! He just showed up without warning. He's leaving.

-Well, old man, the position is taken. Get out of here, come on!

-What? What? Who are you, you first?"

-I'm the young lady's fiancé, then her husband.

-And since when? I'm not leaving. I'm here, I'm staying.

-Since this minute. And if you're looking for a fight, let's go.

-Tell me I'm dreaming... You're not going to fight?

-N-No, I didn't have time to inform you, that's all.

-But what about me? Have you thought about me? I'm homeless now! My wife... kicked me out! Because of you.

-... She'll take you back if you know how to pull it off.

-That's less certain. So I'm crashing... for this weekend.

-Goodbye. All my best wishes to you! And you come here.

Norbert pushes Clotilde inside her apartment, shoves her back in, and closes the door on Patrick, furious at the trick. The loser stands there for a moment in front of the door, closed forever, and the other two finally hear his footsteps gradually diminish. The young woman sits back down, her legs stiff with emotion. Her head is going to explode if the surprises continue!

A beautiful, deep depression awaits her, that's for sure!

This certainty crushes her considerably as Norbert takes her in his arms, just like that, without thinking. It's instinctive after all: he has a great desire to lie her down on the sofa and caress her for a long, long time, forever... Coming back to the reality of the moment, he looks at her carefully and thinks she's the one for him. She's so beautiful but discreet, with her hair so disheveled. She'll be a wonderful mother.

-N-Non, je n'ai pas eu le temps de t'informer, voilà tout.

-Mais et moi ? Tu y as pensé, à moi ? Je suis à la rue maintenant ! Ma femme... m'a foutu dehors ! A cause de toi.

-... Vous reprendra si vous savez lui amener le coup.

-C'est moins certain. Donc je m'incruste... pour ce week-end.

-Adieu. Tous mes vœux vous accompagnent ! Et toi viens ici.

'Good heavens: what if she gets pregnant from this escapade?'

He'll have to wait for the results first. With the way he was, he'll marry her anyway. But he'll be proud of the twist of fate if it was theirs. 'What a snub!' Norbert will show her to his family as soon as their romantic weekend is over. 'I'm crazy, like a middle schooler on his first adventure!' Except this is

serious! The engagement, then the leap into the void with a splendid honeymoon!

- Already up? Get some more rest, you need it!

- Yes, the night was very short, but above all, I wanted to see you again today. I'm a big romantic, you see.

- Just to tell you it wasn't a dream? Me too.

- Yes, it's a bit like that. And what do I see when I get here?

-A big, lanky guy forcing his way through my door! I was so surprised!

-Poor guy! He looked pathetic with his suitcases behind him.

-Oh, so it was true, then, that he was evicted from his house? My God.

-Apparently. Does that change things between us?

-N-No, why are you telling me that? I was telling him to leave.

-I see you hesitating, suddenly, as if this is of any importance. Am I mistaken or not? Otherwise...

-No, I'm just surprised by his choice.

-Good. Let's put him out of our minds and come back to the two of us. What are we going to do now? Do we continue or do I leave?

-I confess I haven't had time to think about it.

-I do, and I'm coming to camp at your place from now until tonight. If you want...

-What? You really want to? Try living together? With me? Like that? What if we don't get along?

-Everything has to start somewhere, right? Why put off something that can be done today? We might as well find out as soon as possible if we're able to acclimate, adapt to each other. And then tonight... if you have a baby?

-Luckily we have two days to see what happens.

-First, I'll pack my personal belongings and head out. Here, come with me. I'll treat you to a nice breakfast in my den, where I have everything you need. While you shower, I'll pack my bag, and we'll come back here to drop everything off. Then we'll go to a nice place not far away, in the countryside, to rest a little from all these shocks. Otherwise, I'm not responsible for myself! I love you.

-What if... we tried for a baby? Maybe this is a chance.

-Don't invite me... Why, would you really like to have one with me? There? Here? Now? Witch of my heart!

-Mmm... Since last night, I haven't taken the pill, so there you go...

'Good heavens: what if she gets pregnant from this escapade?'

He'll have to wait for the results first. With his departure, he'll marry her anyway. But he'll be proud of the twist of fate if it were theirs. 'What a snub!' Norbert will show her to his family as soon as their romantic weekend is over. 'I'm crazy, like a middle schooler on his first adventure!' Except this is serious! The engagement, then the leap into the void with a splendid honeymoon!

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This first day was magical and very successful: mixed at first, they relaxed and had a great time. The meal between vineyards and stud farms rested them. The inn was unassuming, but the interior exuded the refined austerity of fine dishes. The scents and aromas wafting from the kitchen whetted their appetites, and the atmosphere remained calm, gradually harmonizing.

The innkeepers scrutinized them attentively, mocking them.

The feast over, they mutually decide to stop in a meadow, which they... inaugurate like lovers under the warm rays of the reappearing sun. In the evening, they are at 'their' apartment and express some reservations about their usual routine. Each does their best, and the television is on, seeing them sitting down in front of light TV dinners. They choose a movie, laughing at the actors' antics.

'It's been a long time since I've felt this good.'

At bedtime, embarrassed but happy, they reluctantly lie down in a spot, and it's only at curfew, with all the lights off, that they finally relax. During the night, they search for each other and find their desires intact. The significant commotion and the wrinkled sheets wake them completely in this first true awakening together. 'Heaven on earth,' Norbert thinks, stretching and turning over to see her sleeping.

-Good morning, sweet Clo. How are you feeling today? Well? How are you doing on this joyful, sparkling morning?

-Mmm... Good morning, darling? Yes, it's so good to be here, just by yourself...

-Yes? You're so right. I was just thinking that.

-It's so nice to wake up together, without shouting, without clashing.

-I think so too. I appreciate it. Silence and joy of being together.

-I don't want this to end. And yet tomorrow, it's work-sleep, work-sleep, work-sleep. Rest, and you?

-Speaking of which, what time do you usually get up?

-Every day at 6:00 a.m. to start at 9:00 a.m. Then I get home around 6:30 p.m. I eat in the company cafeteria or somewhere else depending on the day; it's between 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. I'm shopping! Why the questions? Are you spying on me?

-You what? Oh, I'm there! You grab a sandwich while browsing the stores. Especially during the seasonal sales, I imagine!

-Yes, and you? You're very inquisitive but not very talkative about yourself.

-My hours are more flexible than yours, but that's normal; I set them. However, in the evening, I finish around 9:00 p.m. or even 10:00 p.m. Except when it's inventory time, which is 4:00 a.m.

-If you'd like, I could perhaps help you finish earlier, right? About administration or accounting.

-Would you be willing to invest in me? Become a partner?

-If you want, why not? I'll do a month's trial, boss?

-I'll hire you right away. What time can or should I pick you up tonight? I really need you, you know?

-Be in the parking lot at 6:00 PM. And a Coca-Cola if I have to work.

-Okay, I'll take you to my headquarters.

Several months later, almost a year later, two new parents were leaving a private clinic with a double bassinet: a charming, drooling toddler who loved blowing bubbles, and a little girl with rosy cheeks who smiled ecstatically. They were twins in great shape! As for the happy couple, they expanded the original company by incorporating a sales system made available to them.

'Everything fell into place like magic since we met!'

The husband took care of the administration, and the wife took care of the sales side: a great team was born. No need for a nanny; Norbert's sister had offered her loyal services; otherwise, it was Clotilde's parents who happily took charge.

Clotilde had taken maternity leave and then resigned from her receptionist position. No farewell party for her!

'When my management told me, I couldn't believe it!'

They acquired an estate: several buildings offered intimate spaces, and Norbert brought his widowed mother and one of his sisters home. Everything coincided admirably between them, and they were convinced of their lucky star. Their projects were gradually coming true one after the other. It hadn't even been... A year?... Already?... That damn elevator had accidentally broken down!

-Kevin, stop, you're going to hurt yourself. Don't come crying afterward, it'll be too late. There, I have to take care of you...

-Charlotte, when are you going to stop jumping, please?

-Darling, when are our vacations? I'm on edge with them.

-Sweetheart, in two weeks, finally just the two of us!

-I can't wait... Two years without any kind of vacation has been a long time!" Staying with them is great!

-It won't happen again, I swear! Sun and relaxation are ours! I'm calmer than you, but I need to rest.

-Phew! Finally! I'm at the end of my rope... Can't wait for... the plane... The beaches... the sun... real rest: doing nothing!

-Oh yes, it will be so nice to be together again like before, just the two of us... alone in the world... what if we were kids again?

-Do you want some more little devils? Oh my... (laughs)

He had a life plan for his second sister. She was disabled because of a hit-and-run driver and could no longer work as an elementary school teacher, and she was gradually becoming depressed. His older sister was looking after the children, as well as her mother and Clo's parents. She would thus have two children to raise properly, while waiting for two more to start. He wasn't a business owner for nothing! (laughs)

Clotilde approved of his idea but didn't want it anymore; their business ran much better when they were in charge! Norbert agreed and smiled mischievously... But he never expected what happened! When they returned from their vacation in the Caribbean three months later, Clotilde urged him to come and see the ultrasound his gynecologist showed her, where... he saw four distinct 'eggs'!

His third sister had just divorced and was looking to start a daycare for her brother's employees. Norbert then allocated her a space to be brought up to standard, in the middle of the parking lot, centered on a lawn. She added benches and outdoor games, a pretty sign, and a beautiful fence. The parents were calm and reassured about their children. Their work greatly improved.

An after-school daycare for homework was initiated and integrated for those in preschool and elementary schools.

'All's for the best in the best of all possible worlds.' Voltaire