

Laura wakes up in a good mood today. She jumps out of bed like a spring and trembles with energy. She wears a Louis XIV maid costume and spreads cherry paint on her cheeks with a thick brush. She puckers her lips and winks at me.

I watch her through the mirror as she does her morning routine as if I'm watching the Bolshoi Ballet. I'm only wearing briefs and I am shivering, but the sight is mesmerizing.

She rises on her tiptoes, straightens her garters, whispers something incomprehensible in the mirror, *ooo shiii mii*, and spins on her heels turning towards me.

Suddenly, she flashes a slap at me and leaves me stunned in the bathroom.

Laura is a child. She runs faster than the wind. The other children lag behind, until they become dots. She runs incessantly singing the bogeyman rhyme to herself.

Laura has always been running in my dreams. Sometimes she's a blooming schoolgirl holding her breath and looking at me from the next desk. And sometimes she becomes the smell of the earth when it rains.

Laura fall asleep uncovered and she's on edge.

"Today we'll play the game 'Tyrant-Punisher'," she says.

She stands me upright in a corner of the kitchen, with one foot slightly bent, a few inches above the floor. She's given me to wear a faded orange bathrobe and a baseball cap with the logo of the Hanshin Tigers.

I watch her frying bacon and breaking two eggs on top. She's put Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" on the CD player, and now "Winter" is playing.

In the brief pauses between the orchestral pieces and the violin solo, we hear clearly the chirping of the blackbird that has taken up residence in the pine tree in front of our balcony.

"I will love you forever," Laura says.

"...forever."

"I will punish you because I love you. And I will hurt you and torment you with the torments of hell."

"...hell."

"I will become indispensable to you. You won't even be able to tie your shoelaces without me smiling at you one day."

"...indispensable..."

She taps her glass against my back. She puts on Netflix. She lights a cigarillo.

With Laura, there wasn't really a "first encounter." When I met her, I simply followed her as soon as she got up to leave the bar.

She waited for me in her black car with the doors unlocked and gestured for me to sit in the back.

At her house, she made me sleep in the bathtub. Next to the sink, she left me a square pink radio and a yellow plastic duck.

I already knew where she kept her keys and money, but she made me wait a week before she spoke to me.

Laura is as beautiful as winter in spring. Laura was born the year the NASA spacecraft Viking 1 landed on the Golden Plains of Mars.

Her hair turned green and tangled when she read the *Histoire de l'œil* of Georges Bataille. Since then, she often rides her bike without underwear, and when she addressed to me the second week, she asked me to break three eggs on her, two on her butt and one on her groin.

She throws one by one her seven veils, which rush to dance in the churchyard, and she tosses her hair forward and then back.

Laura and I swim naked in the cove in front of the chapel.

She has come to find me on the island.

"I will love you forever," she told me on the phone. "I'm coming to torment you."

"My angel, my angel..."

We kiss standing up, in the corner outside the bar. Her lips cling to mine as if she's handing me an urgent letter.

Her lips unscrew me to assemble me from scratch. The wings she pins on my back will only soften the fall, but at first, I let myself believe that I am her angel.

Laura is a poetess like her mother. They both write with pencil on paper. In her paternal home, one writes in the basement and the other on the rooftop. They speak every morning at ten using an intercom system to share their news.

Laura started writing by eating her mother's erasers. She talks to me about her childhood dreams with the precision of an entomologist.

She still meets one of her old classmates from elementary school. They have coffee together once a year on the anniversary of the landing of Viking 1 on Mars, they listen to the cicadas, talk about boys, and scratch their chins meaningfully.

In spring, Laura took me to meet her parents. I was as unsettled as a crack in a pavement.

I tried to restrain my hands from reaching out to hug them.

"They are sensitive people and very small in size. As they grow older, they shrink," Laura had warned me the previous night, while she checked if I was articulating correctly the words she had fed me the previous week, and if I still remembered the time before we first made love.

"I will love you forever," I told her, but my words fell heavily upon her toes.

That night, we lay upside down in bed, and I kissed her feet until dawn.

Laura's mother is a very brave woman. "I was born a goldfish," she told me as soon as I sat on the couch opposite her. "Would you like a whiskey?"

With my inner eye (the outer ones were constantly focused on Laura's mother), I observed Laura's father. He was thoughtful and silent. Every now and then, his eyes meticulously scanned the ceiling as if probing the seams of the universe. Suddenly, he jumped up and decisively went somewhere in the middle of the rooms. He returned with a leather folder overflowing with papers and sank back onto the couch.

Laura was biting her lower lip. She kept accidentally elbowing me, and her lighter kept falling, demanding that I pick it up for her.

Her mother served us a pink kantaifi with mashed barley, cayenne pepper, blueberry syrup, and finely chopped eggplant flowers. She had cut it into small bites and inserted a toothpick into each portion.

Laura's father pulled out a black parchment with red letters from the folder.

"This is the founding act of our family," he said, addressing me, as the women were paying him no attention.

Laura had prepared me for this ritual. Every time she introduced a new lover to them, her father would read them the founding act of their family, and her mother would cook gourmet kantaifi.

"Today, I'm going to change your configuration," I announced to Laura. I had prepared her at least a month ago that on our anniversary, I would reprogram her from scratch, of course keeping her memory and the center of artistic creation untouched. I would return her to society like a pristine cherry.

Laura was radiant with anticipation, and I loved her like a falling star. I squeezed her hand and pressed my lips to her ear.

I spoke to her for a long time, slowly, in a low voice, almost whispering, and I told her everything, what I knew and what I didn't know.

When I emptied of words, I spread a black sheet on the red carpet in front of the fireplace and gently laid her down, like you lay down a baby in its crib. I undressed her slowly and neatly folded her clothes. Her body, illuminated by the flickering of the fire, dazzled my eyes down to the soul.

Like touching fine porcelain, I carefully anointed her with moisturizing cream from the tips of her toes to her skull, caressing, pressing, kneading, and rubbing until her flesh softened and smelled of lavender.

Laura looks at me in the eyes as a traveler in the desert craves water.

"You are the love of my life," she says.

The third movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 3 in D minor is playing on the CD.

Laura bursts into laughter. Her body trembles uncontrollably, but gradually the tremor takes on a rhythm, as if every cell in her body has synchronized with the surface of a distant sea whipped by the wind cascading unchecked from the mountaintops.

I give Laura my book to read, but the manuscript slips from her hands, the pages cascade upside down on the red carpet, and the words spring forth from within like enraged beasts. They have become so wild and aggressive because they have remained unread for so long. I promise them that I will show them to other people, and gradually they calm down, each one returning to its row.

Laura gets immersed in reading. Occasionally, she pauses and throws me a glance, but I pretend not to notice and continue cleaning the asparagus in the sink. I let the food simmer gently and prepare us both an espresso.

We go out to the balcony, and I serve the coffees on the table along with the dessert her mother made for us, a sweet bread filled with finely chopped shark fin and toasted roses.

'You write well,' Laura tells me, 'but it needs a bit more emotion.'

She smiles broadly at me. "I know what gift I'll give you for your birthday – the most exquisite pain in the world."

Laura is the woman I dreamed of the time I wasn't aware I was dreaming. She is the fundamental fabric of the dream. And like all dreams, she is deceptive.

You can call life Laura.

When Laura punishes me, she tells me she loves me. When Laura cheats on me, she talks about yesterday's storm. When Laura no longer loves me, she looks at me with the greatest love.

I bring her a snail and an *Onopordum acanthium*.

"The snail," I say to her, "is my love for you. It moves slowly, but it will find you, no matter what."

She purses her lips.

"I love you so much that my heels ache," she says. She is beautiful like a storm. She chuckles.

"The donkey thorn," I continue, "is my crown when I return from the bars to you."

"Don't talk like a *poète maudit*, my love," she says, and her joints creak as she stretches her legs. She's lying on the couch, flipping through the photo album from our vacations. She chuckles.

"When I found you on the island, you were brown, with three days' worth of beard, and a sweat stain on your shirt at belly button level."

I am painting her toenails. Together, we chose the color of the Aegean sea on August.

The cicadas have gone crazy today. I synchronize the movement of my hand with their beat like a psychedelic trance, which sweeps me away and I make her beautiful, and even more beautiful.

On the CD, we listen to the aria "Erbarme dich, mein Gott" from Bach's "St. Matthew Passion." [...]