

The Manor by Emma Cavalier

Chapter 1.

In some ways, the work of an archivist is a bit like that of a doctor or a priest. Documents convey to us this kind of faceless confession, relating the facts from their own point of view. Our task is to analyze them, organize them, rid them of their dross and preserve them, so that they embody the memory and health of the living organisms from which they emanate.

A task that can be quite tedious on a daily basis, but which is illuminated by the mysterious aura of secrecy and power. Just as, in a somewhat unhealthy way, the priest must dream of one day hearing the confession of a murderer, or the doctor jumps with excitement when diagnosing a serious and rare disease, we archivists enter the profession with the fantasy of the ideal fund, untouched by any study, miraculously preserved, dotted with the names of personalities who have made history, a fund that would reveal unspeakable secrets of which we, archivists, would be the guardians.

Many colleagues see their entire career unfold without ever encountering such a fund. This is something that is not hidden from us during our studies. But that does not prevent us, when we leave school fresh, from chasing after this chimera of intellectual stimulation, this dream of historical revelation, which only the humility of experience will eventually blunt.

I was no exception to the rule, and it was this type of fantasy that animated me when I met Julien Andringer.

I had learned from one of my teachers that the heir to an aristocratic family was looking for an archivist to clean up the family history documents. I had an appointment with him for a job interview, in an old house in the heart of the Rambouillet forest, and my stomach was in knots at the size of the stakes, the hope of an encounter with an exceptional fund.

The Andringer residence was almost a small castle, whose regular stone and brick façade was hidden under century-old trees at the end of a gravel driveway, and whose white steps and huge double doors finished impressing me when I discovered them. The man I had hoped would become my employer had only deigned to communicate with me in writing, and had categorically refused to give me any additional information about the position; he wanted to meet me first. I was greeted by a man in his fifties, with graying temples and a receding hairline, straight as an i in his black suit, who took me back at least fifty years in time when he bowed to greet me. I must have been as stiff as he was in my gray suit, my hair pulled back (with great difficulty, because my brown curls are usually rather

unruly), my heels clicking on the black and white tiles as he silently led me through the corridors of the old building.

He led me through a small anteroom into a dark office whose single paned window looked out onto the inner courtyard; it was there, behind a large half-moon desk covered with piles of files, between a cold coffee and a full ashtray, that I saw Julien for the first time. Without a word, he motioned for me to sit down opposite him and scrutinized me for a long time with his clear eyes, his black eyebrows slightly furrowed under a dark, unruly lock of hair. It may seem hard to believe, but from that moment on he froze my blood, as if I could sense the danger emanating from him, even before he had opened his mouth. I probably would have left as quickly as I had come, if I had not been petrified in my chair by a feeling of being exposed that I naively attributed to the anxiety of having this interview. Nor had I expected to meet a man so young and, to be completely honest, so handsome. He had fine but sharp features, a straight nose, slightly dry lips, as if they had been sunbathed too much, clean skin, a little matte and clean-shaven. The angular lines of his jaw and eyebrows drew a square face, inhabited by the intensity of his gaze.

His long hands were slender yet strong, and the simple black T-shirt he wore outlined the generous contours of his muscular torso and his broad, powerful shoulders.

Even as I was shaking from head to toe with fear, it was impossible not to notice how dark and alluring he was.

This session of mutual observation lasted several minutes.

When he finally spoke, it was to make me feel even more uncomfortable.

“To save us both time, I’ll get straight to the point,” he said. “The house you’re in, which we commonly call “the Manor,” has been a sadomasochistic meeting place for over a century. If you work here, you’ll be confronted with it every day, both in your job and in your everyday life. If you have a problem with that, I invite you to leave right now.”

I was speechless, wondering how many young candidates he had discouraged in one sentence. But I am not someone who gives up easily, and I had prepared myself so well to face something that would perhaps only happen once in my life that my brain had already started its analysis gear, taking the problems in order. I asked him if I too would have to submit to sadomasochistic rites, to use his words.

"That's not part of your job," he replied enigmatically, evading the question.

I felt a certain unease at this, and he let me struggle in my confusion for a few more moments, before continuing in a calm tone:

– You're still here. I guess that means I can continue.

I didn't disabuse him, and he launched into explaining the work that would await me - me, or someone else. In truth, he had done very well to warn me from the start, because the prerequisite he had set was indeed a structuring dimension of the work. The family home - the Manor - had been built towards the end of the nineteenth century by his grandfather, a rich eccentric with a passion for romanticism and libertinism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in an atmosphere of fascination with flagellation and sadism that was a fad, he had made his home a meeting place for high society seeking these rather special pleasures. It had quickly become essential and, as surprising as it may seem, it had remained so.

Julien took me to visit the large library, whose door opened directly across from his office, and where the improbable volumes of a century of erotic literature were lined up in leather bindings. It was only a tantalizing foretaste, clearly intended more to pique my curiosity than to give me an insight into the ins and outs of the job. He quickly took me back to his office, where he explained that over the years, his family had carefully amassed important archives, without taking as much care to keep them in order. The work consisted of classifying and describing them, while unearthing significant pieces that would be particularly interesting for family history. It could extend, if time permitted, to the study and classification of the library. Finally Julien asked me if I was interested.

He hadn't asked about my qualifications, which either meant he'd already looked me up or the job conditions were bizarre enough that he couldn't afford to turn his nose up at a motivated candidate. It took me five seconds to make up my mind. In fact, I'd already made up my mind by the time I'd sat there, speechless, instead of running away like any sane person would. I asked him about the financial terms, and that's when things started to go off the rails.

– Given the confidential content of the archives, this is a job to be done on site. You will be housed, fed and laundered, and I offer you a six-month contract at one thousand three hundred per month. (He smiles.) But I am prepared to increase your salary by twenty percent if you agree to receive corporal punishment in the event of dissatisfaction with your work.

I felt my heart leap in my chest; but it would take more than that to destabilize me after all I had just heard. Clearly, Julien was improvising: encouraged by my attitude, he proposed conditions that he had not at all planned in advance.

“May I know what you mean by ‘corporal punishment’?” I asked politely, trying to keep my voice from shaking.

– Non.

Julien smiled. He watched me sway from side to side on my chair, embarrassed. In his scrutinizing but amused gaze, always fixed on me, I guessed the pleasure he took in letting himself slide down the slope of the game, not hesitating to take risky paths, because clearly, what he was proposing to me could only be a tacit arrangement that I would have no difficulty turning to my advantage. I ran through the elements of the choice at high speed in my mind, evaluating the risks, trying to figure out if they were worth it.

Oddly enough, all fear had left me. Julien's frankness had been enough to establish a form of trust, even if the basic terms were not simple. I felt strangely lucid, without realizing that it was the adrenaline that gave me this sensation of acting from outside of myself.

"You accept or you refuse, that's all," he said. "I won't tell you more."

I don't know if I was being arrogant, foolhardy, or just plain stupid in accepting. I figured I would work conscientiously, and that there was no reason why he wouldn't be satisfied with my services. Whatever the reasons that led me to make this decision on a whim, I accepted almost without hesitation:

- It's okay.

“Okay for what?” he asked, raising his eyebrows, as if the rest of the conversation had never happened.

– You pay me twenty percent more, and if my work doesn't satisfy you, you will do... whatever you want.

I honestly had no idea what I was getting into.

Julien smiled with satisfaction and settled back into his armchair, lighting a cigarette. Then he set about setting the rules of the game. As agreed, I would stay on site from Monday to Friday. I would have a single room and I would take my meals in the pantry with the house staff. Every Monday morning, I would report to his office and together we would set the week's objectives. On Friday, I would come to report to him on my work, which would allow him to apply, if necessary, the "additional clause" of our contract. This clause, he told me, would not be written and I was forbidden to disclose it to anyone, inside or outside the Manor. All in all, as I had guessed, it was nothing more than a completely secret sworn statement: nothing could guarantee him that I would actually comply with it, but deep down, I already knew that I would keep my word. Perhaps he was able to

sense it. In any case, he expressed no doubt about it, nor any threats about what he would do if I refused to submit to it.

Finally he specified that I should address him formally and call him "Monsieur", "Monsieur Julien" or "Master", depending on my preference.

As I left his office, I felt as if I had just emerged from a hazy, incoherent dream, and I felt exhausted as if I had had a bad night's sleep. Yet I never doubted for a moment that I had made the right choice.

Some time later, on a Sunday evening, I showed up at the Manor again, laden with two large suitcases. It was early spring, and the forest was less impressive with the sap-filled buds turning the trees green. The Manor also seemed more reassuring to me, already familiar with its two floors of equal windows, some of which were open to the cool of the evening. I was greeted again by the butler, who this time introduced himself as Edward. He led me down a few steps to enter a large kitchen located on the mezzanine level in relation to the vestibule, which was lit only by two high leaves overlooking the back courtyard. From there, we took four flights of steps through a small door to reach the bedrooms located under the roof. My room was the last one at the end of the row;

Edouard left me there with my two suitcases, a key and instructions to report to Julien's office at eight thirty the next day. The room was small, simple and comfortable.

A small wooden bed, a wardrobe, a narrow desk, a nightstand topped with a glass-shaded lamp that cast an old-fashioned glow. The moonlight falling through the attic window bathed everything in an unreal blue.

I slept poorly, waking up at dawn with the sound of birdsong rising from the forest. After using the shower on the landing, I went to the kitchen, guided by the smell of hot coffee and freshly baked bread. It was an authentic old kitchen, in the center of which sat a heavy solid wood table flanked by two matching benches. A large brick tiled worktop leaned against an old gray stone sink at the end. The dresser and the huge gas stove seemed to come from another age.

I was warmly welcomed by a young girl my age, whose name was Sarah.

Even when my stomach isn't in knots with first-day anxiety in a hazardous job, I'm not a very outgoing person: that day, I was incapable of anything other than listening to her silently while sipping the black coffee she had prepared for me. She told me about the Manor, how pleasant it was to live there, how difficult it was sometimes to work there, how important it was to conform exactly to the rules set by Julien (whom she called "Monsieur", even when she was talking about him). I listened to her attentively, trying to imagine what my interview with my new boss

would be like, how to maneuver in the murky waters of this situation. Nothing she told me suggested that Julien would dare raise his hand to his employees, under any circumstances, even if they were young and pretty... But since it was forbidden to talk about it, the hypothesis could not be completely ruled out.

Every morning, Sarah brought Julien a coffee, at exactly eight thirty, in a small porcelain coffee pot that she brought him on a tray. This ritual did not tolerate a minute of delay. I only had to follow her to present myself on time in front of my employer.

After much hesitation, I had opted for a less strict outfit than during our previous meeting. I wore a cotton blouse and a burgundy mid-length skirt, matching my ankle boots. I had gathered my long curly hair into a ponytail. Julien, as for him, was like the previous time in black jeans and a t-shirt. He ran a hand through his tousled black hair as he saw his coffee arrive with relief, as if he had just spent a sleepless night at his desk. He thanked Sarah who bowed and left without a word. Then he turned to me, looked at me silently for a moment – I was starting to get used to it – and finally, ordered me to sit down.

I had decided to adopt a waiting position, withdrawn, to see first what he expected of me. Obviously, he immediately set about destabilizing me.

– So, where do you plan to start? he asked me.

Fortunately, I had spent a good part of the previous three weeks asking myself the same question, turning over in every direction the little I knew about the work to be done. So I was able to answer him, calmly and without hesitation:

– I was thinking of making an initial quantitative estimate and starting the typology of the documents.

– Very well, and you will also present me with a classification plan.

I was speechless. The filing plan is the archivist's nirvana, the culmination of all things, the overall picture, perfectly coherent and ordered, which can only be built on the solid foundations of a meticulous and detailed analysis. No matter how much there was to deal with, in a week I would certainly not have enough time to get a good idea of the collection, much less to make a filing plan, even a draft. Otherwise, it would really be shoddy work. I told him so, and we embarked on an arduous negotiation. I had to argue with all my energy to get him to agree to lower his demands. He would only remove one task to add another in its place. Most of the time, he spoke in a categorical tone, his face closed; but from time to time I saw the shadow of a smile pass through his eyes, which gave me the impression of being a novice poker player who had been imprudent enough to engage in a game

against the master of bluffing. In the end, he required me to present him with an initial quantitative and thematic assessment of the collection, including the library.

I worked hard. The library was my domain; no one ever came there, except Edward or Sarah when they came to get me at mealtimes.

Marie, the cook, served us a hot dish with meat every lunchtime, and in the evening a more frugal meal with a soup that was always different. Apart from these times when I sat down with the other employees, I spent all my time in the library.

It was a high-ceilinged room, the openings of which were permanently veiled by heavy, dark velvet curtains. The back wall was occupied by these large windows and a stone fireplace. Along the other three walls, the room was divided in two vertically by a semicircular mezzanine resting on eight wooden pillars, and covered with shelves, above and below. I went through them armed with a pencil and a notepad on which I jotted down mostly numerical indications, and sometimes a reference or two to check later. The library was fascinating. Downstairs was the literature, a good part of which, I estimated at about twenty-five percent, was composed of erotic and licentious works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The rest were classics, mainly from the same period. The older texts were generally represented by nineteenth-century editions, with a few exceptions. Finally, I noticed a small section reserved for rare illustrated works, among which were the Fables of La Fontaine illustrated by Oudry, the Bible of Gustave Doré in its 1866 edition, or collections of poetry by Verlaine and Baudelaire augmented with original frontispieces by Félicien Rops. The bottom of the library thus contained three thousand to three thousand five hundred volumes, all bound. The mezzanine was more eclectic. It contained in particular books on science, biology and medicine, occult and freemason works, volumes of journals such as *l'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux*, *le Journal des savants*, or *la Plume*, whose series were complete until the mid-1930s before drying up abruptly. A fine history collection had been built up later, from the end of the sixties. Three bays, reserved for new acquisitions, were covered with unbound works, the most recent of which were from the year; there was everything there, including erotic works from the second half of the twentieth century, without any classification being perceptible. Finally, at the back to the right of the mezzanine, three bays carried the archives, arranged in boxes or files, with very little indication of their contents.

On Thursday morning, I realized that I had been so captivated by the work on the books that I had not yet touched the archives, which were nevertheless my main mission.

I began to open the first boxes, which contained a jumble of various documents, correspondence, photographs, handwritten notes, administrative and accounting documents...

I would need the two days I had left to sort this out.

That was without counting on the biting jokes that Julien has the secret of. I had not seen him once, not even crossed paths in the corridors, since Monday; I assumed he had been absent. For the other employees of the Manor, it made no difference. Julien inspired a little fear in them, but above all the greatest respect. None of them would have dreamed of questioning one of his orders, of appearing before him without him having asked for it himself, or of claiming any advantage. However, this remarkable climate of laborious obedience, each one working daily on the tasks assigned to him, had clearly not been obtained by force. It was his natural authority that earned him unquestioning obedience, and his thoughtfulness and sense of fairness that removed any desire to make demands. All had nothing but praise for their master, and I came to believe that no "corporal punishment" could be involved in this environment. Julien had perhaps simply made fun of me: I would probably hear no more about it.

I had to revisit this opinion when, on Thursday lunchtime, Julien burst into the kitchen where we were having lunch. Judging from the astonished faces of my classmates, this must not have been very common.

– Pauline, he called to me, I want to see you tomorrow at ten o'clock.

– Morning? I asked stupidly.

I couldn't believe he was cutting almost a day off my week: this wasn't bluffing anymore, this was cheating.

– Obviously, in the morning, he retorted.

I opened my mouth to protest, but he dissuaded me with a look. I didn't want to appear irreverent in front of the others, so I lowered my eyes and muttered:

– Yes sir.

All afternoon I struggled to try to advance my conclusions. But the material resisted me, I found no homogeneity in it, anxiety made me feverish and reduced my efficiency to nothing. I did not go to dinner: I was determined to work all night if necessary, so as not to let Julien triumph in such a petty trap. However, shortly after nine o'clock that evening, I was interrupted by Édouard who came to ask me to leave the premises.

- I can't, I answered him, I have work.

– I'm sorry but you have no choice, Pauline.

Mr. Julien will be receiving his guests here in a little while.

He wouldn't let you bother him.

Furious, I put away the box I was working on and returned to my room.

The next day, at ten o'clock sharp, I knocked on Julien's office door, dirty and disheveled, dressed in jeans and an oversized sweater, my hair disheveled and dark circles under my eyes.

I had gotten up a little before six o'clock to return to the library and try to finish my work. I had barely noticed the disorder that reigned there, and had thrown myself immediately on the archives. But if these four additional hours of work finished exhausting me and pushing my stress to its paroxysm, they did not prove sufficient to allow me to improve my knowledge of the collection. Julien began by reproaching me for my attire in a rather playful tone. At his invitation, I sat down opposite him, and he declared:

– Go ahead, I'm listening.

I gave him a summary of my notes, light enough to give the illusion of being homogeneous. He asked me a few additional questions about the book collection, which I answered without difficulty. When he approached the archives, I simply told him, looking him straight in the eye, that I had not had time to finish. He frowned:

– What? I thought I hired you as an archivist, right?

I stood silently, my eyes lowered, as he continued:

– If I understand correctly, you spent all your time wandering around the library, thinking that it would be time to rush through the archives later. I can't really let that go...

There it was: at that moment it seemed to me that all things had stubbornly converged so that I found myself in this situation. He stood up and I imitated him, in an almost involuntary movement, as if I were mounted on springs. I watched him slowly walk around his desk before passing silently behind me. I felt his presence at my back, and a violent shiver ran through me when he whispered, his mouth only a few centimeters from my ear:

– Pull your pants down to your knees.

I did so slowly, trying to keep my hands from shaking.

– Your panties too, he added a little louder.

This time I stood there motionless, frozen, unable to go any further.

"You don't want me to do it myself, do you?" he finally asked ironically.

In reality, nothing seemed more desirable to me than to let him do it. As my legs had more and more difficulty supporting my faltering weight, I leaned forward and held on to the edge of the desk with both hands. I felt Julien's fingers brush my hips, and a rush of heat overwhelmed me as he pushed my panties down my thighs. Then he placed a firm hand on the back of my neck to make me lean forward, and took a step back. A few seconds passed in palpable tension. Finally, his hand came down hard on my left buttock, tearing a moan from me. He spanked me powerfully for several minutes, hitting one buttock then the other regularly. I gritted my teeth, motionless, tense, making a point of honor not to flinch under the blows. The most severe ones took my breath away for a few seconds and made me dizzy as if my brain, overwhelmed by a rush of blood, was about to explode. Yet the most disturbing thing was not the pain; it was the sensation of feeling my sex, naked and so close to the cruel hand, which throbbed between my legs like a living heart, soaked with desire, agitated by uncontrollable spasms.

When the punishment stopped, I found myself hoping that something else would follow; but Julien ordered me to get dressed again and opened the door to invite me out. I gave him a fearful look, he responded with a smile, and quickly closed the door behind me.

The residual pain—not at all unbearable—was soon joined by a shame-tinged anger that overwhelmed me. I was unable to concentrate on anything, so I decided that I had earned my weekend. I quickly went to my room to get my things, jumped behind the wheel of my car, and drove home.

I shared a small two-story house with my mother in a village whose main attraction was its short distance from the motorway to Paris. My room overlooked the small garden and had all the eclectic charm of a sanctuary marked by the different stages of childhood and adolescence. The brightly colored wallpaper from the eighties was next to a pink carpet so thick that as a child I would lose my toys in it (which would then be vacuumed). As a teenager, I had repainted some of my furniture black and covered the wallpaper patterns with stickers of horses and cats, soon replaced by a beautiful collection of beer labels.

A few posters of rock bands were added later, as well as brightly colored Indian hangings.

As a student, I had replaced rockers with a Klimt, a Chagall, and a Bosch. Today, all these traces of my personal history composed, through their improbable cohabitation, a strange but reassuring universe. I spent several hours there, staring

at the ceiling and thinking, trying to decide whether I was angry or amused, hurt or excited, humiliated by what I had suffered, or flattered by the trouble Julien had taken to achieve his goals.

If my body was apparently still, the agitation that inhabited me was the most extreme. At intervals, it manifested itself by a series of involuntary contractions of my lower abdomen, which seemed to want to remember the sensations felt in Julien's office. My reason was powerless to control it. Nourished by the discharges of adrenaline that overwhelmed me each time I relived the scene in my mind, my excitement swelled to the unbearable. Without taking the trouble to hide under the duvet, I let my hand slide between my legs, slip under the elastic fabric of my panties and go down to the hot and humid slit that betrayed my desire. My wet finger went back up to rest on the pleasure button and in a throbbing circular movement, encouraged the tension that made my legs tremble. I panted, I closed my eyes, a drop of sweat ran down my temple. I kept the pressure, my hand moving faster and faster, I bit my lips, and when I heard Julien's deep, sensual voice in my head ordering me to lower my panties, a surge of energy overwhelmed me and the orgasm made my pelvis undulate uncontrollably. While savoring the ebb and flow of these involuntary contractions, I sucked my fingers to try the slightly acrid taste of my pleasure, with a slight disgust for this stringy substance, which I forced myself to lick as if to punish myself for having secreted it.

These masturbation sessions brought me only temporary relief. After several of these solitary pleasures, I was exhausted, crushed with cramps, and always devoured by the same sensation of disembodied hunger.

The second week was just like the first. During our interview on Monday, despite all my efforts to be firm, Julien gave me no room to maneuver. The more vehement I was in my arguments, the more inflexible he was in his demands. I left his office with a completely unrealistic work schedule, having obtained in exchange only the promise that our interview on Friday would not take place before four o'clock. In addition, Julien adopted a new strategy whose aim, as always, was to destabilize me. As much as he had let me work in peace the first week, this time he put constant pressure on me. Every time I saw him, he asked me how my work was progressing; he came to the library once or twice a day to check that I was indeed on the archives. And it worked. I had lost all confidence in myself. The documents seemed innumerable and hermetic to me, especially the account registers which did not correspond to anything known. More than half of the administrative documents were coded; there were no names or dates, only strings of characters in columns that were impossible to interpret at first glance. When Friday came, I had not advanced an inch.

"I told you I wouldn't make it," I pointed out to Julien.

"That's no excuse," he retorted, "you know the price."

He spanked me harder and longer than the previous time, arousing the same contradictory feelings in me. I left his office with my cheeks red with shame and tears in my eyes. What hurt me most was not the treatment he had inflicted on me but the certainty of having totally deserved it. My work was not progressing, I was not achieving anything, I doubted myself and my ability to produce anything worthwhile. I suffered from not feeling up to it, and from knowing that Julien's methods would not change anything. He would certainly end up firing me, and this certainty brought me down more than anything else.

In fact, Julien clearly had only one goal: to catch me out so that he could take the pleasure of punishing me; and I couldn't do anything about it. I was showing the best will, and he the worst bad faith: we were going nowhere.

I turned this problem over and over in my mind for a good part of the night from Sunday to Monday, which I spent at my mother's. I was too anxious to sleep; it made little difference that I did not show up at the Manor until Monday morning, at dawn. I arrived there armed with a new and single resolution: I would not let myself be discouraged again. If I could not prevent him from arriving at the end of the week with a good reason to fight, I decided to go with the flow: if he wanted a reason to punish me, I would give him one.

But not at any price. I wanted my work as an archivist to advance. Our interview that morning lasted barely ten minutes. I accepted everything Julien asked, even the most fanciful, without setting any conditions. He let me go, frowning with a concerned look.

I immediately set about superbly ignoring the instructions he had given me. I had to start from scratch, start over. I spent the first two days doing research on the Internet. I used the computer in the outbuildings, a relaxation area above the kitchen where we had a small living room with a desk and TV, a smoking room and a bathroom with a jacuzzi. Marie, the cook, pampered me all the time, bringing me coffee, cookies or herbal tea depending on the time of day. On the third and fourth days, I went to Versailles, where I continued my research at the municipal library, then at the departmental archives in Montigny-le-Bretonneux. On Friday, I sat down at the computer again to write my file.

Gabriel Armand Andringer was born in Houdan in 1861. His mother came from a family of farmers who had become rich by breeding the famous Houdan chicken. Through his father, he inherited two generations of drapery business, a shop in Rambouillet and one in Dreux. In 1882, he married Agnès de la Charmoie,

the only daughter and last descendant of an aristocratic family in decline. The good financial situation of his business allowed him to invest a substantial sum in Agnès' family home.

This one owned several hectares of forest near Saint-

Léger-en-Yvelines in the forest of Rambouillet. There was an eighteenth-century manor there that was in danger of falling into ruin and was completely rebuilt, imitating the original style, between 1889 and 1892. In 1895, Gabriel Armand Andringer de la Charmoie (as he now called himself) opened a drapery shop with a gable on the street in Paris, rue Bergère in the ninth arrondissement. It served as a bridgehead for a fairly intense export business, particularly to England. This business allowed Gabriel Armand, Agnès and their three sons Philippe,

Jacques and Clément (born respectively in 1883, 1887 and 1890) to live a very reasonable lifestyle. Gabriel Armand was a bibliophile and passionate about contemporary literature. But he was also particularly interested in the licentious literature that circulated more or less under the counter. The reissue of Jules Gay's work, *Bibliographie des ouvrages relatifs à l'amour, aux femmes, au mariage, et des livres facétieux etc.*, cites in its fourth volume dated 1900 the library of Gabriel Andringer de la Charmoie as one of the reference sources for recent works. We can assume that J. Lemonnyer, a bookseller in Rouen and author of the reissue of Jules Gay's bibliography (whose original edition dates from 1861) probably had access to the Manoir library before 1899. At that date,

Gabriel Andringer de la Charmoie would therefore have already started to hold receptions in his manor for erotic evenings.

[The Manor archives will confirm the date.] In addition, the

Louis Perceau's later bibliography of the erotic novel in the nineteenth century (1930) also mentions the Manoir, albeit in veiled terms. The sale of the Louis Perceau collection in 2007 mentions a work by "P. Andringer" dated 1902, which was probably published in a confidential edition; it is entitled *Les Malheurs et Déconvenues de Mlle Pinson, ou le premier coup de martinet...* This suggests that at that date, Gabriel Andringer's eldest son, aged 19, was ready to take up the torch.

[Not yet found the work in question in the library.]

Gabriel Andringer died in 1934. Philippe continued to live in the Manor with his family: his wife Catherine, with whom he had two sons and a daughter. His youngest brother Clément died in the army in 1916, at the age of 26. He had no children. It is unknown what happened to Jacques (G.'s second son).

A.)

I presented myself to Julien at four o'clock on Friday, and handed him a copy of my file, hot off the printer. I stood in front of his desk, silent, waiting out the storm. He glanced quickly at the few typed pages, then asked me:

- What is this ?

– These are biographical elements concerning your ancestor, the founder of the Manor. We can consider them as contextual elements. When I start the inventory, this will allow me to verify...

– Wait, he cut in. That's not what I asked you at all. Where did you find this information? In the archives?

I told him about my journey to gather the various sources, the bibliography at the Versailles library, the civil status at the departmental archives. Julien stared at me, dumbfounded. I don't think he had imagined for a single second that I would go so far (both literally and figuratively). He stood up slowly and I felt a pang in the pit of my stomach; it was my courage beginning to ebb in the face of the imminent threat. I pulled myself together.

- Look, I know this isn't what you asked me, but you were planning on beating me anyway. So I don't see the difference.

Putting my words into action, I placed my hands on the edge of the desk and leaned down, positioning myself to receive the punishment.

With a quick hand, I lifted the light skirt I had chosen on purpose and revealed my already bare ass, ready to be spanked. Julien raised his eyebrows at this sight. Perfectly calm, he moved the two piles of files that were in front of me, so as to clear the desk. Then, with a little mocking smile, he undid his belt while saying:

– You don't see the difference, but you will feel it.

He removed his belt and folded it in two, forming a loop that he held in his left hand. He walked around the desk and had me lie down with my upper body on the cherry wood surface. He took both of my hands, and clasped them firmly behind my back, holding them at the wrists with his right hand. Finally, he began to hit my buttocks with the belt, gently at first, then harder and harder. I moaned and jumped under the blows, each one causing a small explosion of pain in my temples. Finally he stopped; I waited in relief for him to loosen his grip on my wrists, instead he tightened his grip and pinned me to the desk before declaring cynically:

– Be careful, this is going to hurt now.

I answered with an incredulous grunt, and he brought his belt down hard across the middle of my thighs. The pain overwhelmed me and I cried out, unable to hold still as he continued to strike the fragile skin of my crotch. I struggled as much as I could under his iron grip. He urged me to calm down and be reasonable, but he didn't stop striking, deftly aiming for the most sensitive spot where thighs, buttocks, and the tender flesh of my sex meet.

When he finally released me, I turned to him, wiping my tears and rubbing my burning buttocks. He looked at me smiling, the belt still in his hand, with the bright eyes of a mischievous child. I was surprised to feel no humiliation or shame. The pain far exceeded what he had inflicted on me the previous times, and yet, I felt strong, and proud of having had the courage to go through with it.

- Come on, get lost, or I'll do it again.

I didn't need to be told twice.

I found him on Monday morning, in the same place but in a much better mood. I was determined to continue my strategy, and I expected to have to face a new tactic from Julien to make me lose my cool. On the contrary, he welcomed me by offering me to share his coffee, and he said to me:

- I really appreciated what you did last week.

I grimaced, wondering if he was talking about my work or the nerve I'd shown him.

- From what point of view? I asked.

- Both, he replied with a smile, the substance and the form. I read your file this weekend and I find that it opens up interesting avenues. What are you going to do now?

I was a little surprised that he would shake my hand in this way, but I decided to answer honestly. I explained that I intended to start an inventory of the oldest pieces, without reclassifying them for the moment, in order to see if I could connect them to the contextual elements.

In one week, I thought I could process two to four boxes.

- Okay, he said simply.

- I mean, that's really what I'm going to do, I clarified.

I wanted to avoid any ambiguity; I had to make him understand that I was not ready to play his absurd game of artificially inflating the workload to open the door to a sanction, however exciting it might be.

- Yes, I understood, he replied.

– So what? I get a week off, right? I heard myself reply, provocative.

My insolence made him smile. He leaned forward on the desk and said to me in a confidential tone:

– Listen, Pauline. We're starting to get to know each other a little bit, the two of us. I've seen what you're capable of. You, given the plan you made me last week, are starting to understand how I work. So let's stop beating around the bush. You're going to do your job, properly, which you're clearly more than capable of doing. When you come see me on Friday, I'll decide whether I want to beat you or not.

I stared at him through gritted teeth, aware that the terms of the contract had changed. Yet I felt a real sense of relief at the thought of being able to work without that sword of Damocles hanging over my head. And I knew that deep down, I would have been deeply disappointed and frustrated if he had simply given up on those weekly spankings.

“As you wish,” I said before leaving the room.

I returned to work in a state of mind of serenity that allowed me to be extremely lucid and efficient. I worked in the library mezzanine, opening boxes, deciphering documents and taking countless notes that I transcribed every evening on the computer in the commons. Julien continued to come see me daily, but always at the same time, without trying to surprise me. He sat next to me, on the floor of the mezzanine, his back leaning against the wooden balusters, and I showed him the interesting pieces that I had marked with strips of yellow and blue paper.

[Pre-inventory of the archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie.

Correspondences.

– Letters addressed to Gabriel Armand Andringer and copies of letters sent (1882-1934) – Box B1.

– Letters addressed to Philippe Andringer de la Charmoie and copies of letters sent (1899-1967) – Boxes B2 and B3.

– Other correspondence: letters addressed to Agnès de la Charmoie, Catherine Hubert, wife of Andringer, Jacques Andringer de la Charmoie. – Box B4.

– Correspondence and papers relating to Clément Andringer de la Charmoie: letters addressed to Clément, letters addressed by Clément to his family from the front, plus two war diaries (1902-1916). – Box B5.]

Excerpts from correspondence attesting to the existence of sadomasochistic receptions at the Manoir from 1898.

Extract from a letter from Marie-Amélie de Fortange, dated April 3, 1898, addressed to Agnès de la Charmoie:

“Dearest,

I heard that your family home had become a place of debauchery that could not be named. I met Mrs. Masserot in Deauville (...) who told me worse things about your husband (...) It is even said that he practices perversions inspired by the so-called English vice (...) entire evenings on this theme are organized! Please, disabuse me (...) »

Excerpt from a letter from Raoul d'Entremont, dated December 21, 1898, addressed to Gabriel Andringer:

" My friend,

What a success your Friday evening was. I think that that snooty S* * * will never dare to question your taste for the most refined entertainment again! You should have seen his expression when you introduced him to little Fanny. (...) She had been remarkably prepared. I hope that you will soon invite us to share such spicy and guilty pleasures within your walls (...) »

Excerpt from a letter signed “Maria”, dated July 3, 1899, addressed to Philippe:

"My dear, my little Philippe (...) I will see you this Saturday at the Manor. I expect you to always be as charming and attentive in serving my demands. (...) You know my taste for perfection when it comes to obeying my whims. If you disappoint me, I will make you regret it by all the means you fear (...)"

Extract from a letter from Pierre D* * * dated September 3, 1904, addressed to Philippe:

" Sir,

You know how bored I am in Rouen and how happy I would be to come and visit you again at La Charmoie (...) I have several draft texts, some of the pains of which I would like to share with you. They are of the taste that you like. (...) You know how attached your father is to the demands of wealth that he mentioned during my last visit. However, I am sure that if you were to grant me the grace of an invitation, he would probably not have the heart to show me the door. (...) »]

– You know what, Julien said to me, putting down the last letter, it makes me want to spank you.

I was immersed in my notes and pretended to pay only limited attention to his remark. He watched me for a few seconds, then threw himself on me, grabbing

me by the arm, and roughly flipping me onto his knees. I struggled like a devil; taken by surprise, not having had time to prepare myself, I was unable to let him do it. As he struggled to lower my pants, I began to shout:

– No! No! You can't do that!

To my surprise, he let go of me immediately, and I backed away quickly until I was backed up against the shelves, heart pounding, panting, staring at him fiercely.

– Oh yeah? he asked calmly. And why couldn't I do that?

His detached cynicism froze me, bringing me back to the analysis of the situation. My attitude suddenly seemed weak and contemptible, far from the commitment I had believed myself capable of towards him.

– Um... what if someone came? I ventured timidly.

– Don't make fun of me. Nobody ever comes here. You know that very well.

I looked down, feeling the red rising to my cheeks to my dismay.

– Excuse me. Of course, you do what you want.

"I like that better," he said gently, and holding out a hand toward me, he beckoned me to come closer.

I joined him on my knees, and unbuttoned my pants to lower them before lying on his thighs, my bare buttocks, offered to his desire, my back arched in submission. Instead of hitting, his hand slowly placed itself on the globes of flesh, and began to caress them delicately, drawing curves and arabesques between the fall of my kidneys and the top of my thighs. I was in torment, feeling the desire that had been devouring me since the first time he had touched me intensify a hundredfold. I let out a soul-crushing moan, and I could almost hear him smile as he asked me mischievously:

- Well? Is there something wrong?

I arched my back under the warmth of his caresses, and he responded with a series of firm slaps, delivered with the flat of his hand, which only increased my excitement. As soon as I began to bend under the pain, he resumed his caresses, delicately brushing the reddened areas, bringing relief to my inflamed posterior. I sighed, moved, and he began to hit vigorously again. This little game continued for several minutes, until my ass became burning with pain and desire. Suddenly, his hand slid longer over my skin, lingering on the crack of my buttocks which it followed downwards, and he slid a finger along my slit to finally place it on my clitoris which he teased gently. Almost instantly, a wave of rare intensity contracted

my sex, and the orgasm carried me away with an incredible force. I screamed, then in a fit of hysteria I bit down with all my might on his thigh. He swore, grabbed me by the hair, and pulled me back violently. The next moment, he pressed himself against my back with his whole body, kissing my neck, caressing my breasts with a hand he had slipped under my T-shirt. He gently straightened me up and leaned me against the library railing. I heard him undo his belt and a shiver of fear ran through me, but I was too weakened by pain and pleasure to make the slightest movement. I felt his burning hand rest on the inside of my thigh; he lifted me slightly and pushed his swollen and tense sex into my belly. I screamed again, a cry of relief this time. He fucked me hard, holding my hair raised on the top of my head and caressing my breasts, and his animal breath amplified on the back of my neck when he unloaded. So he withdrew, got dressed, and after a furtive caress in my hair as a thank you, he left the library quickly and without a word, leaving me alone, outside of all reality and out of breath. Lying on the parquet floor of the mezzanine, I stared at the moldings of the ceiling which drew improbable volutes like my brain. I was unable to align two coherent thoughts. I fell asleep.

This episode did not help improve my performance.

I was physically and mentally exhausted, and filled with doubts and questions.

Julien seemed to be deliberately seeking complexity. In the end, things could have been simple: he liked me, he would have told me he wanted to fuck me, I probably would have let him. (I defy anyone to be able to refuse him something.) Instead, he had started by scaring me, then cornering me, pushing me to rebel, scaring me again... and now this. I didn't know how to describe what had just happened to me. I had to admit that I had taken unprecedented pleasure in it, but the idea of complying without a fight, almost voluntarily, was unbearable. I turned the scene over and over in my head, trying to convince myself that I had only obeyed his orders without having a choice.

Having managed to motivate myself to work despite everything, I found myself on Thursday evening in the library mezzanine, lying on the floor among the open and scattered boxes of archives, when I heard the large door open and a group of people enter. It was not far from ten o'clock and I realized that I must have dozed off for a moment. I recognized Julien's voice guiding his guests, asking them to sit on the armchairs and sofas that furnished the center of the room. Without getting up, I slowly rolled to the side to look between the balusters of the mezzanine. I saw Julien drop into a large red armchair, and resting his arms on the immense armrests, calmly light a cigarette. Apart from him, the assembly was composed of three men, all dressed in black, and two women, one of whom wore a

leather outfit, and the other a black silk negligee. I first noticed the oldest of the three men, who must have been between forty-five and fifty years old, as he settled into a sofa to Julien's right. He exuded an astonishing presence; his gestures were as if amplified by an excessive and elegant slowness, he occupied the space as if the air around him were thicker and denser. I tore my gaze away from this intriguing character to turn it towards the second man, a small, pot-bellied gentleman with a receding hairline, who was holding the girl in the leather skirt by the hand, and settled himself awkwardly into a seat out of my sight. Finally, the third companion, the youngest, placed himself in the center of the room with the other girl, who was also very young, perhaps eighteen or nineteen, and he introduced her to the assembly. He spoke in a low voice, so that I did not hear what he said to them, but I saw him undress her completely, with the exception of two leather bracelets that she wore on her wrists, turn her around, and lead her to one of the pillars that supported the mezzanine. I understood the purpose of the iron ring that equipped each of the pillars, when he made her raise her arms, her back turned towards the audience. Everyone watched him silently. When he had tied her up, the young master grabbed a riding crop and began to whip her on the buttocks, each blow drawing a red mark on the white flesh. The girl wiggled and let out little high-pitched cries, which I found a little ridiculous, each time the riding crop touched her. After a few minutes, Julien got up and approached the young man. He took the instrument from her hands and reproached her for only hitting with the leather end, which according to him was not painful enough.

"You have to hit with the whole length, like this," he said, and, putting his words into action, he lashed the girl's buttocks with such force that I jumped.

The girl screamed in pain, in a way that was no longer ridiculous, and I gritted my teeth for her. Julien handed the riding crop back to the young man and turned to go back to his place, but at that moment, he looked up and our eyes met for a few hundredths of a second. I stepped back as quickly and yet discreetly as I could, hoping that my imagination was playing tricks on me and that he had not seen me.

As the steady crack of the whips resumed, I couldn't help but look again to see what was happening.

Julien hadn't sat down again: he was whispering something in his older companion's ear. Then I saw him cross the library towards the stairs to the mezzanine, and I fell back on my back, my breath taken away by anxiety. A moment later, he was crouching in front of me, his brow furrowed, a hand running nervously through his hair.

– I'm sorry, I apologized, I fell asleep, and I didn't see the time, and...

– Pauline, be quiet, he interrupted in a low voice.

I obeyed him through gritted teeth, burning to find any argument that could distract his attention from me, but unable to truly resist him. He remained silent for what seemed an eternity, his gaze fixed on me, thoughtful.

Then he said in a firm voice:

– Take off your clothes.

I widened my eyes, considering protesting, but he didn't give me the chance, standing up and leaning on the railing to watch what was happening down below. I was wearing my archivist outfit, dust version: old, worn jeans with white dirt on the knees, a T-shirt that was too big for me decorated with a beer brand logo, and a pair of black high-tops. I could well imagine the faces of his guests, if they saw him coming back down accompanied like that, and since I didn't particularly want to embarrass him, I quickly pulled the T-shirt over my head, unlaced my shoes and removed my pants. When he looked at me again, I was left in only my white lace underwear set. He smiled and added:

- Completely.

I stood petrified at this new demand, wondering how far he would dare go, and how far I would dare follow him.

He insisted gently, and when I still didn't move, he repeated "come on" with a little impatience in his voice, which scared me enough to unhook my bra and slide my panties down my legs as quickly as I could. He was watching me quietly, visibly satisfied with the spectacle, when a voice called out to him from below.

"I'm coming," he said, leaning over the railing, "but send me a rope."

He was holding it in his hands when he turned to me, a long white rope, smooth, supple as if it were alive.

A lump of anxiety formed in my throat and tears welled up in my eyes at the thought of revealing myself in front of these strangers. Julien reached out to grab my wrist, and in a panic, I abruptly backed away out of his reach. After this reflex, I feared a reaction of impatience, anger, perhaps violence. But he simply took a step back, looked at me with a frown and let out a long sigh. Julien has a gift for making anyone who dares to disappoint him feel guilty. In any case, this calm and measured reaction made me feel uncomfortable. I gave him a pleading look, hoping that he would understand that I didn't want to... But with determination, without a sudden gesture, he looked me in the eyes and murmured:

– Everything will be fine. Trust me.

I looked down and let him come closer. First his fingers brushed mine gently, then I felt his hand wrap around mine in an enveloping caress, gradually taking possession of my palm and moving up towards my wrist. Julien kept his eyes fixed on mine, and I watched him do it, hypnotized, incredulous, unable to react. I saw the rope wrap around my wrist, be knotted, then encircle my other hand. He put the other end of the rope around his, brushed my cheek to encourage me, and went down the stairs, dragging me, tied up and completely naked, behind him.

We crossed the room to his deep red armchair, next to which he threw a square cushion before ordering me to kneel on it. He shortened the rope so that I placed my hands on the armrest, at the height of my face. He then leaned towards me, and with his lips a few centimetres from my hair, he ordered me to watch the scene that was playing out in the centre of the library. I almost reluctantly turned my gaze towards the little balding man who was introducing his companion in a somewhat ceremonious tone by giving her a name that sounded like a pseudonym. He indicated her age and that she had been submissive for two years, before thanking Julien for having admitted them both, and inviting the masters present to dispose of her as they wished. Julien merely nodded, and the little man in turn tied the girl to the pillar of the mezzanine, from which the other had been freed. The other two men came to stand around her, and all three began to whip her, alternately, with various instruments. They only stopped to caress her hips, breasts, buttocks, or to insert their fingers into her sex or anus before placing them on her lips – then the punishment would start again. I watched her writhe under the blows, moaning with pleasure, with a little envy even if I didn't want to admit it to myself. I jumped all the same when Julien whispered in my ear:

– Then it's your turn.

– But I don't want that...

– Shh, he cut in. I told you to trust me. Be quiet.

I closed my eyes and rested my forehead on the velvet of the chair, trying to relax, to breathe slowly and deeply. The girl they were taking screamed several times, but I resisted the urge to look, afraid that if I saw what they were capable of, it would make my anxiety go up a notch.

When Julien stood up, I knew the moment had come, and a strange serenity came over me as I stood to follow him.

He did not introduce me to his acolytes.

Without a word, he led me not to the pillar, but to a large red velvet ottoman in the center of the room. He stood in front of me, looked at me for a moment as if he were trying to assess me, then to my surprise, he untied my hands.

I silently questioned him with my eyes; he responded with a gesture, motioning for me to kneel before him. I obeyed with reluctance and a certain self-disgust, reflecting that this was already the second time I had accepted this degrading posture. But when I was seated, these doubts abandoned me and gave way to a powerful determination.

Julien discreetly showed me the riding crop he held in his right hand, and I nodded, both to show him that I had seen it, and as a sign of assent to the ordeal that awaited me. He slowly walked around me, while I settled myself on the ottoman, my ass raised, my legs spread, my back arched, and my hands on my head holding back my hair (or it was my hair that must have been holding back my hands...) An extraordinary fear gripped my stomach, but I felt my sex throbbing hotly between my legs, in full view of everyone.

Julien cracked the whip severely on my buttocks with a loud noise, slowly, spacing out the blows regularly, about ten times. I bit with all my strength into the upholstery of the pouf, my fingers tangled in my hair, motionless under the blows. Not a sound passed my lips. Julien paused briefly, but I didn't move because I felt that he wasn't finished. I caught my breath and tried to prepare myself for what was to come. But even when you're not taken by surprise, the pain is intense, searing. The whip resumed its loud dance in Julien's hand. It took all my willpower to stay in place, not to try to avoid the blows. I felt floods of salty tears wetting my face. A second dozen, and Julien stopped.

– It's lovely, said a male voice. Can we taste it?

I shuddered, ready to flinch, to struggle, and to fight if an unknown hand were to lay upon me. But I didn't need to come to that.

– No, Julien said definitively. That's enough for tonight. The session is over.

I remained motionless for several minutes, my face buried in the crook of my arms, listening attentively to the sounds around me. The hosts left the library, greeting Julien and thanking him for the evening. Finally, silence fell over the room plunged into semi-darkness, and I felt Julien's hand on my arm, gently pulling me up. I looked at him, trying not to think about my face distorted by tears, but he smiled at me, indifferent to my defeated appearance, and he ran a tender hand through my hair. Rummaging in one of the chests under the mezzanine, he took out a sort of silk cape with a hood, which he covered me with from head to

toe, and he took my hand to guide me out of the library, towards the monumental staircase that stood on the left, the steps of which I had never climbed.

[Pre-inventory of the archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie.

Documents relating to the construction and development work of the Manor (1889-1967) – Box B6.

Maps and plans (1882-1967) – Box C1. Cadastral plans of the Charmoie estate (1887, 1904). Construction projects for the Manor: plans and elevations (1882-1889).

Final project by Louis Delvaux (1888). Various plans of the Manor and the estate (1892-1967).]

In 1882, at the time of the marriage of Gabriel Armand Andringer and Agnès de la Charmoie, the young couple did not live in the Manor, but in the Andringer town house in Rambouillet. The state of the Manor at that time was deplorable. Gabriel wrote in 1883 to his friend Raoul d'Entremont (a letter of which we have a copy in Gabriel's correspondence, box B1): "The manor threatens ruin from all sides.

Wild grass has invaded the steps of the porch and even inside the house. (...) When it rains, water seeps in everywhere, not only through the frames, but also through the roof to the point that it runs down the central staircase into the living rooms (...) The west wing is blocked off by wooden panels, we never go there, I think it is in unimaginable disorder and no doubt the upper floor is even open to the sky (...) »

Between 1882 and 1889, Gabriel Andringer developed several reconstruction projects and had plans and specifications drawn up by various architects. He finally chose the Rouen architect Louis Delvaux. In the final contract with him, it was specified that the Manor would be restored "according to the original taste of the façade", that is to say in the eighteenth-century style, in brick and stone. In reality, the West wing was so dilapidated that it had to be completely rebuilt. Gabriel Andringer took advantage of this to let his imagination run wild in the interior design of the central body and the West wing. He planned a certain number of half-floors, hidden passages and trompe-l'oeil doors that would allow one to move around discreetly in the West wing and the outbuildings. The west wing also houses the library with its mezzanine, for which Gabriel Andringer himself drew the plans and sketched the details of the sculptures for the panels between the bays, as well as the capitals of the eight wooden pillars. Some of these figures, pseudo-Gothic gargoyles in scabrous postures, seem to have been inspired by Viollet le Duc's *Dictionnaire de l'Architecture* (1854 – bib. bay 1A). Gabriel

Andringer's drawings appear at the beginning of his notebooks (box B7). He also had the monumental spiral staircase built at the end of the west wing, and the luxurious suites on the first floor. In the central section, he fitted out the office, the common areas and the servants' bedrooms, all still used for this purpose today. The work in the east was limited to interior fittings and the repair of the roof.

The next major works were carried out in 1938 by Philippe Andringer de la Charmoie, Gabriel Andringer's son, and mainly concerned the "special development of the cellars". The documents (estimates, contracts and invoices) are extremely discreet about the nature of this "special" development. According to the plans, the cellars are accessed by a staircase opposite the entrance to the library next to Julien's office. They consist of three vaulted rooms in a row.

The third and final (?) major campaign of works took place in 1964. At that time, the Manor was the subject of a complex financial arrangement that involved separating it into two independent parts. Léon, Philippe's youngest son, accepted as a donation half corresponding to the East wing (according to the text of the donation, which also mentions donations of real estate to Philippe's two other children as compensation), while the West wing remained assigned to "hotel activities" (as the documents soberly describe it). At that time, the East wall of the vestibule that divides the Manor in two was erected (this was already the case on the upper floors, again according to the plans). The interior layout of the East was completely overhauled. The only passage that remains between the two halves of the Manor is in the kitchen on the mezzanine .]

At the top of the stairs, we entered a warm and comfortable hallway. The sconces cast a golden light that blended into the blue-gray of the carpet and walls, where oak doors cut out dark openings.

Julien led me to the last door at the end of the corridor, took a small key out of his pocket and opened it.

His room was large but simply furnished: on the left a chest and a door that opened onto a small white-tiled bathroom; on the right, a large four-poster bed without a curtain, covered with a blue-patterned bedspread. Julien had locked the door behind him.

He pushed me to the bed and laid me on my back. I winced as my bruised buttocks pressed against the bed covers, but I refrained from protesting. He removed the cape, then with a slow, measured, but at the same time precise and inexorable gesture, he spread my thighs to contemplate my sex swollen with desire, before leaning down to place his lips on it, then his tongue, which he delicately slid over the most sensitive areas, just above the skin. The pleasure shook me with involuntary jolts, which he controlled by holding me firmly with

both hands. He first placed his tongue at the tip of the triangle of my intimate flesh, where he slid it so gently that I barely felt it, and yet the shocks of pleasure it imprinted on my body contracted the muscles of my legs to the point of pain. He then firmed up his caresses, slowly circling the button of my clitoris; the sensation intensified, and as I held my breath and contracted with all my strength so as not to lose its delights, I felt it rise and transform, becoming a blurred and invasive impression, which was no longer at all localized in the sole seat of his caresses, but inhabited me entirely with its voluptuousness. Several times, when my pleasure seemed about to explode, he slowed down and diverted his attentions to delay its apotheosis. The tremors that agitated my legs betrayed my feverish impatience, the impression that I had passed to the other side of an invisible line that marked the limit between controllable reality and pure ecstasy, the certainty that if he stopped I would die. He tasted me until I orgasmed, until I writhed in my cries and in his hands, stunned by the violent intensity of the pleasure he had just granted me. Then he lay down against me on the bed, watched me catch my breath, and ordered me to undress him. I knelt down next to him, and with the fervor of gratitude, I removed all his clothes one by one. Then guided by his firm hand placed in my hair, and still kneeling on the bed, I took his penis in my mouth. I savored his sex under my tongue which licked, turned, followed the contours of his glans, I sucked it with my mouth, with so much pleasure that I could have continued forever if he had not interrupted me. Still handling me firmly, he laid me back down on the bed and penetrated me forcefully, holding my wrists above my head with one hand. Thus restrained, I let myself be overwhelmed by pleasure, all the while observing him who was enjoying himself in turn.

We were lying on the bed, naked, facing each other; my mind was completely empty, my body satisfied. Julien looked at me and ran his index finger over my skin, from hip to shoulder, from shoulder to hip, in a repetitive and throbbing motion. After a while, without moving or changing his expression, he murmured:

– Pauline, go back to your room.

I had closed my eyes and was breathing deeply under his soothing caresses. As he did not stop the back and forth of his hand, I remained motionless, tasting the pleasure of so much softness, when suddenly he gave me a tremendous slap on the top of the thigh. I straightened up with a jump, with a cry of surprise and protest.

“I told you to go back to your room,” he repeated.

– Excuse me, but you didn't seem to mean what you said!

- An order is an order. Go away.

He lay on his back and stared at the ceiling; it seemed as if he might suddenly burn his eyes just by looking at me. I reluctantly left the shelter of the four-poster bed, covered myself with the silk hood, and silently left his room.

The next day, a little cooled by so much rudeness, I showed my disagreement by giving up going to work, and I slept until noon. I also did not show up at Julien's office for our weekly professional meeting.

Besides, he didn't ask me to ask either. I needed answers and looked for them, as I often do, in books.

I borrowed two books from the library. The first was a crumpled paperback called *Le manuel du SM*. The second was a hardback edition of several texts by Georges Bataille. I took them home and spent most of the night from Friday to Saturday reading, alternating Bataille's furious poetry with the insipid entries of the unknown master who listed the suggestions for tests with as much imagination and lyricism as a dictionary. I was appalled by the sordidness of this little book, but even more so by its ability to arouse in me intense fevers, which I extinguished with one hand between my legs, biting my lip and fantasizing about Julien's mouth and hands. Bataille, on the other hand, reached into my soul, savagely, each of his sentences transporting me to a purely intellectual voluptuousness. I read quickly, trying to hide beneath the music of the words the raw stuffiness of the situations he was staging. At times, I felt as if I were seeing the Manor in its former finery, and in the exhaustion of the pleasure I had inflicted on myself, the past and the present seemed to merge.

However, the usefulness of the little manual was not limited to arousing my fever. I also discovered that SM was nothing like the chaotic jungle I had first imagined. It was a universe of rules, contracts and commitments, a little cynical perhaps, but whose proponents were at least as obsessed with security and maniacs for classification as librarians. The book gave me some insights, as well as entry points to websites where I completed my basic documentation on the precautions to take when embarking on this type of relationship. Having connected to a forum intended for the exchange of advice between novice and experienced submissives, I tried to find out if Julien was known in the field and what his reputation was. However, while my interlocutors had been quite accommodating when it came to giving me advice on the best way to choose my safeword, they fell into an alarming silence when I mentioned the name Julien Andringer.

Apparently, they all knew him; but he inspired enough fear in them to dissuade them from giving even the beginning of an opinion on him. Refusing to let myself be unduly worried by this type of omen, I nevertheless resolved to exercise a little caution with him.

[Archives of the Manor of Charmoie.

Personal notebooks of Gabriel Armand Andringer. Box B7.

Excerpts from notebook no. 3 (around 1900?)

« (...)

It would be extremely damaging [to the receptions at the Manor, Editor's note 1] if we were to exercise our passions on subjects who are too young, or uncertain as to the commitments they are making by joining our circle (...)
Consequently, I would recommend that we take care to establish with certainty all the following facts:

1. the subject is at least eighteen years old, failing which he cannot be brought to share our pleasures, except as a simple spectator.
2. the subject has expressed his consent, explicitly, to all the tests to which he agrees to submit (...) this consent must be given in the presence of witnesses. The names of said witnesses will be recorded in the register.
3. the subject has a secret word, which the English call a safeword, the pronunciation of which immediately results in the cessation of any test, even one that appears innocuous.

However, the use of the safeword will be subject to one of the following sanctions, at the subject's choice: either he will receive a compensatory punishment, in the form of a test that will be commonly judged more difficult or more painful than the one he refused; or he will be permanently excluded from our circle.

"It appeared to me that we could no longer, for obvious security reasons, tolerate the exercise of sadistic tests by masters who have not experienced for themselves the conditions of submission that they impose on their slaves. (...) For the most part, we have the open-mindedness and the complacency to sometimes exchange roles in order to taste both pleasures, the giver and the receiver, the spanker and the spanked. But more and more impostors are seeking to join our ranks; they are so perverted by their inclinations and inclined to the taste of evil that they take all pleasure away from our evenings. I have asked my friend Jean F. and Mrs. de B. to banish these miscreants from their salons as much as they can, and I myself will no longer open the doors of the Manor to them. (...)

It is necessary to ensure that everyone has had the opportunity to taste the pleasures of degradation. (...) Furthermore, I am convinced that it is not enough to have lent oneself once or another to some mild punishment. I would advocate that the young men and women who join our ranks must necessarily experience a true

and complete submission, which touches the integrity of their body and their mind, so that they do not proceed lightly if by chance they want to subject another to their desires. I did not hesitate to submit my son first to this rule, whatever his reluctance. (...) »]

The answers I had sought in books I found in Gabriel Andringer's notebooks. Through more than a century of the Manor's history, I suddenly felt as close to him as if he had been next to me, leaning on the mezzanine of his library, whispering in my ear tips and advice on the best way to classify one's papers. My grandfather had planned everything, ordered everything. He had laid down an incalculable number of principles and rules, many of which seemed to have directly inspired the advice I had found in my little manual.

More surprisingly, there were also a number of recommendations aimed at guaranteeing the "authenticity" or, if you will, the spirit of the Manor, in accordance with what Gabriel Andringer's guests expected in terms of staging when they came to participate in orgiastic and punitive festivities. This infinite attention to detail extended to the recruitment criteria for the employees and servants who served within its walls, who had to be embodied by real typical characters, such as the English butler or the well-rounded cook. It was amusing to find the portraits of my companions, who had clearly not been chosen on their professional qualities alone. But there was no profile for the archivist: Julien had had to invent that one.

Whether or not he knew that these rules went back that far,

Julien complied scrupulously. Gabriel Andringer noted in his notebooks that it was necessary to meet each employee individually on a regular basis to congratulate them on their work, and especially to check that life at the Manor did not conflict with their moral principles. Clearly, our employer was continuing this tradition, scheduling an individual interview with each one once a month. He had given us a schedule of appointments that was posted on the kitchen door; the names of all the employees were listed: Édouard the butler,

Marie the cook, Sarah the housekeeper, Thomas the gardener, and me of course. For my part, I was to see him on Monday morning as usual, but later than usual in the morning.

He received me with extreme coldness, only telling me that he was happy with my work. Our interview lasted less than ten minutes. But despite his apparent indifference, Julien had cared about me and had done what was necessary to ensure my well-being, at least on a professional and material level. Returning to my files in the library, I met Édouard who opened a door for me in the panel of the last bay on the left, to which he gave me the key. It led to a small office with a French

window opening onto the garden, with walls lined with empty shelves, where a laptop sat on a small square table. After a month of work, I could finally settle in. My office had two doors: one opened onto the library, the second onto the adjoining dining room. I settled into the black leatherette swivel chair and took down Gabriel Andringer's notebooks, which I arranged on the shelves, before diving into them. The Manor had changed so little since its founder's time that I could almost hear his cane with a knob echoing on the flagstones of the corridor. In a box filled with faded photos, I searched for his portrait, not doubting that I would find Julien's fine but slightly hard features there.

Julien was completely obsessed with me. I clung to the memories of the few moments I had spent with him, replaying in my mind every second, every gesture, every change in his expression, trying to detect in them a clue to his state of mind towards me, or an explanation for his dark mood of the last few days.

Indeed, his temper had deteriorated, and I was not the only one to have noticed it. I tried to glean everything that my older colleagues in the house might know about our mysterious boss, and I watched for any allusion to Julien in their conversations. They were generally few in number, but this week, when we had all had the opportunity to talk with him, was a little different. Each of us had experienced in our own way the sourness of his disposition, to the point that it was a topic of conversation one evening at dinner.

"Still," remarked Sarah, by far the most talkative, "I've rarely seen him in such a bad mood."

- I do, replied Marie, and what I can guarantee you is that there is a girl underneath.

- Oh la la, but me, Sarah added, since I've been working here, I've never really seen him with a girl. I mean, not seriously... well you know what I mean.

- Yes, there was this woman, Cataline... a real harpy.

- Oh yes! exclaimed Thomas, the gardener. Thank goodness he threw her out! I wouldn't have continued to be treated like shit for long...

- What do you think, Edward?

Edward was undoubtedly the most discreet of all, but also the one who knew the most about our employer.

- Certainly, it is a woman, he confirmed.

The conversation then became lost in conjectures about the identity of the culprit. I listened, looking into my plate of broth in the eyes, my cheeks perhaps a little pink, and my brain boiling.

- Have you seen him with anyone? Sarah asked.
- No more than usual, Marie replied. Girls passing through.
- Disposable, then, Thomas clarified.

Edward said nothing but he looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

Suddenly he called out to me:

- And you, Pauline, what do you think about it?
- Uh, nothing much, I replied, embarrassed.

I could have spread out the whirlwind of hypotheses that overwhelmed me, the desire to be that girl they were talking about, the immense fear of being that girl who had dared to attract Julien's attention, the resentment of imagining that it was someone else, the desire to go and ask him the question, and the anxiety of our next meeting in his office. I said nothing, and after a few tangled excuses, I slipped away cautiously towards my room.

Under my door I found a white envelope with my first name on it. It contained a small white card marked with the red monogram of the Manor, on which was written in flowing letters: “ Meet at the library at 11 p.m. J. ”

1. Note from the archivist, obviously.

Chapter 2.

I could have spent the next two hours standing motionless on the threshold of my room, staring blankly at this terse message. Perhaps I was looking for a hidden meaning, an escape route. But since the innocent little card refused to reveal anything other than its imperious invitation, I pulled myself together. It must be made clear that at no time did I hesitate to go to the meeting. My mind eluded the deeper questions and only let surface concerns pass. For example, a crucial question: what outfit should I choose? I spread out all the clothes I had on my bed, and changed four times before opting for a dressy summer dress, in cotton and black lace, which held at the shoulders by two thin straps, and revealed the beginnings of my breasts and the bottom of my thighs. Under the dress, I was naked.

I reached the library by going through the secret door under the attic, which went around Julien's apartments, and opened onto the landing of the monumental staircase on the first floor. Usually, we avoided this path so as not to meet the passing guests, who occupied the rooms on the first floor; but that evening, the Manor was deserted. I walked barefoot on the cold flagstones, in total silence. I entered the library a good quarter of an hour early. Julien was there too: with his

back to the door, sitting in his favorite armchair, he was silently smoking an almost completely consumed cigarette. He did not hear me enter, or show that he had heard me. I made my presence known in a hesitant tone:

- Sir ?

He called me without turning around.

– Pauline. Come here.

I approached, trembling. He pointed to the thick carpet that covered the parquet floor in the center of the library. I walked around him slowly and stood at the precise spot he indicated, then I turned to him, taking a deep breath, and looked up at him. His forehead was lined with the mark of bad days, his eyebrows furrowed, his gaze lost in itself. He had a long black riding crop leaning against his right leg.

– On your knees, he ordered.

A powerful surge of adrenaline made me feel slightly dizzy. I planted my feet on the ground and remained ostentatiously still. I had accepted a lot from Julien and it seemed time to set some boundaries, even if they were symbolic. I didn't want to act submissive to him, at least not in this way. He was so preoccupied that he barely noticed that my attitude was deliberate.

“Come on, obey,” he said, as if I had simply misheard him.

– No. You can spank me, or even whip me if you want, but I will not get on my knees.

Surprised, he looked at me as if I had just slapped him; but behind a facade of indignation, I detected a beginning of interest, even amusement. I felt the opposite sensation: his reaction disgusted me to the point of nausea and finally determined me to resist him.

"You'll get on your knees if I want you to," he snapped arrogantly.

“What do you think?” I exploded. “That everything is owed to you? That you only have to demand something to get something? You are nothing but a spoiled, capricious brat!”

"You see that," he said ironically, "a capricious child. Should I take that as an insult or as a compliment coming from a girl who allows herself to act proud, while she lets herself be whipped and fucked and it gives her pleasure?"

He was so right that I could find nothing to say, and simply lowered my eyes and blushed. Sensing that he had regained the upper hand, Julien grabbed his riding crop, stood up and walked towards me slowly.

"I think I've had my share of humiliations," I said quietly, staring at the carpet.

– And I think that you haven't had enough.

He was so close to me now that I could feel his breath in my hair. He placed a finger at the base of my neck and slowly slid it towards my shoulder; despite myself, my body was shaken by a violent shiver. I whispered in a hesitant voice:

- You have no right to force me.

He slid the strap of my dress over my shoulder, and reaching behind me, pulled the other strap down. The light fabric rustled as the dress fell to my feet, leaving me naked and exposed.

"It's dangerous to play a game you don't know the rules to," he whispered in my ear.

- I know them well enough to know that you have no right to force me.

– I know exactly what I'm allowed to do. And when I'm done with you, you'll be begging me to let you get on your knees.

I was speechless, my throat tight. He ordered me to lean forward and hold my ankles with my hands, my legs slightly apart. This position, in addition to being uncomfortable, was at least as humiliating as the one I had refused, because I exposed to him between my spread buttocks my most secret parts, the dark flower of my anus, and the lips soaked with desire of my sex that our confrontation had made burning with desire.

– And now I want to hear you count.

"You're joking!" I exclaimed in fear.

– Never. Count.

And that's what I did. Because the truth is, Julien really does always get what he wants. Oh! not by force: by persuasion, or because he knows body language well enough to impose only what he can get.

As he hit me with the whip, first on one buttock then the other, with disturbing regularity, I counted without thinking of anything other than the insurmountable effort it demanded of me.

Five, six, seven, each number was an admission of the guilty pleasure I took in being treated this way, twelve, thirteen, each blow brought me face to face with myself and fantasies I was incapable of assuming, twenty, twenty-one, each flash of pain made me want to beg for it to stop, and only my pride allowed me to hold

on without moving. When he finally stopped whipping me, my legs were shaking so much that one wondered how I was still standing.

"On your knees, or I'll continue," Julien growled in a threatening tone.

I remained motionless, silent. However, I did not have the pride to believe that I could bear any more: on the contrary, I was at the end of my strength. Julien could not ignore it, and I knew that he would not continue. At that precise moment, I felt absolute confidence in him. My heart was beating wildly, and fear was devouring my insides, but I clung to the only certainty I had: Julien knew what he was doing. And I remained motionless, offered as a sacrifice to his will.

He swore under his breath, threw his riding crop on the floor, and left the library, slamming the door.

As soon as he was out, I collapsed on the ground, sobbing like a child. Several minutes passed before I admitted to myself that it was neither pain, nor anger, nor even shame that made me cry like that. What put me in this state was thinking that I had disappointed him, that he was going to turn away from me, that I had perhaps wasted, with my stupid stubbornness, the little attention he had chosen to give me. This discovery plunged me into a sort of mute and determined stupor. Having regained my calm and my wits, I decided to tackle the problem head on and go and explain myself to Julien.

[Archives of the Manor of Charmoie.

Personal notebooks of Gabriel Armand Andringer. Box B7.

Excerpts from notebook no. 4 (around 1905?)

“Rules of behavior for slaves.

Humility: The slave must lower his eyes before his master and kneel before him (or before her, if she is a mistress) as often as possible.

Respect: the slave may only speak to his master if the latter has invited him to do so, and always with the greatest respect. He chooses his words in such a way as to show docility and submission. Using the informal "tu" is prohibited.

Obedience: the slave does not contest any order from his master whatsoever.

Complacency: the slave willingly and willingly submits to the trials that his master imposes on him for his pleasure. If he also derives pleasure from it, he thanks him accordingly.

Rules of conduct for masters.

Measure: the master fairly assesses his demands in relation to the abilities of his slave, so as not to subject him to orders which he would not be able to obey.

Mastery: The master never acts in anger and ensures that all the techniques he uses are mastered.

Requirement: the master ensures that his slave is pushed to the extreme limit of his abilities, so as to lead him to surpass himself. It is in this extreme that the slave will find the delights of his condition. A master whose slave exceeds the limits he had set for himself must evolve in turn, or hand him over to another, more expert master.

(...) »]

It was nearly midnight. As I left the library, I found the Manor completely deserted and silent, plunged into darkness. The pale glow of the fire exits cast large ghostly shadows on the white walls.

I tried to imagine where Julien could have gone in his anger. The door to his office, just across from the library, was closed and plunged into total darkness. The monumental staircase that climbed up to his apartments, on my left, coiled around itself like a large, peaceful snail, bathed in the night light that fell from the high windows onto the garden. To my right, the corridor joined the entrance hall, passing three rooms that I had never entered, but which I knew from having seen them on the plans were three adjoining living rooms, which opened on the other side onto a large terrace. The third door was ajar, and let a ray of golden light filter through. I headed towards it, hoping not to meet anyone other than Julien, because my dress was not quite long enough to hide the red marbling on my thighs.

I pushed the door gently and stopped on the threshold.

It was a small square living room with two windows overlooking the entrance courtyard. The furniture consisted of several tables and chests of drawers in dark wood with gilded ironwork, in the Empire style, and several armchairs, wing chairs and sofas upholstered in warm tones. Julien was sitting alone on one of the sofas, in front of a small table with a marquetry top that looked like a chessboard. He was looking at the pieces thoughtfully, as if he were in the middle of a game, but none of them had been moved.

- I need to talk to you, I said.

He pointed to the chair opposite him and murmured wearily:

– Sit down and take the whites.

– I didn't come to play chess.

As he did not move and pretended not to have heard me, keeping his eyes fixed on the chessboard, I moved a pawn at random and continued:

– I apologize for my attitude. I mean, not just for saying no. For refusing to give in... afterwards. I apologize.

"I'm sorry, Pauline, but I can't," he replied evenly, moving a black pawn in turn.

- You mean it's inexcusable?

– Yes, if you want, we can say it like that.

I continued to play, letting myself be caught up in the game without thinking, trying somewhat mechanically to protect my pieces. He also played with apparent phlegm, as if it was boring him to death, but each of his moves was relentless and I saw an attack strategy taking shape.

I bit my lip to give myself courage, and with a pounding heart, I moved my fool with a trembling hand, asking:

– But maybe you could... give me a compensatory sanction? Punish me... that's done sometimes, isn't it?

– Yes, it can be done. But in this case it would be useless.

– Really? Why?

I had meant to ask the question in a light tone, a clumsy attempt to hide the ambivalent feeling of relief tinged with disappointment that his refusal had aroused in me. He had just taken one of my pawns, and rolled it between his fingers as he finally looked up at me to answer:

– You said it yourself. I can't force you to do what you don't want to do. I can beat you, but you already know that there is a point beyond which I will not go. What you refuse is not the game, it is the submission that it implies. But there is still a minimum. If you are not ready for that, we will not achieve anything.

- You are harsh... I assure you that I have made great efforts, in terms of... submission.

The word had hurt my lips, which did not escape Julien. He smiled a little sadly, and pierced me with his inquisitive gaze.

– Yes, I am tough, I have that reputation. Except that in general, it is thrown in my face when I punish, not when I refuse to punish. Pauline, what are you playing at? Do you never get scared?

I looked down and blushed slightly, searching for a countenance in the chessboard. I finally answered anyway, trying to be as respectful as I could:

– Yes, of course I am afraid. But you wouldn't want that to stop me, would you? Otherwise I wouldn't have been here for a long time.

- You should listen to your fear from time to time. Just show some common sense. Because the attitude you had tonight, I can neither forgive nor punish.

– We're at an impasse, then.

I looked at the chessboard: as usual, my play was quite naive; I had positioned my pieces well and my defense seemed correct, but in attack it was clearly insufficient.

The black queen fell on my knight, and it seemed quite clear that I was going to find myself checkmated in three moves.

– Shit, I muttered.

"I think you're screwed," Julien commented with a smile.

I stood up, laid the white king on the board, and declared:

– It was a foregone conclusion. You are much too strong for me, I am only a beginner. And besides, I had said that I did not want to play.

In the following days, Julien's mood continued to deteriorate, and I felt a certain guilt, especially when one of my companions was the victim. Sarah and Marie complained about having become totally invisible, but made sure to stay that way, for fear of attracting his wrath. With others, this materialized into real confrontations, all the more violent because their motives were futile. Thus I witnessed in spite of myself the brutal outbursts that Julien exchanged with Thomas one morning when I had left the French window of my office open onto the garden, to take advantage of the mildness of this spring morning. After they had covered each other with colorful adjectives, I saw the gardener pass by, reeling off strings of curses as he returned to his rose bushes. The next moment, Julien's silhouette was outlined in the frame of my window, and without looking at me, he lit a cigarette with a hand trembling with anger, grumbling:

- I'm in a foul mood.

“It's obvious,” I remarked, placing one of Gabriel Andringer's small leather-bound notebooks on my desk.

He didn't answer and remained standing next to me, spitting smoke in small plumes over his shoulder. I had noticed that in moments of intense annoyance or passing spleen, he tended to come and take refuge in the library; he then took the opportunity to monitor the progress of my work. It relaxed him. Now that I had moved to the small office, he joined me there just as naturally, without necessarily

waiting for me to speak to him, simply looking for a soothing presence. Of course, it could just as easily have turned out differently, one of the ways he had of relaxing was to distribute resounding corrections.

"Can I do something for you?" I asked him with humility, and a lightness of tone that masked the acute awareness of the risk I was taking.

His clear eyes, sharp as blades, rested on me without showing surprise.

– Yes. Certainly. Assuredly. (He paused for a short thought.) Stay at the Manor this weekend.

– What for?

– To be at my disposal.

A familiar feeling of excitement and fear tightened my insides, and I hid my confusion behind a smile.

- If I stay, will you dispose of it?

– Most likely.

“Okay,” I confirmed, looking down.

He studied me for a moment, in a way that I now understood to be an assessment of my determination and abilities. He was perfectly calm, and his control was a strange contrast to the violence he had displayed a moment earlier in front of Thomas. He had clearly found what he had come looking for in my office.

"You'll have to make an effort," he said learnedly.

I knew exactly what he was referring to.

"I realize that," I murmured, blushing.

He gave me a vaguely predatory smile.

[Archives of the Manor of Charmoie.

Personal notebooks of Gabriel Armand Andringer. Box B7.

Excerpts from notebook no. 5 (around 1913?)

"(...) While we used to tolerate great freedom in the pleasures shared by our guests at receptions, which could be at any time, in any place, at any whim, I realized after what happened at Saint Marcile, at my friend T.'s, that there was a certain degree of danger in proceeding in this way, and in letting the emotions of lust disperse in places and times over which we have no control. Although all our guests are of the best society and carefully selected,

(...) we cannot have any certainty of the respect of the rules and the conditions to which our happy victims submit. (...)

For these reasons, we have resolved to concentrate our passions at reserved moments which are shared for the pleasure and safety of all. We call this moment the session, although some speak of joust or scene play according to the term used by our companions from beyond the

Manche. I prefer the term session (...) which is more familiar to me and which I readily associate with the sweets that I love.

The session is a moment that we can develop and adapt according to our desires (...) under the careful control of one of us whom we designate as responsible for avoiding abuse and whom we have taken the habit of calling the Session Master. (...) I have most often played this role but have also, on occasion, left it to Philippe who is proving to be a remarkable companion as he matures.

“We now hold meetings regularly, several times a week (...) in the small living room or more frequently in the library.

(...) When one of our subjects is admitted to participate in the sessions of the Manor, we prefer that he be bound to a Master by contract. The contract can be written or oral. If it is oral, it must be pronounced in front of at least two witnesses. The contract allows us to specify, in total agreement with the subject who determines the terms jointly with his master, what type of trials and pleasures he agrees to submit to. (...) I have thus seen slaves who agreed to be whipped during the sessions but not to participate in the pleasures (...) as well as the reverse.

(...)

The session proceeds in a simple and unified manner, like drawing a straight line. We honor our consenting victims each in turn, in the order we have predefined, so as to grant ourselves a subtle progression.

(...) Each has been previously presented by her Master, who takes care to specify his experience and his expectations, so that those to whom one does the honor of this offering can adjust their behavior accordingly. The Master of the session ensures that these wishes and limits are respected (...). »]

Every week, starting on Thursday evening, the Manor came alive with a feverish agitation, which did not die down completely until Monday. Of course I knew about this astonishing phenomenon, but I had never had the leisure or the audacity to observe it in detail. This time, taking advantage of the license of being, in a way, invited there, I indulged myself complacently in the study of the characters who flocked there for a weekend.

Their outfits ranged from the sober black suit to the most extravagant leather or latex disguises. The masters sported the cane or the riding crop, the mistresses wore thigh boots or twirled in velvet and lace petticoats that caressed their pointed boots. Their companions were dressed as they fancied, from the strict suit that one could guess did not hide any underwear, to complex and refined period outfits, corsets larded with leather, pleated schoolgirl skirts.

It was a ballet of promising fabrics, the vertigo of a ritual dance in which some set the pace and others followed, a dashing and clattering parade of threats and desires. Posted at the window of the commons, I watched them cross the courtyard, making the white gravel crunch under their stiletto heels, and climb the steps of the porch where Édouard welcomed them and directed them to the salons. Each would be received personally by Julien, who knew all his guests, ensured their comfort, and chose among them a few chosen ones whom he would invite to the evening session at the library. Dressed in a relatively discreet black miniskirt and fishnet stockings, having slipped into the hustle and bustle of the large salon, I saw him make this delicate selection for the first time.

The session was a goal in itself; everyone came here with the hope of participating. To do this, it was necessary to attract Julien's attention and hold it: nothing very easy.

Guests were welcomed in the early evening in the largest of the three rooms that formed the ground floor of the West Wing on the terrace. As much as the small living room on the main courtyard was opulent and warm, the great living room was grandiose and impressive with its white woodwork with grotesques in the manner of the eighteenth century, and the pale blue silks that were reflected endlessly in the many mirrors that lined the walls.

I had tied my opulent hair into a bun for greater discretion, but despite my efforts to avoid him, Édouard quickly spotted me in the small crowd. Without giving me the slightest comment, he served me a glass of champagne and left me to my observations. My readings, and in particular the notebooks of Gabriel Andringer, had made me vigilant about the conduct to adopt in this kind of circumstances. I verified my theory by confronting it with practice, observing the way in which the masters, sometimes demanded absolute submission from their companions, sometimes showed only tenderness and complicity as in any couple. Julien did not show any value judgment towards one or the other: he treated all the masters and mistresses with equal deference, and paid attention to the submissive only to verify the respect and fear he inspired in them.

Attentive to the smallest details, he quickly spotted me, but he only gave me a furtive glance, without threats or promises.

A little relieved on this side, I wandered for a moment on the terrace, where couples had taken refuge to smoke or enjoy the evening air in wooden deckchairs.

Back inside, I jumped when Julien gently touched my shoulder, and as I opened my mouth to justify myself, he discreetly signaled me to be quiet. He had equipped himself with two brown leather bracelets, about three or four centimeters wide, and equipped with a small metal ring. Without brusqueness, he took my hand and girded my wrists one after the other with this evocative harness.

“Don’t go away,” he ordered me before returning to his social activities.

It is impossible to describe the weight that these accessories placed on my mind, much more than on my arms. The blood was pounding at my temples, and I looked in all directions like a hunted deer, searching for an impossible way out. Then my gaze met a familiar face: it was the middle-aged man I had noticed in the library the evening I had been imprudent enough to let myself be surprised there. When he saw me, he came straight up to me, shook my hand, and greeted me:

– Good evening, my name is Pierre. I am an old friend of Julien.

We have already met...

- Yes, I remember, I replied, blushing. Mine is Pauline.

Pierre is the kind of man whose age indulgently refines his most striking features. Every wrinkle puts a flash of mischief in his metallic gray, almost transparent eyes; every white hair reaffirms his natural presence. If he neglects his budding beard, it reinforces the line of his square jaw. If he is dressed, one recognizes a quiet elegance in him; if he undresses, one is hard pressed to find a trace of weakness or plumpness in his nervous musculature. He is a man to whom one can hardly remain indifferent. Still holding my right hand, he had raised it to the level of his eyes and was scrutinizing the infamous bracelet with great interest, which only accentuated my embarrassment and my confusion.

- Where is your master? he asked me suddenly.

I remained silent, not at all certain that I wanted to grant this title to Julien, nor that the latter would view it favorably.

“Let me rephrase,” he said, his lips stretched into a half-smile. “Who is your master?”

When I still didn't answer, he continued:

– Do you see those lovely jewels you’re wearing on your wrists?

They are a sign of your submission. That means there must be someone here who has the responsibility to ensure your obedience, and to protect you if necessary. I want to know who that is.

This time the definition was crystal clear, and I answered without hesitation:

– It's Julien.

– That's what I feared.

At first, I didn't understand this reaction. But soon,

Pierre bombarded me with questions about how I had met Julien, where I came from, when I first became interested in SM...

- I tried to find out more about you last time, he told me, but Julien wouldn't give up.

"If he didn't want to tell you about it, how would you expect me to?" I replied, shrugging my shoulders. "It would be suicidal."

But he did not lose heart. I soon understood from his questions what worried him: clearly, Julien was not in the habit of getting attached to a girl, and Pierre suspected him of not having respected all the rules of initiation (which, moreover, was perfectly true).

When Julien overheard our little conversation, he quickly intervened.

"I forbid you to speak to him," he ordered me.

"I do what I can," I grumbled, rebellious and sullen.

Ignoring Pierre who was protesting half-heartedly, Julien placed a hand on the back of my neck, just at the base of my hair, and pulled me close to him. My heart leapt as he whispered in my ear:

- Are you ready to obey me tonight?

I nodded discreetly.

- What do I ask you?

I nodded again despite the fear that churned my stomach. He took my hand and pushed me towards the nearest couch, in front of which he ordered me to kneel, which I did without arguing. Then he made me cross my hands behind my head and rest my forehead on the seat of the couch.

"I'm not doing this to humiliate you," he whispered in my ear.

I just want to be left alone.

I, who would never have believed myself capable of accepting half of such a constraint, tolerated the ordeal surprisingly well. In the end, for the assembly around us, it was almost normal to see a man treat his companion in this way.

I focused on the conversations around me, dominated by Julien's deep voice, which seemed to be in full confrontation with Pierre. Then little by little, I came back to myself, thinking about how I had gotten there, on my knees in this beautiful living room for the pleasure of a man I barely knew, and of whom I didn't know exactly what he expected of me.

It is probably an obligatory passage, at one time or another, this question of why and how.

I felt the unhealthy abandonment of the prey that lets itself be drained of blood by the vampire, in a debauchery of mixed sensations where the shimmering of silks and pearl necklaces is only a sordid masquerade for acts that would be more at home in a damp cave. Contrasts of this sort are part of the genre, where disgust competes with desire, as in this novel by Mac Orlan where the Russian countess,

"beautiful and terrible", smokes American cigarettes with affectation, the Mediterranean sun lighting up her sublime skin with a joyless laugh, in the animal smell of a pile of dead furs: beauty and blood.

Yet I understood what Julien meant by denying that he wanted to humiliate me. We were on a stage where we took on roles, where we moved according to a choreography predefined by external rules, seeking our margin of freedom, like puppets who invent their destiny in the length of string left to them. This freedom, it did indeed exist, in a form of complicity established by Julien; by this simple confidence, he admitted a form of humanity that the others were not able to detect. I felt myself drifting towards a serene, peaceful introspection, an intense feeling of accomplishment. Deprived of my senses and my movements, I was in an optimal position to mentally prepare myself for the game in which I had finally agreed to participate.

There were five masters, including Pierre and Julien, including a woman, for four submissives, including a young man and myself.

Julien settled into his usual armchair and placed me next to him, kneeling at his feet, within reach of his hand which was stroking my hair.

At his signal, the session began.

Edouard, who had appeared out of nowhere, offered the guests a heady wine in triangular glasses. The first man stood in the center of the room and introduced

his submissive in the usual manner. Her name, her age, her experience. The type of test he had in store for her. He thanked Julien for his hospitality and sought his consent again before proceeding with the rest. The girl was placed on all fours above a strange little piece of furniture that was too long to be a table and too stocky to be a bench. Her belly and breasts brushed the rough wood. Her wrists and knees were tied to the four legs of the table, then the two other masters came to stand around her. Pierre had positioned himself so that his penis was at the same height as the submissive's face; he unbuttoned his pants and entered her mouth. The third man was caressing her lower back, and suddenly thrust into her brutally, drawing a muffled cry from her. At the same time as he took her, he seized a kind of whip to whip her. The ordeal was short-lived, for the girl quickly lost her calm, and she screamed so much and struggled so much that Julien asked that she be untied and put on the stake to be punished. At these words alone, she began to beg and ask for her master's indulgence, without obviously obtaining it. She was handcuffed to the stake facing Julien's seat, who asked that she be whipped by Pierre. The first master thanked him as if he were being given the greatest honor. Pierre rewarded the girl with a dozen blows on the buttocks, then after giving her a few more caresses, she was allowed to withdraw.

I was surprised that a girl who had been so proudly presented by her master was spared so quickly. But in reality, would I have really done better in her place?

Tolerating the blows, yes, that was not a problem; but I still felt a deep reluctance at the idea of being taken by a stranger, in public. I wondered if this was what Julien had in store for me for this evening, and if so, if I would manage not to disappoint him. While I was thinking these things, the next one was brought in: he was a young man, he was naked except for a leather collar and bracelets like mine, and a leather strap that went around his waist and passed through the crack of his buttocks and on either side of his sex.

– Where is Helena? asked Julien.

“I’m here,” a woman’s voice answered.

She stepped forward into the dim light of the library, in her black velvet dress that hugged her bodice and flapped her calves, perched on very high heels, her long black hair cascading freely over her shoulders. She was superb, and as she passed Julien, she placed a hand on his arm, a very white hand with long nails, and with her blood-red lips she placed a kiss on Julien's, who returned a tender smile. I felt a pang of jealousy, that a woman could present herself before him with such splendor, and that he would allow it, and that he would kiss her. But in such a circumstance, it was probably a rather absurd feeling, and I tried to hide it by lowering my eyes. Julien made me raise my head, proving to me that he was

watching me closely; He placed his possessive hand back in my hair and ordered me not to look away.

The masters had sat in a circle around Helena and her submissive, in armchairs like Julien's. Pierre was at the corner of the fireplace; sitting on the protruding stone step, he was smoking a cigarette and squinting. The young man stood motionless in the middle of this space, his eyes lowered to face the woman. She began by asking him to masturbate, and while he was doing so, one of the other masters began to whip his buttocks and thighs violently with the riding crop. I admired the young submissive's ability to take the blows, without moving or screaming and continuing to obey his mistress's order. Then she made him kneel and quickly pulled his dress over his head. He was no longer visible while he honored his sex, but his buttocks were still exposed and whipped, this time by the second master. When it was Peter's turn, Helena withdrew and ordered:

– Turn around so the whip can hit you in the front.

Obediently, he obeyed and sat on the floor, leaning slightly back and resting on his elbows. Helena placed the handle of a whip between his teeth, to stop him from screaming and to help him bear the pain, and Pierre began to beat him very systematically, starting in the middle of his thighs and working his way up towards his sex. When he got there, I was seized with a violent nausea and Julien had to force me again so that I would not look away. He forced me to watch the young man writhe in pain under the blows, courageously gritting my teeth, without trying to escape. Finally, with a gesture, Helena put an end to his torture; she made him get on all fours and while removing the harness that covered his anus, she asked if a man wanted to take him.

"We wouldn't want to deprive you of that pleasure," Pierre said cynically.

Then, girding her waist with an imposing dildo, the woman sodomized him herself, tearing from him his first cries of pain and pleasure. The youngest of the two other masters came to stand in front of him and pushed his cock into his mouth. Finally Helena coldly ordered him to cum, and to my greatest surprise, without anyone having touched his sex, he released a long spurt of sperm on the ground while visibly writhing with pleasure. I thought that his ordeal was coming to an end, but his perverse mistress reserved the final touch. She delicately freed herself and ordered him to clean the floor with his tongue. While he complied, I could no longer take my eyes off him, raised by retching of disgust, both horrified and overexcited by the way he had just been treated, which far exceeded my imagination. When at last he was taken away to rest, I no longer knew whether I feared or desired that the next one should be my turn; I was buffeted by so many

contradictory sensations that it seemed to me that my body no longer knew where good and evil lay, up and down, and what it should expect or fear.

But first the other girl was brought in, who was also introduced by her master in the usual manner, except that he was profuse in his thanks to Julien for doing him the honour of the session. Then he solemnly declared that he wished his submissive to receive a particular kind of whip which he called by the English word, single tail . I felt Julien jump, and he refused point blank. A lively discussion ensued, evidently because Julien was to administer the ordeal himself. Helena and Pierre tried to urge him to accept, he replied that he had not planned to participate in the session that evening. Finally he let himself be convinced by their arguments, but they debated at some length with the master requesting a number of strokes between five and twelve, which was not enough to allow me to suppose that the instrument in question must be particularly cruel. Finally they agreed on the number seven, and the girl was undressed and tied hand and foot to the post. Julien stood up; I was still a little anxious to feel him moving away, but he leaned towards me and, giving me a caress in the hair, he reminded me once again:

– Don't look away.

There was no risk: once he had taken the whip, I found myself totally hypnotized. It was a long whip with a single braided leather strap, exactly the kind of whip that took me back to my childhood, to hidden fantasies that I had never really understood or accepted, to the time when I watched in fascination as my favorite heroes, from Zorro to Indiana Jones, were capable of making this kind of instrument do anything – except of course caress a lady's buttocks, although it was probably dreaming about that that made me clench my thighs as I watched them. Julien had the same presence with the whip in his hand; I saw him from behind, making it undulate nervously at his side, putting me into a real trance. Yet when he whistled and cracked the instrument across the girl's back, from shoulder to opposite hip, drawing a cruel scarlet mark, I understood why the ordeal was not decided lightly. Despite her cries and supplications, the girl received the seven agreed blows.

When she was untied, she collapsed: there would be no other test for her tonight. Then Julien turned to the others and declared in a firm voice:

– The session is over.

Back in Julien's room, I was torn between disappointment at not having participated in the session and real relief, but the feeling that prevailed was an intense desire, an almost unbearable heat, which I hoped was shared with Julien, since he had also reserved himself. He made me sit on the bed, freed my wrists

from the leather bracelets I had worn all evening, and sliding a hand along the inside of my thigh, he went up to my wet sex, murmuring:

– Let's see if you liked the show. It looks like you did...

My cheeks turned bright pink, but I still found the courage to confirm to him:

– Yes, especially the end...

– Ah! the whip.

"Do you think I could try?" I asked him timidly, startled by my own audacity.

– No way. That's for experienced submissives only.

His way of pronouncing the word "experienced" deeply vexed me. I felt as if he were treating me like a child, a beginner, a girl who could never give him more than a tiny fraction of what he was likely to demand. I found myself insisting, as if it were a matter of honor:

– Yes, well it's not just a question of experience. Just look at the first girl tonight: she wasn't exactly up to par, if I may say so.

Julien had his back to me, probably so that I wouldn't see the reaction to my boasting on his face, and he was slowly undoing his belt. He was holding it in his hand when he turned back to me and said firmly:

– I said, no way. Take off your clothes.

A shiver rose in me, from bottom to top, starting from the pit of my stomach. I took off my clothes, trying to put as much sensuality into them as possible. He stared at me intensely for a few seconds, then he took my wrists and leaned towards me to gather them behind my back. I felt his breath on my face and the leather of the belt against my buttocks; the desire brought to its peak tore a little sigh from me. He smiled and suddenly, placed his lips on mine and kissed me languidly, full on the mouth, his tongue pressed against mine describing circles of infinite slowness that made me dizzy. He stopped as abruptly as he had started, turned me around firmly and installed me on all fours on the bed, my rump stretched out towards him. He placed a burning hand on the back of my neck, then slowly, very slowly, he went down the curve of my back to my buttocks, on which he lingered with delicate perseverance. Then he took a step back and lashed my thighs with the belt. I groaned and clenched my hands on the blanket, before arching my back to offer myself more. My arousal was reaching new heights, and the feel of the leather on my skin only amplified it. He continued to hit vigorously, without eliciting the slightest protest from me, until my legs, streaked with red

marks, struggled to carry me. Then I heard him undress calmly, and I remained motionless, awaiting his instructions, trembling with a desire that was becoming more and more unbearable. When he lay down and allowed me to touch him, I practically threw myself on him to caress and suck him with an almost comical greed. I kissed him all over his body, and suddenly, carried away by a real madness, I began to beg him:

– Please... please... make me cum...

- That's not reasonable. I'm going to have to beat you again.

He sat up abruptly and pushed me onto his knees. To be precise, he had one knee under me at the level of my sex, and with the other he was blocking both of my legs to prevent me from struggling.

– Give me your hands, he commanded.

I stretched both hands behind my back, resting tensely on my shoulders, my face buried in the blanket.

Julien gathered my two wrists in the hollow of my back and held them firmly with one hand. I was thus tense and completely immobilized, while he still had one hand free. He caressed my ass and sex, making me shudder with pleasure and desire. Then he began to spank me forcefully, tearing plaintive moans from me that I tried in vain to hide by biting the blanket. He alternated spankings and caresses, until exhausted and burning I writhed with pleasure without being able to hold back my cries.

"I'm too good to you," he murmured, and passing behind me, he penetrated me roughly.

I was barely able to do anything but let him pound me as he pounded me hard, his pubic bone slapping against my bruised ass and my sex swollen with pleasure. I squeezed his cock inside me with all my might, moaning, rolling my hips under his steel hands that held me in place. He dug his nails into my flesh, and I heard him rumble like a storm as he spilled his hot seed over my stomach.

Hormone excesses sometimes make you do strange things, things you wouldn't have thought you were capable of, or things you end up regretting afterwards. For my part, I was under the influence of such a hormonal cocktail caused by the mixed effects of exacerbated desire, physical pain and pleasure, that I had barely more reason than an Irishman at the end of a Saint Patrick's Day party.

The sight of Julien's naked body stretched out against me, the perfectly defined muscles of his torso, his thick thighs, his elongated buttocks with their little hollow on the side that made you want to grab them with both hands, all of

this made my head spin, and despite the fatigue I especially wanted to be able to continue to contemplate and touch this marvel of flesh that was finally offered to me at the end of so many physical and psychological trials.

– Julien, will you allow me to sleep with you tonight?

He raised his eyebrows in surprise, but still smiling.

– Hey, Pauline, just because we slept together doesn't mean you have to act so familiarly.

"I don't want to call you sir and address you formally anymore," I replied with a pout. "I find it ridiculous."

– Ridiculous or not, I cannot tolerate such an attitude.

- And what will you do?

Sitting up on the bed, I began to fix my hair, arching my back in a provocative pose. He looked at my curves with a dreamy and slightly tender eye, which did not prevent him from declaring:

- I will beat you.

– Ah! What if I like it?

"I'll beat you harder," he said, smiling, amused.

I shrugged and slid, cuddly and lasciviously, along his body slightly damp with sweat whose scents maddened my senses. He hugged me and kissed my hair, then murmured in a caressing voice:

– Okay, you can sleep here.

The next day, Julien came to get me in the late afternoon in my room where I was taking a nap. We had spent a good part of the night talking about everything and nothing, and if he had gotten up at dawn as usual, I do not have his physical stamina and I needed sleep. I had caught up on some of it in his bed, wrapped in the sheets where I was getting drunk on his smell; I was trying to get the rest when he drummed his fingertips on my door.

His mischievous smile snapped me out of my stupor almost instantly. I was rather worried, his enthusiasm usually being a sign of high risk for my posterior. He led me through the corridors of the Manor, holding my hand like a flirt.

- I'll show you why Thomas and I had a fight on Friday, he said to me.

He led me into the garden, not caring that I was barefoot; the freshly mown grass tickled my toes pleasantly. He finally stopped in front of a clump of dark red roses and showed them to me triumphantly:

- Look. Can you imagine he wanted to cut them off!
- What, the rose bushes? I asked, frowning, confused.
- But no, nettles.

Only then did I notice that the thorny roses were tightly entwined with the high branches of a clump of white nettles. I gave Julien a look in which fear vied with exhaustion.

- Oh no!
- Oh yes! We will pick some sheaves for tonight's session. Help me.

And so saying, he took a pair of leather gloves out of his pocket and put them on. I protested:

- Hey, I don't have any gloves!

He came back to me and suddenly very serious, piercing me with his gaze, he took my hands and brought them to his lips. He kissed my fingers with infinite gentleness and murmured:

– My dear, when you feel the burning of the nettles on your pretty fingers, it will give you plenty of time to imagine the effect it will have on you when I use it to whip your buttocks.

Suddenly I had trouble swallowing.

The nasty plant quickly got the better of my attempts at vigilance, and as we gathered large bouquets of this sharp lace, my hands and wrists became covered in small red dots that stung like so many pinpricks. Each time I jumped at the contact of the stinging leaves, I did, in spite of myself, exactly what Julien had said: I imagined what it would do to my buttocks, applied systematically and deliberately by his implacable hand, and my stomach curled up painfully on itself, and I squeezed my thighs together so as not to feel my sex swelling with excitement. Julien kept an eye on me, and I was careful not to give him the pleasure of seeing me complain. Once we returned to the library with our harvest, which was placed in a large basket near the fireplace, he turned to me with a broad smile and declared:

- Now you have to taste the nettle spanking.

Turn around.

- Um, thanks, but no worries, I replied, cautiously taking two steps back.
- It wasn't a proposition. It was an order.
- Oh yeah, really?

I gave him a naive smile as I backed away again. He merely raised his eyebrows disapprovingly, then seizing two long leafy branches, he lunged at me with a low growl:

- You'll see!

I let out a shrill, clearly overplayed scream and fled behind a sofa. He threw himself after me. He cursed and laughed, uttering all sorts of threats. I leapt like a goat, behind a sofa, over an armchair, twirling around the pillars of the library. My attempts to escape him did not get the better of his enthusiasm. I was agile and fast, but he was strong and much more focused than I was.

When he finally caught me, we were both in a fit of uncontrollable laughter. He held me as best he could, as I struggled with all my might, uttering little shrill cries and bursts of laughter, and with his gloved hand he thrust a handful of nettles into my trousers and breeches. Their burning elicited a roar of protest from me, and I was trying to free myself when we were interrupted by a cough coming from the front door.

– Julien, I would like to speak to you, said a masculine, authoritative voice.

He let go of me and I slid to the floor, kneeling in front of a sofa, out of sight of the unwelcome visitor. Julien stood up and, to keep himself composed, brushed a few leaves off his trousers before running a nervous hand through his hair, a sign of annoyance. I noticed that if his gloves had protected him, he had nothing to envy me for the nettle stings that covered his arms. Among the little red dots you could also see a few scratch marks that I had inflicted on him while struggling.

– Yes Pierre, he said, can't it wait?

"Obviously not," replied Pierre's voice, as serious as if the fate of the state depended on it.

Julien motioned for me to go out. With a grimace, I discreetly removed the branch of nettles from my panties and left the room, passing Pierre with my eyes lowered.

I allowed myself a long cold shower, which soothed the sting of the nettles and the intense excitement of my senses. From the conversation Julien and Pierre had that day, I heard both versions later. I could have guessed quite easily, by cross-checking, that their argument had to do with me. But at the time, I felt too insignificant to be able to imagine it.

The frustration of not having been able to go through with what was supposed to be a fun time with Julien filled me with bitterness. Pierre seemed to

me to be a formidable nuisance; not for a second did I imagine that he was trying to protect me from Julien's excessive and disordered ardor.

The energetic clarification he made had, if you will, the desired effect: namely, a clear and brutal halt.

[History of the F* * * affair

Reconstructed from several sources preserved at the Manoir de la Charmoie (Box B8 and others), at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (press collections), and at the Archives de la Ville de Paris, series of judicial archives.

On January 17, 1926, a 28-year-old actress, Eléonore Vidal, was found dead in a hotel room in Paris.

Suspicion quickly fell on F* * *, then undersecretary of state in the Aristide Briand government, whose name appeared on the hotel register. The scandal immediately tarnished the image of F* * *, who was also known to be a notorious womanizer.

The case is mentioned in several newspapers of the time:

Le Temps , January 18, 1926: "Murder of actress Eléonore Vidal. The body of Eléonore Vidal, actress, 28 years old, was found yesterday in a hotel on the rue Royale in Paris. The victim is said to have received several stab wounds. (...) The investigation led by Commissioner Bottineau revealed the involvement of a member of the government. (...)"

Le Figaro , January 30, 1926: "When on January 17, the lifeless body of Eléonore Vidal, a charming actress, was found. (...) we were far from suspecting that Mr. F* * *, Undersecretary of State for Finance, would have to answer for this assassination. (...) Questioned in his cabaret in the eighteenth arrondissement, Mr. Garelle, the actress's last known employer, declared: - it's true, we sometimes had the privilege of receiving a visit from Mr. F* * *, (...) he had been seeing Miss Vidal for some time (...) he was a respectable client."

The investigation into the relationship between F* * * and Eléonore Vidal soon reveals that the politician had been in an ongoing relationship with the young woman for several months. However, they had in all probability met at the Manoir de la Charmoie.

At that time, the affairs of the Manor were under the responsibility of Philippe Andringer de la Charmoie, the eldest son of Gabriel Andringer. Heard during the investigation, he created two files: one on Eléonore Vidal, and the other on F* * *. These files are kept at the Manor (box B8); there is a file concerning this investigation in the Paris archives, but I was not able to consult it to see if the

content corresponded (procedural files are in restricted communication for 100 years).

File F* * * of the Manoir archives mainly contains billing statements corresponding to the occupation of a room, approximately once a month between the end of 1923 and 1925. The Eléonore Vidal file contains two photographs of the actress. In one of them, we see the young woman lying on the blue chaise longue in the grand salon (the one with the toile de Jouy upholstery with bird motifs, still in the grand salon today). She is wearing black lace underwear and a fur coat half-open over her bare skin. Her black hair is cut in a bob and topped with a pearl headband. She holds a long cigar holder in her right hand. Her almond-shaped eyes, outlined with a broad stroke of kohl, stare into the lens. The sensuality of the photo is expressed in her shiny, parted lips... The file also contains several payment receipts signed by Philippe Andringer, which tend to prove that she worked at the Manor in 1923, we do not know on what task.

F* * * was finally cleared in the Vidal case, the victim's ex-boyfriend having confessed to being the perpetrator of what turned out to be a fairly ordinary crime of passion. Philippe, for his part, was going through a difficult phase where the prosecutor threatened to indict him for pimping, indecent assault and violence. He then benefited from the support of a few high-ranking figures.

Letter from Senator Martin to Gabriel Andringer on December 3, 1926:

“Dear friend,

I have heard the difficulties you are facing. (...) I can assure you that you have my full support and I will do everything in my power to ensure that you can continue to open your doors to your friends. (...) »

Letter from Paul Fort, Prefect of Seine-et-Marne, addressed to Philippe Andringer on December 19, 1926:

“Dear Philippe,

(...) There is no question of me letting you cover such ignominious accusations. I know your integrity and your sense of fine things too well to believe you guilty of what you are accused of. (...) I have some support that can help us exonerate you. (...)

I hope to come and visit you soon at Charmoie.”

Support clearly driven as much by the attachment of these high-ranking people to the Manor and its activities as by the friendship they have for Philippe and his father..

In fact, the charges were quietly dropped in early 1927.

Gabriel Andringer wrote to his lifelong friend Raoul d'Entremont (a copy of which is in the archives, box B1): "I am relieved that we have come out of this affair. I have every confidence in my son to restore the reputation of the Manor. (...) Philippe has decided to surround the identity of our guests with more secrecy. He will also ensure that the rules for controlling the age and consent of our lucky victims are more strictly applied.

(...) to prevent a repeat of an unfortunate incident of this type.”

I think that this case explains the absence of account books before this date. They must have existed, as evidenced by the wealth of information in the F* * * file, and they are even mentioned by Gabriel Andringer in his notebooks. But they were certainly destroyed because they were considered too compromising. The account books begin in 1926 and are remarkably complete and well-kept, which supports the hypothesis of a voluntary destruction of the older registers. Furthermore, they are entirely coded and do not contain any explicit names or dates.]

The following week, I tried several times to meet Julien, without success. When I tried to enter his office by following Sarah, when she brought him his morning coffee, she deployed treasures of persuasion to try to stop me, arguing that it was not necessary to do that, that he hated being forced, that it was up to him to take the initiative... In the end, annoyed, I asked her curtly:

- But finally, what do you want him to do? Hit me?

She just blushed and didn't bring it up again. But my attempts were doomed to failure.

I spent the weekend with my family to make up for my absence the week before, and came home late on Sunday evening. Julien's unexplained silence put me in a state of palpable anxiety, and by turning over in my head all the possible reasons he could have for avoiding me, I could no longer sort out the truth from the lies. I decided to calm my dismay with a herbal tea and a large slice of chocolate bread, which I enjoyed alone at the kitchen bench, in the dull glow of an old wall lamp with a dusty bulb. Suddenly, a voice that rang out to my right made me jump:

– It's too late to be hanging around the kitchen all alone.

Pierre looked at me, leaning against the doorframe, his arms crossed and a slightly mocking smile on his lips. For a few seconds, I remained rooted to the spot, disconcerted, then I lowered my eyes and offered him an infusion, which he accepted.

He stepped over the bench to sit across from me. I served him, then sat back down, my hands trembling a little. Pierre didn't take his eyes off me. A heavy silence fell, broken only by the tinkling of the spoon I was twirling in my cup. Finally he spoke:

– Did Julien pass you my message?

"He's not in the habit of letting me have anything," I said ironically, unable to suppress a slight tone of defiance.

"Really," Pierre retorted in a sharp voice that made me shudder. "I would like him to be a little more strict with you."

- Do you think he is not strict enough?

– No, that's not what I mean. There are just rules and I would like him to respect them. He tends to act a little erratically around you. Because he likes you.

I shrugged grimly.

– A fling.

- Are you saying that because he refuses to see you? That's his excessive side... He'll get over it.

- Do you know why he does that? I asked hopefully.

– I asked him to respect the rules, or leave you alone. You know, I've known Julien for years, and I can tell you that he's very strict with his own principles. But still, I've rarely seen him be this interested in a girl. You have to give him time to think.

– Really? But what are these rules that he doesn't want to respect?

– It's mainly a commitment issue. And it's not for me to explain that to you.

He had said this last sentence in a categorical tone, which discouraged me from asking any more questions. He paused for a moment, then offered me a cigarette. Our two columns of smoke intertwined in the still air of the kitchen, building aerial volutes with suggestive shapes. After a while, Pierre continued:

– Before meeting Julien, you had never had any SM experience?

I shook my head negatively, staring into the bottom of my cup.

– Obviously, you have a remarkable capacity for resistance, and you immediately took pleasure in it. It's not so common, you know. Most girls need to be... let's say, educated. And even beyond that, it's usually the game of domination that attracts them, not the act. Julien has often had trouble finding a girl who really suits him.

– Yet here you have no shortage of girls... more beautiful... and who do all this with more experience.

I had stressed the last word, remembering with resentment the way Julien had thrown it in my face.

Peter sighed, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

– That's true, there are plenty of experienced girls. And jaded ones too, who aren't afraid of anything anymore. Otherwise it's the opposite: fragile kids from whom there's nothing to get out of them. In both cases it's the same problem: you don't encounter any resistance, no response, no consistency. Julien needs a girl who's big enough to measure up to him. (He looked at me with a smile, then after a silence, he continued:) If Julien didn't like you so much, I think I'd be very interested in you.

I was taken aback by this little statement, and felt singularly flattered by it. Pierre noticed it and calmed me down immediately:

– But don't get proud of it, above all.

With that, he slipped away, leaving me to my thoughts.

Determined to be patient, I limited my attempts at approaching him during the following weeks. Left to my own devices, I devoted myself to a detailed study of the administrative files of the Manor. I wanted to go to Paris to consult some additional documents on the F* * * affair in the archives of the City of Paris, but in order not to take the risk of being absent just when Julien would have wanted to see me, I took advantage of a Saturday for this escapade. I was staying with a friend who had a studio a stone's throw from the Contrescarpe. On the program, happy hour on the terrace, amber beer flowing freely, and a group of relaxed girls who giggled under their breath while making eyes at the boys. It was a weekend rich in all kinds of fun, which took my mind off things.

Since Julien still refused to see me, one Friday evening I finally slipped the F* * * file under his door. After spending two days refining a plan of action, I tried again on Monday morning. The plan was as follows: be very professional, talk only about the archives, and turn on the lights, with a plunging V-neck and skirt that hugged my buttocks.

Honestly, I don't know what came over me. I must have forgotten that with Julien, planning a tight-lipped plan is useless; the mere thought of thinking of designing a plan was already doomed to failure.

I entered his office at eight-thirty, just as Sarah was leaving. Without giving him time to intervene, I sat down across from him and crossed my legs, which had

the effect of pushing my skirt up to the top of my thighs. At the same time, it was so short that if I hadn't, he would have had an immediate, plunging view of what I had underneath—namely, nothing.

– I wanted to see you to talk to you about the F* * * case, because you understand, as you have seen, I have worked on it for a long time and...

I let a stream of words flow from my lips. Julien wasn't listening to me, he was staring at me with a hard look, his jaw clenched under an unusual three-day beard.

Suddenly he cut me off:

- What is that outfit? Get out of my office right now.

– But I...

- Out !

He had raised his voice just enough to trigger an animal-like flight reaction in me. I stood up and stormed out the door. Hurt, I forgot my plan and my patience and decided to move on to direct provocation. So far, all my attempts had left him cold, but I had a feeling that with a little push, I could get him to lose his temper, and manage to make him angry enough that the desire to fight would overwhelm his resolve to avoid me.

I changed, gathered a few things, called my Parisian friend to ask if she could see me again, and went to see Édouard in his office. It was a long, windowless room, wedged between the kitchen stairs and the entrance hall, where two comfortable benches had been set up to welcome visitors.

– Edward, I have some research to do at the National Library. I'm going to be away for a few days, I'm going to sleep at a friend's house in Paris.

– Does Mr. Julien know about this?

- No, but you will be kind enough to tell him, if he looks for me.

– Maybe you should...

- It's okay, I know what I'm doing.

– Is there a number where we can reach you?

– Julien will be able to find me. He has my cell phone number.

It took him no more than twenty-four hours.

I was at the library having my lunch break in one of the small lounges facing the garden when my phone vibrated, displaying the number of the Manor. I picked it up, a little nervous.

- Hello ?

- It's Julien.

- Excuse me, I can't talk to you, I'm at the library...

- To others. If you were working, you wouldn't have picked up. What the hell are you doing?

"Why do you care?" I asked, anger rising in my voice.

- I didn't allow you to leave for several days like that.

I want you to come back to the Manor right away.

- Go to hell.

I hung up abruptly and put the small device back on the exotic wood coffee table, as if it had just burned my hands. I stared at it, shaking from head to toe, wondering if I had lost my mind. I had just realized that speaking to Julien in this way was tantamount to showing a recklessness bordering on recklessness.

After a moment, my phone buzzed again with a large insect-like buzz, echoing in the silence of the break room. A guy in a mouse-gray jacket biting into a sandwich wrapped in plastic wrap glared at me through his tortoiseshell glasses. Julien's voice rang out through the earpiece, a blank voice, drained of any anger or boasting, the voice he took when he was determined to act.

- Do you have anything to write on?

- Uh, yes.

- There's a club in the eighteenth, it's called Asgard. We'll meet there tonight at ten o'clock. I'll give you the address.

I wrote as he dictated, with a pen in the hollow of my wrist because I didn't have any paper.

- Is that okay? He asked calmly.

- Uh, yes, I repeated, taken aback.

- Good. See you tonight.

And he hung up.

If there was one thing I hadn't prepared for when I planned my little getaway in a hurry, it was having to go out in the evening with Julien. A shopping trip was a must.

I hurried back up to the reading room of the Réserve, apologized to the curator—he was a former professor of mine, and he had been kind enough to facilitate my access to collections that were usually difficult to obtain without proof of research—and left the peaceful banks of the Seine to reach the Halles district. The streets were teeming with Parisians in a hurry, swearing and weaving between tourists wandering haphazardly. The café terraces were full, the parapet of the Fontaine des Innocents was stormed by a gang of young goths with raven-black hair and clothes, the shops were swallowing and vomiting in the same movement streams of passersby who looked like giant scales, balanced by brightly colored plastic bags. I chose a posh boutique, relying on the obsequious expression of the saleswoman, a small woman with a wire body topped with an enormous blond hairdo with artfully layered curls. I asked her to suggest something original, classy and daring.

– A little daring, or very daring? she asked me with a mischievous smile that I would not have believed her capable of at first glance.

- We'll see what you're really daring about.

I showed up for the meeting that evening in a sequined dress whose fitted bodice made my breasts bulge out like two round white hills. On the side, from under my arms to mid-thigh, an interlacing of ribbons adjusted the dress, revealing small diamonds of flesh that certified that the flowing and shiny fabric could not hide any underwear. The bottom of the dress tapered into a fringe of fine silk braids that flapped my thighs like a loincloth.

My outfit was completed with a pair of black patent leather boots with heels, and a trench coat that hid the indecency of my dress from the eyes of passersby. For a woman, this kind of outfit is an absolute weapon. No man could look at me with indifference, and knowing it made me strong and even more desirable.

At the address given by Julien, there was only a closed door, nothing to indicate a bar or a club. I knocked, and the door opened to reveal a tall guy in a suit who stepped aside to let me in, giving me a rather unwelcoming look. We found ourselves in a sort of airlock with a cloakroom at the back, and a door on the right to which was nailed a gold plaque engraved with the words: "Asgard. Private club." Asgard, the kingdom of the gods: I recognized there the characteristic modesty of the SM crowd. The doorman, for his part, looked more like a Cerberus; he gave me a great number of silent intimidation, then declared:

– I'm sorry, Miss, this is a private club, you can only enter by invitation.

– That's good, I'm invited. By Julien Andringer.

The giant looked me up and down again, and suddenly, to my surprise, he burst into a loud laugh.

– That's a good try, little one, but it's not working!

I was a little disoriented; Julien hadn't warned me that I might have trouble getting in.

- I beg your pardon ?

– There are plenty of kids like you who try to get in without an invitation. You think that all you have to do is say the name of someone you know, and that's it! No luck for you, I know Julien well, and you're not his type at all.

It was my turn to stare at him silently, incredulously, then I crossed my arms over my chest and declared defiantly:

- Well, you don't know him that well, since he's waiting for me. Let me in.

– Out of the question. My position depends on it.

- It will really depend on it when he finds out that you stopped me from entering!

- That's it, come on, get the hell out of here.

- I won't move an inch.

I leaned against the wall opposite the club door and scowled, ignoring the bouncer. It seemed clear that Julien had done it on purpose, to see how I would get out of this absurd situation. All I could do was hope he hadn't arrived yet, and wait for him.

About ten minutes later, a couple showed up and had better luck than me with Mr. Cerberus. He let them in without even speaking to them. When he opened the door for them, I leaned out to catch a glimpse of the inside of the club. Julien must have been watching the door, because in the half-second that it remained open, our gazes locked intensely. The colossus quickly closed his Pandora's box, but reassured, I took a step back and waited. Indeed, the door opened again, this time to Julien who joined me in the vestibule, under the astonished eyes of the doorman.

– Leave your coat and bag in the cloakroom, he ordered.

He was calm, nothing gave away the fact that he had summoned me with the intention of punishing me. By dint of getting annoyed with the doorman, I too had

forgotten to fear this inevitable outcome, and I was all impatience and satisfaction to find the man who occupied my mind. I stripped myself and handed my things to the Cerberus, unable to hold back a triumphant smile. For his part, he seemed much less impressive all of a sudden, with his jaw dropping to his knees at the sight of my outfit. When I turned back to Julien, I saw that he was sizing me up appreciatively.

He slipped a finger into my cleavage, between my two breasts, and pulled me against him, murmuring:

– Very nice.

I blushed slightly at the heat that flooded my crotch, but pointedly kept my eyes down. He grabbed my wrist and led me inside.

Chapter 3.

From the number of pairs of eyes that landed on me as we crossed the threshold, I became aware of the very special role that Julien played in this small community. He was surrounded by an aura of respect and vaguely unhealthy curiosity that made him the center of attention. Of course, it was the same at the Manor; but there, he was the master of the place. Observing the same phenomenon in a foreign place was totally different, more impressive. He assumed this role naturally, and in a totally controlled way. His serenity shone through in each of his gestures, calculated and staged; he was performing, but without pretense, without hamming it up. Next to him, I felt quite awkward, and I congratulated myself on having chosen a dress that allowed me to look at least a little up to par.

He went back to his place, on a stool at the bar, and placed me in front of him, standing facing the counter.

- Do you want something to drink?

I nodded.

- What do you want?

- Same as you.

– Excellent choice, he agreed with a smile.

I think he was especially pleased to see me cautiously resume the formal "vous". He had me served a glass of red wine, thick, heady, whose color glowed like embers. Since I had my back to the room, I could not make out the people around me, except through portions of distorted reflections that I glimpsed in the mirrors of the bar. I had a blurry and mainly auditory image of the club, where the conversations were light and animated as in any Parisian evening. While keeping a

possessive hand on the back of my neck, Julien conversed quietly with those around him. They talked about this and that, about mutual acquaintances, about shared evenings. At one point, a man interrupted them and timidly suggested to Julien that he dispose of his submissive. I could not help but turn my head a little to see the girl. She had long blonde hair that flowed from side to side of her face almost to her hips. She was quite pretty, except that she looked terrified and her makeup was dripping in two long trails of tears down her cheeks. My companion replied that he already had everything he needed for tonight.

No one dared to ask him questions about me.

The guy and his princess-haired partner walked away and I followed them with my eyes for a moment as they crossed the room furnished with round tables, towards the back wall where several small alcoves were set up that could be closed with opaque curtains. They blended into the crowd where everyone was dressed in black, scrupulously respecting the dress code of the genre, based on leather, latex and metal, a little less velvet and silk. I moved closer to Julien and pressed myself against him, reassured to see that he was wearing the usual outfit that I knew he wore at the Manor, jeans and a black t-shirt. He wore a wide brown leather belt, through which was passed the loop of his riding crop, which beat his thigh with each of his movements. Fascinated, I imagined him undoing it, turning it in his right hand as if to warm it up and ordering me to present my ass to receive the bites of the cruel instrument. I could almost feel in my flesh the burning of the leather, the pleasure mitigated by the pain, the anguish of the endless punishments that he knew so well how to inflict. I felt the excitement rising in the pit of my stomach, and my sex pressed against Julien's knee, I discreetly rubbed myself against him to relieve myself and share my emotion with him.

Suddenly, he pulled me out of my reverie by grabbing me by the wrist again as he stood up. He dragged me toward the back of the bar; as he passed, several people stopped to greet him. At the end of the counter was a small, closed black door, in front of which Julien stopped before turning to a man in his fifties, with gray hair and a rounded belly, who was standing behind the bar and surveying the room with the eye of the owner. The man approached, smiling, and shook his hand:

- Julien, how are you?
- Impeccable. Can we go down?

The boss smiled at him, then he looked at me for a moment, furrowing his bushy eyebrows, and observed:

- You know I don't want any novices down there. Is this girl initiated?
- She is with me.

– Mmh yes, obviously, excuse me, you know I had to ask the question, it's the rules.

He put his hand under the bar and the small door opened by itself with a click, revealing a dark staircase that seemed to sink into the depths of the city. Julien let his hand slide along mine to take my fingers, and pulled me up the stairs. When the door had closed behind us, he put an arm around my waist and whispered in my ear:

– Downstairs is the very private part of the private club. But it's no worse than the Manor. Behave yourself, and be obedient.

I nodded obediently as we emerged into a long, dimly lit, vaulted room.

There were a few tables, a counter smaller than the one in the room above, and a sort of platform leaning against the stone wall. On it, a couple was engaged in a delicate bondage exercise: the woman was installed in an improbable position, her legs spread and raised, her hands tied between her legs; the man was swirling around her, drawing elegant geometric shapes on her body with a smooth white rope, all in contrasts on her tanned skin. I am not a fan of this kind of practice, but I must admit that it was pretty. A small number of scattered spectators observed the scene with nods and murmurs of approval. Julien took me to the back of the room and asked me to wait for him. In the meantime, several people came out by the stairs, visibly drawn there by curiosity, following in Julien's footsteps.

Standing a little trembling against the stone wall, I watched him cross the room and address a stern man who was standing near the bar and not taking his eyes off the stage. They exchanged a few sentences, while Julien calmly unhooked the riding crop from his belt and twirled it between his fingers, exactly as I had imagined. I was in such a state that I feared that wet streaks might be seen running down the inside of my thighs, but at the same time I twisted my fingers in anxiety. The man did not seem to agree with Julien, both of them looked at me intermittently. When Julien came back to me, pulling me against him, he whispered softly:

– I'm not going to be able to beat you as much as I would have liked tonight. You'll just have to consider this as a down payment.

Far from reassuring me, this threat petrified me. We waited for the couple on the stage to finish their complicated embraces, then when the place was free, Julien grabbed a chair and led me to the center of the room, in full view of everyone. He placed the chair upside down, that is to say with the back in front of me, and said to me in a low voice:

– You can scream as much as you want, but I don't want to see you move. Understood?

– Um, I'll do my best, I replied, a little hesitantly.

– The correct answer to this question was “yes, master.”

I glared at him; he rolled his eyes, feigning exasperation, then he gently took my wrists and made me lean forward over the back of the chair and grip the seat with both hands. I was thus well wedged against the back, and he had only to make one gesture to lift my dress up to my waist, revealing my bare buttocks and the hot cavern of my sex to the eyes of the audience. I did not have time to feel hurt in my modesty: he was already behind me, preparing his riding crop, and when he began to hit, I had the confirmation that it was indeed a punishment, and not an erotic appetizer. I bit my lip to stop myself from screaming and counted in my head. But quickly the pain made me lose count, and I had to use my concentration more selectively. I imagined my feet as the roots of a tree, buried deep in the ground. My screams echoed against the vault of the small underground room.

Julien pushed me that night to unknown limits. He struck with a worrying application, each blow falling a little harder than the last, in a terrifying progression because it was seemingly endless. The space between the blows seemed calculated to give me just enough time to breathe. The pain reached a delirious force, I saw stars under my closed eyelids, which danced and glowed in rhythm with the sonorous crack of the whip on my bruised buttocks. When he stopped hitting, instead of ebbing away the pain swelled like a wave and overwhelmed me to the point of nausea, and I wondered by what miracle I was still standing, in the exact position where Julien had placed me.

He pulled my dress up over my scarlet buttocks, and grabbed me to stand up. Fortunately, he was supporting me at the same time, because I was in the grip of a violent vertigo, which made the stone walls spin around me like the walls of a centrifuge. Julien led me to a small living room composed of sofas at ground level, placed around a large Moroccan tray in engraved metal. I stumbled on the carpet before falling to my knees. Someone called out:

– Hey, she's going to give us an endorphin overdose!

I felt Julien's reassuring hand stroking my hair, and he pulled me against him with a protective gesture before offering me a glass of clear alcohol and a cigarette. The circuit of the smoke in my bronchi put me back on my feet a little, but my perception of the environment remained rather vague, through the filter of my heightened senses which amplified everything: the tingling of the hairs of the thick carpet on my knees, the heat radiating from Julien, the absurdity of the

uninterrupted parade of faces leaning over me and commenting for Julien on the scene they had just witnessed. I couldn't really focus my attention on their words, but the few snippets of conversation I could catch were compliments and congratulations. The guy with whom Julien had negotiated my punishment threw at him:

- My respects. I didn't think she would last until the end.
- I know what I'm doing, though, replied Julien.
- How much did you agree on? asked another man.
- Forty. Julien wanted to go to fifty, but frankly, I don't think it would have held.

“Of course she did,” Julien retorted with a hint of pride in his voice. “That was only ten more. She was still capable of receiving them. Wasn't that right, Pauline?”

“Yes, master,” I heard myself answer in a blank voice.

I mentally castigated myself for being so slovenly docility after what I had just endured. But it was perfectly in keeping with my state of mind at that moment: I felt dizzy, cottony, broken. Julien looked at me, raising his eyebrows in a half-surprised, half-amused manner; he was indulgent enough to spare my pride by refraining from triumphing.

We didn't linger at the club for long that night. Julien was preoccupied, tense; it may seem strange, but I think he was worried about me. He kept giving me furtive glances that gave me the impression that he wanted or even needed to talk to me. As we left the club together, entwined in the warm night, we walked for a while through the streets of Paris. The boulevards were filled with passers-by loitering in the windows of charming boutiques, in the lively noise of nocturnal conversations. As soon as we moved a little away from these arteries of life, the gray streets became strangely deserted, the headlights of cars sometimes cutting through the pools of blurred light from the streetlamps with a flash of sound.

Julien stopped in front of a Haussmannian building whose heavy wooden door opened silently when he punched in the code. The tiny elevator shaft with its dark red metal grilles was so small that we were pressed against each other as we went up. He took the opportunity to kiss my neck and, hugging me tightly, he placed a hand on the top of my thighs and pulled my dress up to my waist. Immediately, I felt the pent-up excitement of the evening rise up in me, and a deep desire for him to take me right here, without worrying about the potential comings and goings of the building's residents. When we reached the top floor, he pushed

me in front of one of the landing doors and took a key out of his pocket. I entered to discover a studio lit by two round openings in the roof, like the old maids' rooms. The apartment had been renovated, a thick carpet muffling the sound of our footsteps. There was a small American kitchen with a bar on the left, and on the right, bathed in the blue light that fell through the exposed beams, a large cot.

– Welcome to my bachelor pad, Julien said to me as he locked the door behind us.

- Is this your home?

I widened my eyes, amazed by the intimate warmth that bathed this place.

– Yes, I had it redone, they were attics. No neighbors, except the old people below; but I assure you: it is perfectly soundproof.

– That reassures me, that's for sure.

“It should,” he murmured, running his hands through my hair. “At least I won't forbid you from screaming.”

– Not yet ! he protests.

– I meant, for fun.

Pulling me firmly against him, he placed his mouth on my lips. Our tongues entwined in a kiss with infinite convolutions, and the ball of heat that had inhabited my lower abdomen since the beginning of the evening became unbearable. I pressed my crotch against his thigh, moaning. He lifted me up, and without stopping kissing me, placed me on the bed.

His hands were lost on my skin, each caress spreading like a wave of electric current. He placed two fingers on my sex, and with a talent for giving pleasure that was matched only by his talent for causing pain, he made me climb all the rungs of ecstasy to the unbearable. I actually screamed, and begged him to take me. Holding me by the wrists, he demanded that I claim his cock with all the synonyms I knew before finally condescending to penetrate me. He was so tense with desire that his pleasure was equal to mine and left us, still dressed, panting, crippled with cramps and hilarious from having enjoyed so much.

It was only once we had undressed, refreshed by a good shower and were both seated at the bar with a glass of wine that we took the time to sort things out.

– Pauline, can I know what got into you?

- What, you didn't expect me to let you ignore me like that indefinitely.

- So you thought it was smart to provoke me? You shouldn't play that kind of little game with me. It's dangerous.

I smiled at him, a boast to show him that I wasn't afraid of him (even though deep down, I wasn't feeling very good).

– I couldn't find any other solution.

- I would have found a solution, if you had given me the time. Pierre had asked me not to see you anymore.

– That's not exactly what he explained to me!

Julien's eyes widened in surprise, and I bit my lip, berating myself for saying too much.

- Can I know what he explained to you?

I summarized my interview with Pierre in the kitchen in one sentence:

- He told me that you didn't want to respect certain rules.

Julien looked down and fatigue passed like a shadow over his face. Seeing the two of us in this kitchenette at two in the morning, one could wonder which of us looked more like a child who had been punished. He sighed and launched into the beginning of an explanation:

– Our community does not tolerate you participating in sessions if you are not officially submitted to a master. I need to find someone for you, it might take a little time.

I raised my eyebrows and let a moment of silence settle, then I stated:

- You are my master.

He answered me with a sad smile:

- I am not the master of anyone. Of everyone, and of no one.

– Well, it's the same for me, I retorted jokingly, to hide the dismay that was beginning to set in.

I don't think I really want a master after all.

He looked up at me and penetrated me with his blue gaze, murmuring cynically:

– Great. We're made for each other then.

And he kissed me.

Waking up the next morning, pretending to sleep a little longer, I surreptitiously observed Julien's movements, as he engaged in the ordinary waltz of everyday gestures: untangling the sheets, doing up the button of his jeans on his bare skin, making coffee. I couldn't help but think about the way his beautiful,

large hands had manipulated me, cajoled me, and beaten me, the way they generously distributed blows and caresses, the will of the clear eyes of the man to whom I had offered myself. Quivering with contained excitement, I indulged in the slight anxiety that the memory of the night before caused me, I lost myself in the contradictory sensations of our ambivalent relationship, savoring everything incongruous, inappropriate, and delicious about it.

He dropped me off a little later at the friend's house where I was staying and allowed me to stay in Paris to continue my research, on condition that I return early on Thursday evening. To my astonishment, he specified:

- Yes, I know, yesterday I told you it was just a down payment, and today I'm allowing you to stay... But I can assure you. You'll get the rest of your punishment in due time.

[Collection of white nettles. At Jean Fort's, from 1917 to around 1939. Unfinished file.

The publisher Jean Fort, nephew of Pierre Fort who was himself a publisher in Paris from 1896 to around 1905, began his activity around 1901. At that time, his address was 73 Faubourg Poissonnière and, in addition to this authentic address, he was already using fanciful addresses such as "Bibliothèque des deux hémisphères" or "Sweetgrass, Québec". It was at the latter that he published Philippe Andringer's little pamphlet in 1902 (Bib. Trav. 2F). From 1921 to 1925, he was located on Rue de Chabrol, and finally, from 1925, at 25 Rue de Vaugirard.

As early as 1917, Jean Fort published the first pamphlets of the famous Collection des Orties blanches, entirely devoted to flagellation works that were very fashionable at the time. These are carefully edited and often illustrated by the most prominent artists of the time in the field of erotic illustration: Louis Malteste, Martin Van Maele, etc. The texts, mostly under pseudonyms, are also sometimes of remarkable quality that yields relatively little ground to the obligatory stylistic devices of the genre. Several works by Louis Malteste and Pierre Mac Orlan are worth noting. First list:

Apertus, The so-called Passionate Flagellation , 1928.

Blackeyes, Sadie, (Dumarchey, Pierre), Little typist , 1933.

Chancènes, Jean de, Slave in Love , 1930.

Daniel, Max, Icy, Jacques d', Malteste, Louis, The Passionate Sinner , 1926.

Desergy, René-Michel, High School Chambermaids , 1934.

Flogger, AW, *Confidences of a Baronet* , 1929.

Fulbert, Florence, *Women Trainers of Men* , 1931.

Furry, Sophia, *The Lace Prisons* , c. 1940.

Icy, Jacques d', Malteste, Louis, *The Cherished Hands* , 1929.

Slavy, Bob, *Mrs. Goodwhip and her slave* , 1932. etc.

The BnF's computerized catalog only lists around thirty works related to the *Orties blanches* collection, but a more in-depth search brings back more than a hundred results, including a series of reprints begun in the 1970s.

In order to verify the completeness of the *Manoir* collection, I undertook a more exhaustive collation, carried out on the collection of the BNF Reserve, rating *Enfer*, which is reputed to be one of the most complete of its kind. The survey is quite complex because most of the texts are the subject of various reissues, within the collection, sometimes with different illustrations. I thus identified 65 editions between 1917 and 1939, for only around fifty texts.

Having identified 82 copies bearing the mention of the collection of *White Orties* in the library of the *Manoir*, a study seems necessary to me to identify the editions that appear in several copies and to trace the texts. In addition, several are dedicated by the author or illustrator to Gabriel or Philippe Andringer and at least three include pencil sketches or handwritten pages added as a supplement.

Between 1900 and 1914 approximately, Gabriel Andringer makes several references in his notebooks to a certain "Jean F." who was supposedly a friend of his and had received him several times at his home in Paris for sessions. This Jean F. apparently also frequented the *Manoir*, as did a "Pierre D." who frequently wrote to Philippe and spoke to him about novels he was publishing: was this Pierre Dumarchey / Mac Orlan? A cross-check with the *Manoir* records might allow us to verify this.]

On Thursday afternoon, I sent Julien an email from a library computer: "Dear Master, I haven't quite finished my work. I'm going to be a little late, but I promise to be back around nine tonight." The reply was immediate: "Pauline, I asked you to be back today at six. Every minute you're late will cost you a whiplash. Yes, I'm serious." I didn't doubt it for a second. I suppose I had tried to coax him by addressing him in such a formal manner, but in reality I hadn't expected much more understanding from him. So I used the little time I had left to make as much progress as possible with my research, and left the library parking lot shortly before five.

The traffic conditions in the Île-de-France proved true to their reputation, and it was a few minutes past six when the gravel in the courtyard of the Manoir crunched under the tires of my old brown Ford. I ran inside and poked my head into Édouard's office:

- Hello, do you know where Julien is?
- In his office I suppose?

Our dear butler hadn't even deigned to appear surprised. I threw my things on the bench, specifying that I would come and get them later, ran along the corridor and knocked all out of breath on the office door.

- Who is it ?
- Pauline.
- Come in.

I pushed the door and closed it silently, leaning against the door. Julien was working on his computer, a cigarette between his lips. He didn't look up and observed:

- It's twelve minutes past six.
- I know, I tried to justify myself, it's because of...
- Be nice, pass me the whip that's there, behind you.

I turned around. The instrument was standing upright against the wall, and I took it by the handle. A strange shiver ran down my spine, and as I felt the flexible, leather-covered shaft vibrate, I felt myself invested with immense power. I crossed the room and handed him the riding crop across the desk. He grabbed it and stood up, still without looking at me. As he walked around the desk, I nervously undid the button of my pants and pulled them down to my knees with my panties, then I leaned forward, my elbows on the desk, my legs spread, and my back arched to present my buttocks well.

Julien leaned over me to crush his cigarette in the ashtray on my right, and standing behind me, he asked me to keep count. He gave me the promised twelve strokes, firmly but without excessive severity.

We played a familiar tune, each of us knowing the score by heart, the sharp crack of the riding crop alternating with my trembling voice announcing the number. While unsettling and painful, the exercise had a reassuring familiarity. After the twelfth stroke, he turned to put the instrument down where I had picked it up, while I got dressed. When he came back to me, he grabbed me by the waist and

kissed me fervently. I let myself slip my arms around his neck, my fingers getting lost in his wild hair as he slid his tongue over my lips with infinite gentleness.

“Tonight you will have the rest of your punishment,” he whispered in my ear.

– Really? I thought I was deprived of a session.

– Pierre is not here. He is not coming until tomorrow.

– Oh. It's not a rule-following issue, then.

It's Pierre who worries you.

He tightened his hand in my hair until it hurt and whispered with a smile:

– Fish.

I let him do it, half closing my eyes, and he kissed me again; then he sent me to put on a decent outfit (that is to say, sufficiently indecent) and ordered me to join him in the large drawing room.

She was so radiant that it was impossible not to notice her. Her almond-shaped eyes and her shiny black hair, like a shard of quartz, formed a striking contrast with her fair, smooth skin. Under her transparent shirt, her small, round breasts ended in two dark areolas, pointed like two small pyramids in a milky desert. And then, she was wearing a headband with two black velvet cat ears. As soon as Julien had seen her, he had immediately set his sights on her. And you can't really blame him. Arriving in the large living room that evening, the first thing I noticed was this girl with cat ears, whose every movement was a feline dance that hypnotized Julien. The second thing I noticed was Pierre's presence. He stood to Julien's right, relaxed, hands in his pockets, and seemed to be very amused by his friend's state of confusion in front of this funny little cat. But I didn't let myself be fooled: if he was there, it was to keep an eye on him. I didn't see any other reason that could justify his coming unexpectedly, a day early.

When he saw me, he proved my theory right. I saw his eyes harden, his eyebrows furrow, his mouth twist into a disgruntled grin, and he walked straight toward me, giving off so much hostility that I wanted to sink into the ground, head first, like an ostrich. Julien gave me a distracted look, sighed, then, avoiding the problem, turned back to Miss Cat Ears, leaving me to face Pierre alone. A sour resentment twisted my stomach.

Pierre had stopped a few inches from me and was staring at me without saying anything. For my part, I was looking at my feet, encased in a pretty pair of brand new patent leather stiletto heels.

And there he declared:

– Julien, what the hell is going on?

Forced to let go of his new whim, Julien apologized to the master of the girl with cat ears and approached us, sighing again.

– You promised me, Pierre replied.

- What do you want me to do? Julien asked, shrugging his shoulders.

Pierre took a few seconds to think, so long that I had time to feel my heart pounding like a steam hammer in my chest.

"Tonight she's mine," he finally said.

As I wondered what he meant by that, Julien took my right wrist, lifted it, and placed it in Pierre's hand. The deal was sealed, and when I opened my mouth to protest, Julien glared at me with such determination that any resistance was instantly extinguished. Gritting my teeth, I dared to ask him anyway:

- What does that mean?

- You obey him, as if he were your master.

- Should I sleep with him?

My cheeks were scarlet, and Julien was still looking at me with his impassive and irritating calm.

- You'll do whatever he tells you. If he wants to fuck you, he'll fuck you. Do you have a problem with that?

– No, I whispered.

My eyes slid to the man I had just been given over to, his strong hands, his salty skin, his generous muscles that made you want to run your fingers and tongue over them.

Surprisingly, it was true: I was rather excited at the idea of sleeping with Pierre, especially if it was Julien who asked me to.

– Good grief, Julien, what are you teaching your submissive? Pierre growled.

He closed a hand as hard as a vice on the back of my neck, and making me bend towards him with an impressive contained violence, he continued to my attention:

– It's "no master," or I'll give you a taste of my belt, here and now.

"No, master," I hastened to correct, trembling.

Julien didn't seem very happy with the way Pierre had addressed him, and even less with the way he was treating me, but oddly enough, he refrained from protesting. I would never have believed that anyone could speak to him in that tone without him exploding. His sullen attitude was that of a kid who knows he deserved his punishment, but who doesn't take it willingly. Pierre, for his part, ignored him superbly, as if he were a negligible quantity, a grain of sand. The tension between them was no less palpable, and they ostentatiously separated, each to one end of the room,

Pierre focusing his attention on me, and Julien on the girl with cat ears.

Julien may be demanding, but he has always had his own very personal way of respecting me. Flexible, he navigates the gaps in my desire; he assesses what I am capable of giving, and then he demands it, down to the last drop of energy.

With Pierre it's different. Simpler, more straightforward. He sets the rules: you just have to respect them. As long as you obey, everything's fine; at the first misdeed, the punishment falls, merciless. I understand that this can be reassuring in a certain way, but I found it oppressive. I felt his gaze fixed on me permanently, ready to strike at the drop of a hat.

At the beginning of the session, Julien settled into his favorite chair and placed the girl with the cat ears between his legs. She had been introduced to us as Alicia. Julien undid his belt and made his sex, swollen with desire, emerge right in front of her; the skin of his glans drew a promise of slightly acrid sweetness, and I wanted to put my lips on it. It was Alicia who had this privilege, and her mouth, shiny as a candy apple, enveloped his penis in a sensual caress that made her half-close her eyes. Revolted by this spectacle, I clenched my fists. Pierre called me to order in his own way, brutal and without appeal.

When the time came for me to serve him, Pierre loudly declared that I was a lecherous slut who took as much pleasure in being whipped as in being fucked, and that he was going to prove it. He had me tied to one of the pillars of the mezzanine, and choosing a submissive who was there, he had him kneel between my legs, his hands tied behind his back behind the wooden post. The man thus had his face at the height of my sex, and Pierre ordered him to lick me, but very slowly, and only at his signal. Then he whispered in my ear:

– He'll take care of the pleasure, and I'll take care of the pain. I'll stop whipping you when you've come.

He moved back behind me, and began to slowly caress my thighs and sex with the end of his long, thin riding crop. I was trembling all over, and before the ordeal had even begun, I was already almost on the verge of orgasm. However,

when the first blows fell, a small series of four or five but delivered with force and without respite, the suffering immediately took over and tears came to my eyes. On Pierre's order, the man who was tied between my feet reached towards me, and gently ran his tongue up the slit of my sex and up to my clitoris, which he reached at the moment when a new blow of the riding crop landed on my two contracted buttocks. The man showed a rather convincing expertise in the art of tormenting a woman; his caresses were both delicious and perverse, and lingered in the vicinity of pleasure without ever giving it time to settle. No matter how hard I concentrated and tried to position myself so that his tongue would finally linger where I wanted it, he knew how to withdraw it or slow down his solicitations when my pleasure became too obvious.

At the same time, Pierre alternated between a barrage of fierce blows, which prevented me from concentrating on anything else, and lighter phases, where I felt him raise his hand a little and space out the blows, letting the pleasure build. He played like this for a while, sometimes letting me access the upward slope of ecstasy, sometimes stunning me with pain, until I finally understood that he had total control over me. Despite all my efforts, it would be impossible for me to enjoy myself until he allowed me to.

He drove me in this way to the edge of exhaustion, and finally, without ceasing to whip me, although more moderately, he asked my other torturer to caress me harder. I felt his precise tongue harden and my loins pushed violently towards him almost in spite of myself. He did not shirk, and finally the orgasm rose and overwhelmed me, exalted, almost demented, carried away by a pleasure of a violence that I had rarely known before.

Instead of savoring my pleasure, I spent the rest of the session fuming. Julien had nothing but Alicia: he caressed her, whipped her, took her, demanded all sorts of things from her that I would have gladly given him myself. I suppose that the jealousy that was devouring me, not very discreet, must have practically gone out in smoke through my eyes and ears. It earned me an additional ordeal.

At the end of the session, Alicia left with her master, Pierre gave me back to Julien and slipped away, and we were left alone, Julien and I, in the library. He took on the tone of a lecturer to tell me:

– Pauline, in SM there is no room for jealousy.

In principle I should punish you for your attitude.

Exasperated, I gave him a defiant look and said curtly:

- I've been beaten enough for tonight.

He remained very calm and retorted:

- I decide whether you've had enough or not.

– Oh, really?! I thought Peter was the master here.

I saw a blood-red glow pass through Julien's eyes.

He remained completely still, except for the fingers of his right hand, which began to drum nervously on the armrest of his chair. I had succeeded in making him angry. A cold sweat ran through me. Now I was angry with myself for having insisted on going too far.

– Very well, Julien declared in an icy voice, since you insist, come here.

I approached him, my stomach muscles twitching involuntarily. He continued:

– But first, I want to hear you admit that it wasn't me who decided to beat you again. You put yourself in this situation yourself.

- Yes master, I whispered in a broken voice.

He pushed me onto his knees, lifted my skirt, and gave me a memorable, salutary beating with the flat of his hand, which washed away my resentment and his anger.

That night I slept with him. We did nothing but hug each other as if we were cold, kiss each other's faces, and sleep entwined, a bad sleep in my case, because no position relieved the throbbing burning in my behind.

The next day was a work day; Julien got up very early, and I shortly after him. I spent about an hour in my office, working on the records.

Around ten o'clock, I went out onto the terrace to smoke a cigarette, and came face to face with Alicia. Even in jeans and a white tank top, with her hair a little disheveled, dark circles under her eyes, and a cigarette between her lips, she was fresh and beautiful enough to make the garden itself pale. She looked at me with her big almond-shaped eyes, came closer to me and said:

– You know, I'm sorry about last night.

– Excuse me? I asked him a little curtly. About what?

– Paul, he's my master, wanted to make sure we could go to the session, and he asked me to go all out with Julien.

But I didn't think he'd take it this far. It wasn't my goal to put you at odds with your master.

I looked at her with a shrug and whispered:

- He's not my master.

She was silent for a moment, studying me as she puffed on her cigarette, as if wondering if she could trust me.

Then she continued in a very soft voice:

– But yes. Just see the way he looks at you. He's your master. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

– Nobody... Not even him?

Discouraged, I slid down with my back to the wall until I was sitting on the floor, sighing. Alicia came and sat down next to me; her knee brushed mine, causing a strange feeling of unease.

“I know how you feel,” she said, her head raised, her eyes lost somewhere, far away in the clouds. “We’ve all had moments of doubt. We’ve all wondered if we were beautiful enough, brave enough, strong enough for our masters. We’ve all heard them say that in SM, there’s no room for love or attachment. You have to hold on.”

When a man looks at you like that, it's because you've got him, believe me.

I had been so angry with this girl, I had gathered so much hatred towards her, and now that she was here sitting next to me, speaking to me in a confidential tone, telling me exactly what I needed to hear, I wanted to take her in my arms, to rest my head on her shoulder and to let myself go to tears that for once would not be tears of pain.

– And you never asked yourself if that's really what you wanted? To have a master, I mean.

– Oh, that, she said, laughing, is a taboo question.

– What do you mean, taboo?

– Taboo as in you shouldn't talk about it. SM is worn like a well-cut outfit. The more you pay for it, the more indecent it is to complain about it. Most girls would tell you that you should be very happy to have the chance that a guy like Julien is interested in you. And the more he makes you suffer, the more you should rejoice.

– That's easy to say.

– I know. In reality, we all have moments when we really wonder why we continue to do all this. But you see, you have already reached the point of no

return. You would want to resume a vanilla relationship, you would be like a heroin addict who thinks he can relieve his withdrawal by smoking a joint.

– Vanilla... I repeated thoughtfully.

– Yeah, that's what they say, vanilla. Tell yourself that you'll see your master come back, and he'll demand even more, he'll treat you like a female dog, and the worst moment will be when you admit to yourself that your bastard of a master is the person in the world who knows best how to make you cum. And even better than you do.

She stood up and casually dusted off her pants.

I wanted to hold her back, but I didn't know what else to say, and I looked at her stupidly, mute and admiring. She gave me a small smile through a curtain of black hair that caressed her face, and suddenly, she kissed me on the lips. I pressed my tongue against hers for a shiver, before watching her walk away with her feline gait, without turning around.

[Pre-inventory of the archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie.

Administrative documents.

Various administrative documents relating to the Manor (including case F* *) 1907-1926 – Box B8.

Various administrative documents relating to drapery shops and other income, 1902-1967 – Box B12.

Host File, 1926-1967 – boxes B9 and B10.

Hotel registers, 1926-1967 and session registers,

1952-1967 – Registers, Series R and S.

The series of coded registers begins in 1926. At that time, Philippe Andringer, the eldest son of Gabriel Andringer, was the administrator of the Manor. His handwriting can be recognized on the registers and he is the signatory of most of the administrative acts, invoices, etc. relating to them, as well as those concerning the other sources of income of the Andringer family.

According to my estimates, the Andringers gave up their drapery business just after the end of the war, in the early 1920s. Gabriel Andringer was too old to continue to run the business, and Philippe carried out a clever financial operation, all the documents of which are in the archives, to sell two of the shops and start operating the third, the one in Paris, in the form of a sort of franchise that brought him a small income in addition to the income from the Manoir hotel.

This must have started several years ago, but the older records having been destroyed, for us it is documented from 1926.

To understand something about the activities of the Manor, it is necessary to combine three series of complementary documents: the hotel registers, the session registers, and the File. The hotel registers are simply account books, they contain dates and billing mentions, but no names. Instead of names, there is a system of numerical references to the File. An entry in a hotel register might look like this:

From 12.03.1931 to 13.03.1931 – ch. 07 – M24 – 118 fr.

This means that room 07 was occupied from March 12 to 13, 1931 for an amount of 118 francs by the master who bears number 24 in the File. These registers are classified in chronological order.

The File lists all the hosts of the Manor by assigning them a numerical identifier preceded by "M" for the masters, and "S" for the submissives. The files for the submissives only contain a first name, and the reference of the master who introduced them. A few files bear handwritten inscriptions on the submissive's preferences and prohibitions, but this is quite rare and all the annotated files date from the same period (the end of the 1950s, according to my estimates). The masters' files contain the master's first and last name as well as his date of birth. The file is classified by host order number ("M" and "S" combined in a single continuous series).

The most interesting are the misnamed session registers, which should have been called contract registers because in fact, they list not the participants in the sessions, but the hosts who meet the criteria for having the right to participate (for a submissive: being accompanied by a master to whom he is bound by contract; for a master: having been submissive before). The classification of these registers is apparently chronological, but it is difficult to say because no date is written in plain text.

Finally, by combining all these documents, we can gather a lot of information about the masters: knowing which submissives they attached themselves to, how many contracts they participated in as witnesses, at what time they were submissives, on what dates they attended the Manor, etc. For the submissives it is much more complicated given that their last name does not appear anywhere. We can at most find the trace of a submissive if we know approximately his contract date or the name of his master, and even then. On the other hand, it is almost impossible to determine the identity of a submissive just from these documents.]

It was well into May, and it was mild. It was the kind of spring evening that makes you want to go outside and smoke and watch the sky change from blue to gray as the night casts its sheet of shadow over the trees.

Coming back from my mother's at the end of the weekend, I tried to analyze my own impatience, feverish and a little tense at the idea of returning to the Manor. I knew that the garden was waiting for me, immense and silent like a bear in hibernation.

And the session was waiting for me, the one on Sunday evening, marked by the weariness of the past weekend and the slight regret of knowing that life will resume its course. And Julien was waiting for me, with I don't know what formidable program, and always a score to settle.

But when I stepped out of my car onto the white gravel of the yard, I saw that the first one waiting for me was Alicia. She was sitting on the front steps, dressed for the shoot: all black leather, with hot pants and boots, and a zippered bustier. Her cat ears held two strands of straight hair behind her ears. She watched me come toward her, puffing on her cigarette.

I sat down next to her on the steps, and she called out to me:

– Hello.

- Were you waiting for me? I asked him.

– Yeah. Your master told me you were coming home tonight. You know it was a hell of a weekend here without you. Your master was in a terrible mood.

“Stop calling him that,” I muttered, lighting a cigarette of my own.

- What do you want me to say?

– Well Julien, like everyone else.

– Honey, she said, laughing, you're the only one who calls him that. You don't call masters by their first name, unless you're totally suicidal! And especially not him. He's too scary.

I looked at her, smiling. Her lips were shiny and I wanted to bite them. A male voice interrupted us, stopping me from doing so.

– Oh girls. Where do you think you are? This isn't a tea room.

I stood up and walked up the steps to Julien, before respectfully lowering my eyes to him.

- I'm also pleased to see you, I gently provoked him.

He smiled indulgently, kissed me on the lips, and continued:

- We don't have time for chatting. Pierre wants to talk to you.

Finally, he wants to talk to both of us.

- NOW ?

– Before the session, so yes, now. And Alicia, don't just stand there on the porch. If you want to get some fresh air, you have the whole garden.

She bowed to him in obedience, and walked away to circle the outside of the Manor.

Pierre was waiting for us in the small living room, alone, busy tasting an amber liquid, making the ice cubes clink against the side of the glass in a circular motion. Julien sank into an armchair opposite him. Deprived of instructions, I didn't really know what attitude to adopt; I was going to kneel on the floor next to Julien when Pierre motioned for me to straighten up and sit on a third sofa. I obeyed, a little embarrassed.

This put me on an equal footing with them, and I couldn't really avoid their gaze. The three of us sat in silence, forming a strange, tense triangular formation, a bit like those birds that, even when they're flying at full speed, always remain exactly the same distance from each other.

– As you know, Pierre began, looking at me, SM is too delicate a game to allow us to take risks. In our community, we demand total obedience from our submissives, while imposing difficult tests on them. So we can't do just anything.

I listened to him attentively; Julien frowned and rolled a cigarette between his fingers without lighting it.

– To avoid any problems, he continued, we have put in place various means and rules that are important to respect.

It's a question of responsibility, you understand? If a submissive is admitted to the session, she must have a master who knows exactly what she can or cannot do, the basis of everything being that she is explicitly consenting. And for that, she must have made a kind of contract with her master, a commitment to submission.

I could see all too well where he was going with this. I glanced at Julien with concern.

- I want to remind you that I do not accept this kind of commitment, he said. It is contrary to my principles.

"Actually," Pierre said, "he would like you to do it to me. I would be the one who would take responsibility for covering for you, and Julien could, let's say, take advantage of it."

I looked at both of them. Was it possible that they really expected me to accept such an arrangement? Julien's face was closed, unreadable. Pierre seemed rather doubtful. Pale as a sheet, I declared in as firm a voice as possible:

– Never in my life. I will never give up my free will in favor of anyone... other than Julien.

The person in question jumped slightly and looked at me with a surprised frown. It is true that I myself was quite amazed by what I had just said.

- Is that true? If it were for me, would you be willing to do it?

– Uh, yeah. Well... maybe.

I was willing to do just about anything for him, and I thought he knew it. Apparently, he didn't. Pierre waited a few seconds to see if this was getting us anywhere, but when Julien scowled again, he continued:

– In that case, Pauline, I will ask you to agree not to participate in the sessions anymore.

– Pardon ?!

It was my turn to be taken aback. I couldn't believe my ears; as for Julien, he had also had a slight movement of surprise, and perhaps even of annoyance.

Apparently, Pierre had not warned him about this part of the speech, and it was not to his taste.

– But what if Julien imposes it on me? I replied.

- He can't force something on you if you don't consent.

- So if I understand correctly, it's up to me to say no. And why would I do such a thing?

– If it ever starts to get out that Julien doesn't apply the rules he imposes on his guests himself, I don't give much for his credibility. People will spit behind his back and the Manor will empty. I'm sure that's not what you wish for him.

His speech was remarkably well-rehearsed. Clearly, he had tried everything to get Julien to fall into line and he was playing his last card here. On the surface, it held up perfectly. In reality, it showed above all that he trusted my sense of responsibility more than Julien's, which was rather humiliating for his friend. However, I didn't really have a choice. I was about to comply with Pierre's demands, when Julien abruptly intervened:

– No, Pauline, don't promise him that. I'm asking you.

I froze, hesitant. Again, I felt like I would accept anything Julien asked me. Or to be more precise, that anything he might ask me would be exactly what I wanted to do.

– Julien, you have to know what you want, Pierre declared a little dryly.

"I want her to do what I want," he replied, gritting his teeth angrily.

– Be a little responsible! Give yourself a framework, set your limits. Afterwards, you can do what you want.

There was a short silence, during which the two men sized each other up with their eyes, in a power struggle that I had trouble grasping. And then finally, Julien gave in.

- Okay. Let's make this damn contract.

Pierre and I looked at him in surprise, neither of us having really hoped that he would actually change his mind.

– We'll do it right away, and we won't talk about it anymore.

– You can't do it tonight, Pierre observed, she needs to be prepared...

"Yes, he's right," I said. "There's no point in waiting."

Let's do it right away.

I don't know where I found the strength to say those words. Pierre looked at me with a vaguely disapproving air.

I knew what was coming, and in essence he was right not to want to rush things, but I didn't want to risk Julien changing his mind again.

[Pre-inventory of the archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie.

Contracts (1926-1939). Box B13.

This series was created a posteriori from documents that were scattered in correspondence, administrative archives, and others. Because of their particular interest, I decided to classify them in a separate box.

Here we have seven written submission contracts, all dated between 1926 and 1939, and corresponding to entries in the session register and the File:

- contract between Gabriel Andringer and Louise, June 6, 1926
- contract between Philippe Andringer and Madeleine, December 14, 1926
- contract between Philippe Andringer and Elsa, April 21, 1928
- contract between Philippe Andringer and Marie-Pierre, February 17, 1934

– three other contracts made in the name of a master named Pascal Meyer, in 1931, 1937 and 1939.

I have not found any written contracts after this date, which does not mean that there were none. Oral contracts were also common and are often mentioned in the archives.

The structure of contracts is stable and usually begins with some sort of introduction where the submissive pays her respects to her master and agrees to obey him.

This is followed by a list of the tests to which she explicitly agrees to submit, which generally includes all kinds of corporal punishment with a more or less exhaustive list of the instruments used ("I will receive for my faults, or at the simple good will of my Master, the whip, the cane or the rods...") as well as details on the sexual preferences and the limits set by the submissive ("My Master will dispose of my body as he pleases, and may make my mouth available to persons of his will, who will however avoid profaning my other orifices..." "I agree to submit to the tests chosen by my Master, for his pleasure and my education, with the exception of scatophilia practices (...)")

In this series, there is one, however, which has a slightly different structure: the one that Philippe Andringer spent with Elsa Driss. Philippe's correspondence with this young woman (see box B2) begins in February 1928:

“Dear Master,

I have not stopped thinking about you since our meeting at the Manor. I thought about your hands, your caresses, the pleasure I had in submitting to your most severe demands that marked my flesh and my soul. (...) I loved being yours so much, and seeing the pleasure and satisfaction you derived from it, that I only aspire to relive it again and again. (...) My Master, Mr. D., has allowed me to write to you to tell you how much I remain your submissive and devoted,

Elsa. »

The letters exchanged afterwards are innumerable, and almost never dated, which makes it difficult to truly classify them if one has not followed the evolution of this very special relationship. It would seem that shortly after this first letter, Elsa asked Philippe to intercede with her master so that she could enter into a contract with him:

“Dear master,

Thank you, thank you! You have revealed me to myself, you have made me a woman. I aspire to nothing else but to be yours. Please, speak to Master D., intercede on my behalf, make me your slave. (...) »

Then a discussion takes place and concerns Elsa's contract, which Philippe prepares with her by sending her proposals and examples of contracts that he had at his disposal. One of the contracts from box B13, that of Madeleine, was thus attached to a letter from Elsa which said this:

"(...) how wise all these precautions are on your part. I recognize in you the master I would have always wanted to have, demanding but prudent; (...) as for our contract, excuse me Master, but in the example you sent me, and which I return to you enclosed, I cannot recognize myself. (...) I would like something simpler and more direct, which would allow me to put myself in your hands, to trust your judgment, which I know is always so right. (...)"

Indeed, the contract between Elsa and Philippe is the shortest of all. It simply says that she submits to him completely and unconditionally. No limits are set.

Their two signatures appear at the bottom of the document.

This was certainly not usual and the relationship between Philippe and Elsa was not of the same nature as the one he could have with his various other submissives, who were numerous.

None of them maintained such a regular and continuous correspondence with him, which frequently went beyond the realm of SM to reflect a rich and shared intellectual relationship. Philippe, who was married and had three children who were already teenagers, was therefore living a real love story in parallel with Elsa, giving birth to a daughter, Esther, in 1937.

After the war, there is no trace of Elsa Driss, who must have died during the war. On the other hand, Esther Driss seems to have lived at the Manor from 1945 and was visibly recognized by her father even if she did not bear the name Andringer. She would also be the only one of Philippe's children to appear in the registers as having participated in the SM activities of the Manor. She signed a contract as a submissive in 1955, having as her master a man named Hubert Certon.]

It's quite simple, this contract story, Julien didn't believe it at all. And I didn't believe it either.

Neither of us wanted to formalize our relationship with a commitment that we both knew I would be incapable of honoring. In fact, the very fact that it existed

already instilled deep within me the visceral need to transgress it. I had no desire to enter into the sordid game of the submission contract, to list the trials that I accepted and those that I preferred to refuse, to give my relationship with Julien a predefined and rational framework that would only weigh on us like a painful and out of place constraint, like an amputated limb that continues to hurt through the illusions of a tortured mind.

Pierre had explained the procedure to us, which involved me choosing a witness; I had called Alicia. Julien had gone to get her, then the two men had left us alone together, so that she could help me prepare. Alicia was happy for me and delighted to see what she had told me about Julien come true.

- See, I was right. Well, you know how a contract works?

- A little.

In fact, I knew exactly what was expected of me, and I was determined not to comply. Since this formality was imposed on us, I felt the need to show my disagreement with an act of rebellion, extreme, excessive, against the grain. I knew that Julien and Pierre would understand, that they would read my behavior like an open book.

It was for me a way of cancelling by absurdity the effect of the commitment that was asked of me. I explained to Alicia what I intended to do. She did everything to discourage me, calling my project in turn stupid, reckless, improper, absurd, fanciful and dangerous. It was completely indifferent to me. Alicia was good at giving advice and good will, but she did not succeed in making me change my mind. It was I who finally convinced her to go along with my decision and to endorse it.

When Julien and Pierre returned to the small living room, Alicia confirmed to the latter that we could proceed with the contract. He placed us as if to act out a scene, Julien standing in the center of the room, me kneeling at his feet, Alicia and he sitting on each side. Then he solemnly spoke:

– I remind you that Pauline freely proposes a contract whose terms she has chosen. If Julien finds them too restrictive, he has the right to refuse to commit. In which case the terms will have to be redefined, and there will be no contract tonight.

He won't be disappointed, I thought. I was starting to know Julien well enough to know what he was likely to accept and what he wasn't, and this time I had no doubt about his reaction. It was crazy enough to seduce him instantly.

There was a silence during which everyone held their breath.

Julien encouraged me, using the soft voice of those times when he demands something difficult:

– You go.

– Julien, I began in a slightly trembling voice, I beg you to accept being my master.

I glanced furtively at Pierre. I had hesitated over the informal “tu”, fearing that Pierre would take it the wrong way. But it was important for Julien to know that I was acting sincerely, without a facade. Since no one interrupted me, I continued.

– I am aware that this implies submitting to all the tests that you wish to impose on me, whatever their nature. I consent to this explicitly and unconditionally.

Again, a heavy silence settled. Alicia, her face tense, her arms crossed on her chest, rolled her eyes to the sky with a sigh. Julien frowned with a slightly worried look.

Tired of waiting, Pierre finally asked me:

– And the limits? What do you want to set as limits to your submission?

I took a breath and answered in one go:

– None. It doesn't seem necessary to me.

I looked up and saw a slight smile play on Julien's lips, an amused smile full of pride. Pierre stood up abruptly, looking displeased.

"That's not done," he protested. "You must define the conditions of your engagement, say where it stops.

– Be reasonable, Pauline, murmured Julien, still smiling.

I gave him a look loaded with innuendo and replied, looking down:

- My commitment has no other limits than those you wish to give it.

Peter opened his mouth to say something, and closed it, twice in a row. He sounded like a big fish getting upset. Then he addressed Julien:

– Julien, you're not going to accept such a responsibility.

– Of course I do. She offers me absolute power. You'd have to be crazy to refuse.

The sensible irony in his tone of voice was enough to prove to me that he was not fooled. However, he was only too happy to have the opportunity to take Pierre at his own game. The latter looked at me, clenching his teeth, and threw out:

– This is really... absurd. Alicia, can I have your opinion on all this?

– I did my best to dissuade her, but apparently, when it comes to SM, she trusts Ju... her master more than herself.

– Hmm, obviously, Pierre replied, seen like that, it's perhaps not quite as stupid as it seems.

- So? Julien got impatient. Do you validate this contract or not?

– That's totally unreasonable. But for once you meet a girl who is as crazy as you, who am I to interfere... However, since Pauline didn't set any conditions, I'm the one who will do it, and you will respect them, failing which I will denounce this sham contract, is that clear?

Julien nodded silently, not taking offense at Pierre's aggression towards him, too busy as he was rejoicing at this turnaround.

– First, she has no right to give up the use of a safeword. Do you hear Julien? You have to give her a safeword.

He gave a grunt that gave no indication of approval.

– Secondly, Pierre continued, since there are no conditions, the contract can be terminated at the simple request of Pauline, expressed to one of the three of us.

This time, Julien nodded more clearly.

– Finally, Pauline, I hope you realize that you have chosen the most alienating contract there is, and that it is normally reserved for experienced submissives. I think that even if Julien is naturally demanding, he did not expect so much from you. Are you aware of that?

– Yes master, I agreed obediently.

It was so easy to play along, and so hypocritical of me. Pierre sighed, hesitated for a moment, then solemnly declared:

– Julien, she's yours.

Then Julien did something quite unexpected: he got down on his knees, yes, on his knees in front of me, and taking my head between his two large, powerful hands, which I felt vibrate with an imperceptible tremor, he kissed me full on the lips.

– Shit, this is starting well, Pierre growled. Couldn't you hold on a bit?

- She is mine, I do what I want, replied my master with a wild look.

As I entered the library that evening, following in Julien's footsteps, I felt the weight of the commitment I had just made weigh on my shoulders. Of course, formally it didn't change much, but I realized that all the unsaid things between Julien and me had previously constituted a barrier behind which I had taken shelter. This barrier no longer existed.

There was a short discussion between the masters about the order of performance. Euphoric, Julien had let himself go and brought us all to the session, which meant that there were five of us submissives. It was a lot for a Sunday session, usually shorter and more relaxed than those on Friday and Saturday.

Finally, Julien decided that it would be my turn to go first. Everyone settled down, except Julien who went to stand in the center of the room, and me next to him. He undressed me, and for the first time formally introduced me: he made me stand in front of the others, my hands crossed on my head, my chin raised, my back arched. With the tip of his riding crop, he made me spread my thighs slightly to accentuate the indecency of my position. Then he solemnly declared:

– Let me introduce you to Pauline. She is twenty-three years old and has been initiated for two months.

Two months, that made my "initiation" go back to the first spanking he gave me in his office. I found him very generous.

He then called Alicia and asked her to sit, legs apart, on a stool in the middle of the room. He placed me on my knees between his legs and made me bend my spine, so that my face rested against the taut fabric of Alicia's mini-shorts, right at the level of her sex. I placed my hands on my companion's thighs, which I felt were quivering from this intimate contact, and she grabbed my wrists. Julien addressed her, in a loud voice, so that everyone could hear.

– Pauline owes me a punishment. I'm going to be a little hard on her tonight. It's up to you to make sure she holds out until the end.

The anxiety grew more precise and dried out my mouth. Julien never threatened lightly. If he took the trouble to provide this kind of precision, it was because he really intended to be merciless. He leaned over us, and this time added in a very low voice, still for Alicia but just loud enough for me to hear him too:

– At the same time, you let me know if things are really not going well.

And he stepped back to prepare to act. He was more tense than usual, and I could feel it; no doubt he too was feeling the weight of his new responsibility despite everything. He regained his natural calm when he began to officiate. He

whipped me long and severely, taking great pleasure in seeing me squirm under the blows, certainly also in seeing Alicia's face change as she had to hold me tighter to control my jolts. I crushed my face against his sex through the leather shorts, and I nibbled the inside of his thighs while moaning, my rump tense and trembling under the bunch of leather straps that Julien used to warm me up to the quick. Alicia prevented me from shirking, but at the same time supported me; sometimes, she stroked my hair and encouraged me in a low voice, in my ear.

As painful as it was, the punishment brought me to a state of violent excitement, my sex dripping with desire, my entire body on edge, ready to ignite at the slightest touch.

But Julien refused to relieve me and did not allow the other masters to touch me either. He declared that for the punishment to have its effect, he would leave me starving like this, with the leisure to think about it.

At her command, Alicia made me get up and took me to a small square room without windows, which was wedged between the library, my office which was separated from it by a simple partition and the dining room, which was accessed directly from the library precisely by crossing this kind of small boudoir. This one served as a resting space for the sessions, and was furnished only with a sea of cushions and silky fabrics in which one wanted to snuggle up.

I knelt in that ocean of softness—my buttocks hurt too much to sit down—and Alicia took me in her arms to comfort me. My sensitivity had been put to the test, and feeling the delicate caress of her peachy skin in the hollow between my neck and my shoulder, I felt all will leave me and I eagerly sought her mouth. Our tongues curled; her lips were soft as clouds with a slightly sweet taste. My hands roamed her body, hastily, like a blind man's caress. She was as excited as I was and moaned weakly under my caresses, biting my lips and chasing the burning of my ass with her airy palms. We ended up collapsing together on the cushions, our legs intertwined in a feverish embrace, our mouths sealed by the moisture of our kisses. I guided her hand to my sex, and she slipped a finger between lips soaked with desire. Agile and delicate, her hand explored my flesh, tracing the path of the most extreme sensations on my sex, before finally attacking the precise place that unleashed my pleasure. While jerking me off insistently, she whispered in my ear:

- If your master finds out, he'll be furious!

"Who cares," I replied, starting to remove the little shorts I had kissed for so long, determined to use my tongue to explore what was underneath.

I had dipped my head between her two milky breasts, where her skin gave off a very characteristic smell of almond and orange blossom. She was still

masturbating me, and the pleasure was overwhelming me in waves, paralyzing me for a few seconds before I could resume my own caresses.

It was at that moment that Julien, probably worried about Alicia not coming back, entered the boudoir. My companion froze, terrified; as for me, I threw the intruder a defiant look, then with an enthusiasm reinforced by the desire to provoke, I plunged my head between Alicia's now bare legs, in search of her forbidden fruit. I placed my lips at the bottom of her pubis and with the tip of my tongue, explored the button of her clitoris. She let out a moan of pleasure as she tilted her head back. I guessed a fleeting contact between her gaze and that of Julien, who did not interrupt us, and remained there, motionless and silent, watching us. Reassured by this passive attitude,

Alicia took things in hand. She gently released me from her sex, laid me down a little firmly on my side, and stretching herself out against me, she began to jerk me off methodically again while kissing me full on the mouth.

– Go ahead, my darlings, enjoy yourselves, whispered Julien.

I looked up at him and saw that he had opened his pants, and bringing out his turgid cock, he was masturbating himself in turn while watching us. I kept my eyes fixed on his, our locked gazes united us, Alicia's fingers danced at the junction of the lips of my sex in the same rhythm as Julien's hand went back and forth on the shaft of his penis, and suddenly, the orgasm overwhelmed me, violent, suffocating, taking my breath away. I closed my eyes for a second; I heard Julien let out a grunt, and he released a long spurt of sperm just above us, spreading his seed on my panting face. The contact of his fluid was warm, slightly sickening, exciting also because of the way he had spread it on me, intentionally. I bit my lip and turned to Alicia. She waddled in front of Julien like a cat, and after a provocative glance, she tasted with the tip of her pointed tongue the milky substance spread on my cheek. Julien encouraged her with a smile, and watched her do it. I trembled with excitement while she licked me conscientiously, tasting the salty mixture of my sweat and his sperm, swallowing greedily the secretions of our shared pleasure. Julien waited until she had finished cleaning the traces of her pleasure from my skin, then leaning towards us, he whispered something in her ear. I could not understand what he was saying to her, but I saw her blush imperceptibly and nod.

As she was getting dressed, Julien turned to me and said:

– You are exaggerating, Pauline.

"What have I done now?" I simpered, trying to soften him up.

He let himself be taken willingly and let out a deep, quiet laugh that echoed through the small, closed room.

- You know that very well. You only do what you want.

He stood up and ran a caressing hand through my hair, then grabbed Alicia by the shoulder and roughly pushed her toward the door that led to the library. Before leaving, he turned back to me one last time and said:

– Rest. I'll come back for you later. I'm not done with you.

Chapter 4.

Once alone in the boudoir, I let myself fall into a restful sleep, from which I only emerged when Julien came to get me after the session. I still felt exhausted and asked his permission to return to my room.

- No, you're coming with me, he answered me in a final tone.

- I'm warning you, I'm not capable of anything anymore.

– Let me be the judge.

He took me to his room, undressed me and made me lie on my stomach on his bed. My scarlet buttocks gave off as much heat as a brazier. He returned a moment later from the bathroom, with a small white porcelain pot.

- It's a special cream that a friend of mine prepares, he told me. It will relieve you. Well, at first it will burn a little, but afterwards the effect is truly magical.

"You're going to tell me you tried it yourself?" I remarked ironically.

- Of course.

I mentally slapped my forehead. Obviously, if this rule had been in use in Gabriel Andringer's time, there was no reason why it would not still be applied today.

No one can be a master if he has not been submissive before. Suddenly, I had a kind of revelation, an epiphany as the English say.

– Tell me, Julien, can a man be the master of another man? I mean, without there necessarily being a homosexual link between them.

Julien had taken a dab of cream and gently spread it on the lower half of my left buttock. I bit the pillow with a roar. He continued as if nothing had happened.

- Yes, it is possible. Why do you ask that?

– I was wondering... if there hadn't been this kind of relationship... between you and Pierre, I gasped.

I saw him smile; he continued his work of spreading the cream, proceeding with infinite gentleness, which did not however prevent my ass from burning like a Saint John's fire in the early morning. I gradually got used to this new sensation, trying to breathe deeply and to remain calm and still.

"I was never Pierre's master," Julien declared, deadpan.

– Mmh, yes, I rather saw it the other way around.

- You have more imagination than average.

– Am I wrong then?

– I didn't say that. It's just that... no one's supposed to know.

– Tell me, I asked him, giving him my best smile, hoping that it might convince him.

He shook his head.

– I never told anyone this.

– Well, exactly. You wouldn't want this story to get lost, would you? It would make a nice oral archive.

He seemed to think for a moment, still busy gently massaging my buttocks. The pain was receding, giving way to a familiar feeling of warmth, like the one you seek in winter, by putting yourself just a little too close to the hearth.

- Will you be able to keep it to yourself? he finally asked me.

“Professional secret,” I said with a wink.

[Archives of the Manor of Charmoie. Oral Archives, May 2009.]

Julien's story, transcribed from memory by the archivist, for rereading by the person concerned.

“When I was a kid, I lived in the East Wing with my parents. At that time, my father was the one who ran the Manor, and its shady activities. He had met my mother in the sessions, they were both masters, and they still participated regularly, often together. You have to imagine what it was like to live there, for the two teenagers that my brother and I were. We were really fascinated. My father kept us apart as best he could until my brother was seventeen, I was fourteen. At that time, Olivier began to be allowed to attend the sessions, of course not to participate, you have to be an adult, but to watch and discover the complex rules and subtleties of the SM relationship. When he came back, he would tell me about it, it drove me completely crazy. I insisted so much that the following year, my father started to let

me go too, occasionally. I would sit in a corner of the library and not miss a single thing, almost holding my breath the whole time it was going on.

However, I still had to wait several years before I turned eighteen and was finally initiated.

Obviously, no one can be a master if they have not first been submissive, and that was true for me too. I had to go through that, and I must admit that I had no desire to do so. My brother did it before me of course, I was able to see how it went, and it was neither very painful nor very long. My father made sure that he could quickly become a master, he was already one when I was initiated in turn. But Olivier and I do not have the same character at all, and besides, he did not attach as much importance to it as I did. He liked it, but nothing more.

While for me, it was a real obsession. I wanted to be the one holding the whip, it was very difficult for me to have to submit to it before. Finally, since it was that or nothing, I pretended to comply, and I put pressure on my father to make it last as short a time as possible. After a few weeks, I got what I wanted. Big mistake in fact.

I was young and arrogant, unmanageable, cruel, and I would even say, irresponsible. I treated girls with the utmost violence, often only stopping when I was prevented from continuing, by force. I am not very proud of this period... My parents made a few attempts to put me back on the right path, but it is hard when you start off on the wrong foot. I acted with little discernment, which can end up becoming dangerous, and of course, it ended badly.

I had found myself a girl, she was a few years older than me and had a strange, rather dark character. It didn't bother me, I wasn't interested in her for her conversation. I don't even know if I ever took the time to really talk to her, even once. Anyway, she came to spend some time at the Manor with me, I treated her with the utmost harshness, she never complained. And then one day, she came home, and she committed suicide... Everyone kept telling me that I had nothing to do with it, that she was depressed, and that it wasn't my fault, but I'll let you imagine how guilty I felt. I didn't eat anymore, I didn't sleep anymore, I was even traumatized to the point of not wanting to set foot in a session anymore, which is no small thing for me!

Finally, my father lost his patience, and in a way it was time. One day he called me in and told me that since I was doing nothing with my days (I also had trouble giving any interest to my studies) he had decided that he had another program for me and that he was leaving me no choice. It was in the summer of 1998, I was nineteen. He took me to Pierre's. He was a friend of his, I knew him of course but he had been living in the United States for several years so I hadn't had

the opportunity to spend much time with him. Since he was passing through Paris, my father took me to his place. They had agreed in advance. Pierre didn't say anything, it was my father who spoke to me. He said that I had behaved in a pathetic way and that for my punishment, he wanted me to become submissive again, and to make a contract with Pierre. I was too dejected to resist. I said I didn't care, I would do whatever he wanted. They made me kneel and make an unconditional commitment, which put no limit on the authority Pierre took over me. And then they chained me up, and to seal our agreement, they shaved my head.

Officially, everyone was told that I was going on a trip to clear my head and get my mind back. That's still the version that prevails today. No one knows, not even my mother. I went with Pierre to California, and I became his slave. Not his submissive, his slave. You don't know Pierre like that, but when he trains a boy, he is extraordinarily intransigent. He didn't just beat me violently, as often as he wanted. He made me suffer the worst humiliations, he sought out the harshest masters and mistresses to deliver me to them. He gave me no respite, but I quickly came to be grateful to him because I no longer had the leisure to feel sorry for myself. Serving Pierre required constant concentration. In this way, he also broke my arrogance, he made me give up the slightest bit of pride or arrogance that I could have preserved. It took him two years. In the end, I had forgotten that I had been a master, it even seemed impossible to want to be one. Submission, after a while, provokes a kind of fatalism. I had reached the point where I had stopped looking for the end of the tunnel, waiting for it to stop. Pierre did not let me hope that it would stop one day. I was quite surprised when from one day to the next he announced to me that I had learned enough, and that it was time for me to go back to the other side. At first, I even refused, but there again he did not give me a choice.

We were both still living in San Francisco when I did what I consider my rehabilitation... It was a rich period for me, where I felt alive again, where I started to be interested in various things, outside of sex and SM. Pierre accompanied me and guided me in my return as master, as surely as he had done to submit me. I learned from the best. I realized that my sensations as a master, I had not forgotten them, only they were transcended by what I had experienced and that is when I understood the usefulness of this damn rule. He who has not been submitted, I mean truly and not the simulacrum to which I had first lent myself, he cannot know what it feels like to be submitted, beaten, humiliated. He cannot master the sensations of the other, the subtle balance between pain and pleasure. That's the lesson I learned with Pierre. I've always had a special relationship with him. This kind of experience leaves its mark.

Then we returned to France as if nothing had happened, I went back to my father and resumed a "normal" life. Of course people realized that I had changed, but they had forgotten... I quickly acquired the reputation of being an excellent master, because I was always strict, hard and demanding, but at the same time very respectful of protocol and able to adapt to submissives, to feel their pain and pleasure as if I were in their place. But since I was always wary of myself and my own limits, I set my own rules. I never again personally engaged with a submissive. Besides, I didn't really need to, since people fought to submit their daughters to me, so that I would grant them the privilege of taking an interest in them for five minutes during a session, or more rarely for an evening or a whole night. For the industry I became a kind of reference, a way of knowing, for the submissives entrusted to me, how far they were really capable of going, what their limits were. But I never took the same girl twice in a row.

It lasted five years, and then my father announced to me that he was fed up, that he wanted to retire, and he offered me to take charge of the administration of the Manor. It made my brother furious, but at the same time, he didn't really want to do it himself. So I got down to it, managing the accounts, the staff, planning work when needed, welcoming people, supervising the sessions... The routine, basically.

It was good, reassuring. And then you came along, and you ruined everything. The rules I had set for myself, with your pretty smile, and your unpredictable behavior, and your way of showing me that you're not afraid of me, and of asking for more... Pierre pestered me to make a contract with you, but to tell the truth, I didn't think you'd accept. It was when you said you were ready to do it for me that I changed my mind."]

After this episode, Julien allowed a real complicity to develop between us. He spent more and more time with me in the library, or in my office. We would simply chat, I would show him the documents, he would supplement my information with what he knew about family legends. From time to time, he would choose a book from the library, and put it on my desk to invite me to read it.

Of course, rumors began to spread among the small team of staff. I noticed that they avoided talking about Julien in front of me, and Sarah, who was the most curious, would occasionally drop in unannounced in the library, hoping to surprise us. But Julien played the game admirably well. He made a clear distinction between what he could ask me in the evening, when we were alone or in the presence of his guests, and our almost friendly exchanges in my professional space. As for Édouard, who was the only one who really knew what was going on, he remained impeccably discreet.

The balance that was thus established brought me such fullness that it became more difficult for me to leave the Manor. Julien probably felt that I was distancing myself from my outside life, and he began to play on it in his own way. One Friday evening when I was preparing to leave the Manor, as I was passing by his office to give him my file for the week, he asked me casually:

- What are you wearing under your skirt?

The skirt in question was light brown suede, short and slit at the thigh, with matching boots – perfectly suited to a cool and rainy early summer. Without bothering with long speeches, at the cost of a few contortions, I lifted it up to my waist to reveal a burgundy cotton thong. He looked at it with a tilt of his head, and said:

– Take it away.

He had taken a tone that there was no point arguing. I slid the thong down my boots and placed it in his outstretched hand.

He continued:

– This weekend you will wear skirts no longer than this one, and I forbid you to wear anything underneath. And also, no masturbating.

It was this last demand that led me to protest.

The idea of having to spend the entire weekend, including family meals, without panties under a short skirt put me in such a state of excitement that I could hardly imagine how I could manage without occasionally relieving myself.

– I don't know if I'll be able to do it...

"I advise you not to disobey a direct order," he replied, looking at me seriously.

I simpered, trying to soften him up.

- Why are you so hard on me?

– I'm sure that as soon as I don't have you in sight, you'll jerk off like the horny little thing you are. For once, you'll hold back. But it's for your own good. When you get home, I'll give you more pleasure than you can dream of.

At these words, I clenched my thighs, fearing that all the moisture I was secreting would end up staining my skirt.

– So I'll come home early on Sunday, because I'd be surprised if I lasted much longer...

He crossed his arms over his chest and frowned theatrically; but he couldn't seem to look truly angry, because of the spark of amusement that shone in his eyes.

– You will wait until Monday. And I remind you that in theory, you must respectfully submit to all my orders.

I gave him a mischievous smile.

– Fortunately it is in theory and not in practice.

- Don't give me a reason to beat you.

– In theory, you don't need me to give you a reason for that.

This not very subtle attempt at provocation revealed the beginnings of excitement that was starting to itch between my legs.

But he did not let himself be trapped and threw me out the door, without having beaten me or relieved me.

The weekend was a real torture, but I managed to hold on. In accordance with his instructions, I did not return to the Manor until Monday morning, and I resumed my work in my office still in the outfit he had imposed on me, in a short skirt and with my buttocks exposed, and in a state of practically unbearable excitement. In fact, it had been especially distressing for the first few hours, but then I had ended up getting used to it. In the end, I was playing with my own fear of being discovered, spreading my legs noticeably under the table of a bar on the terrace, almost hoping that a passer-by with a more wandering eye than the others would discover my indecent secret. Then in my imagination, this stranger with the lecherous gaze would take me by the hand and lead me into a side alley or a carriage entrance, stick his fingers into my private parts, turn me against a rough wall, penetrate me brutally, panting with pleasure and without having uttered a single word.

But none of this had happened, and on Monday evening, summoned by my master at ten o'clock to his room, I presented myself with a burning and undiminished desire.

Julien opened the door and, closing it quickly behind him, joined me in the corridor. He held a long strip of black fabric in his hands, and showing it to me, he declared:

- Tonight I promised you pleasure, I brought reinforcements. A friend.

- Another man? Who is it?

– It doesn't matter. That's why I'm going to blindfold you. You just obey, as usual.

Putting his words into action, he gently wrapped the black fabric around my head, in three successive passes, so that the soft and slightly elastic material adhered correctly to my face at the cheekbones, leaving me completely blinded. His gestures were attentive and precise, and I felt taken in hand, in the perfect position to abandon myself to him.

He led me into the room and made me kneel. I felt something sweet and a little salty on my lips, and without trying to understand, I opened them slightly; I then realized that it was the head of an erect penis that was slowly entering my mouth, and not that of my master.

I had a slight movement of recoil, which Julien controlled by gently holding my head. He had knelt behind me, and stroking my hair, he whispered a few reassuring words in my ear; then he lifted my skirt and felt my buttocks. While kneading them, he was still speaking in my ear and this time they were extremely crude promises, which flooded my sex with desire while I now sucked without restraint the anonymous penis. I wanted to feel the dry slap of his hands on my ass, and I arched my back to offer it to him. But he reprimanded me for my impatience, and abandoning my fleshy parts, began to undress me.

Since he had not seen fit to restrain my hands, I began to explore with my fingertips the body of the stranger standing in front of me. His thighs were narrower than Julien's, his buttocks elongated and bony. I let my hands rise over his hairless torso, a little thin but muscular enough for me to be able to trace the outlines of his abs under my fingers.

When Julien lifted me up, I was naked and I felt that he too had taken off his clothes. He pressed me against the body of his accomplice, and I found myself caught between them, more burning with desire than ever. I sought my master's lips, and he gave them to me. Between our three naked bodies, the only accessories were the blindfold that veiled my eyes, and a long leather riding crop that Julien held in his hand and whose rough contact I felt against my hips. Again, I arched my back to offer the small of my back to the instrument and encourage my master to use it, and again, I only gained tender reprimands.

The two men laid me on the bed, lying on my back, and spread my thighs. A tongue delicately probed me, and letting myself be overwhelmed by a pleasure that I had so hoped for, I finally stopped trying to analyze what was happening to me. I jerked off and sucked what was within my reach, I sought out any carnal contact without sorting, I let myself be manipulated like a doll that is caressed and turned over with the tender cruelty of impatience.

They were not stingy with caresses or kisses, and they made sure to bring me to orgasm before demanding a more absolute surrender from me. I was still dizzy

with the vertigo of pleasure when I was made to get on all fours on the bed, one of the two men offering himself to my mouth while the other gave me the whip. I rolled my hips under the blows, moaning to ask for more. Suddenly, I felt two fingers placed on my anus to coat it with a fresh and slippery substance. Instinctively, I tried to get away, but Julien's iron hand pinched my thigh and put me back in place. I wanted to rear up, but the stranger mastered me by holding me by the wrists, and sliding under me, he penetrated me powerfully, releasing a surge of pleasure that took my breath away and gave my master plenty of time to resume his

equivocal caresses. I protested weakly; he replied firmly that I had no choice and that he wanted me to obey.

At that moment, the dizziness of the other man who was pounding me regularly was such that I no longer knew how to resist. I arched my back with a plaintive moan. Julien carefully prepared me with his fingers, then entered the intimate cavity of my posterior with caution, tearing a cry of pain and surprise from me. Barely a second later, there was no longer any question of pain. Their two sexes impaling me and their four hands running over my breasts, my hips and my back deprived me of the little reason I had left, and finally I let my body express its complete release, the famous letting go so difficult to achieve, a total loss of control on the verge of unconsciousness.

For a long time afterwards I tried to recognize, among the guests of the Manor, the faceless man who had accompanied me with Julien in the exploration of these unknown horizons, beyond what I believed myself capable of, beyond even what I knew or thought I wanted. Somewhere, no doubt, I should be glad that it was in vain, and that this first experience of sharing my body with another remains tinged with the mystery and intoxication that my master had wanted to give him, for my pleasure.

I kept in regular contact with Alicia. My new friend lived near Bordeaux with her master. We sent each other long stories by email, recounting in detail the trials that our masters had in store for us. It was a deep relief for me to be able not only to confide, but also to do so with a person who understood exactly what I was feeling, even shared it physically and intellectually. In reality, I needed to exorcise all the demons that were eating away at me, the doubts that some of the practices I was engaging in gave rise to, and especially the very fact of agreeing to engage in them.

Since I had little affinity with the submissives who frequented the Manor, Alicia was my link to reality, my outlet, my magic mirror that repeated to me, when I needed it, that I was always the most beautiful in my master's eyes.

Julien spent less time with me, because the Manor was bustling with excitement during the summer. Since June, he had been welcoming guests every day of the week, and not just from Thursday to Monday. Even if there were not sessions every evening, Julien put a lot of energy into ensuring that his visitors were well received. He only had me participate in the sessions very occasionally, preferring to keep me for the privacy of his room. I knew from hearsay that he generally adopted two opposing attitudes. Either he confined himself to the role of session master, and abstained from participating in the antics that he only supervised. Or he used the session as a way to let off steam, and set his sights on a strong girl to inflict an outburst of violence on her that made a big impression on the guests. In a way, he maintained his image as a ruthless and cruel master, whom the submissives feared to the highest degree, and whom the masters admired.

With me, on the contrary, he proceeded with my apprenticeship in an extremely measured way, introducing one test after another with vigilance. Those which aroused my desire and stimulated me, he renewed by gradually increasing his demands. Those which repelled me or left me cold were consigned to oblivion.

What I felt at that moment, and I can understand that this may seem strange coming from someone who had just entered into a relationship of domination-submission by contract, was a deep need for freedom. I needed to feel, and even to physically experience, my ability to make choices, to define my own rules, preferably in clear opposition to my master. Fortunately, he was not particularly attached to this dimension of the SM relationship. In the extreme, he preferred to see me disobey, as long as I submitted valiantly to the punishment that he then decided to inflict on me. I would not want to give the impression that I was deliberately seeking punishment, in a form of perverse relationship where rules are established only to better transgress them. The rules symbolically constituted the constrained space, the prison where I did not want to let myself be locked up. Julien did not really impose them. He was content to express them, to make them readable. Inside this space, it was slavery. If I chose to leave it, it was escape, freedom, but it had a price. Julien played with this border.

Transgressions were accompanied by trials, trials were accompanied by pleasure and complicity. Nothing was ever all black or all white, and it was in all these intermediate nuances that we built our balance.

Generally speaking, what I enjoyed the most was being whipped. That was also where my master excelled and where he took the most pleasure. We had mutually agreed that I should be beaten at least once a week, on Wednesdays. The idea of the fixed day came from me; I had borrowed it from Jacques Serguine who, in his *Éloge de la fessée*, describes the trouble that these weekly meetings caused

him and his wife, which they would not have wanted to postpone for anything in the world. Julien had chosen Wednesday because it was a quiet day in the Manoir's activity, and he wanted to have all his time to devote himself to our games.

That was what it was all about: games. Julien would come up with different rules each time to surprise me and keep the fear that gripped my stomach every Wednesday morning alive, until the evening when I went to join him in his room. He would always be waiting for me there with a new scenario whose goal was to arouse in me a maximum of confusion, uncertainty and pleasure. To do this, he worked to make himself as unpredictable as possible, sometimes resorting to real artifices.

For example, I remember one day when he made me play my punishment with dice. When I entered his room that evening, he showed me the riding crop and put two dice in my hand. I looked at him questioningly. He seemed to think for a moment, as if he were inventing the rule at the same time as he was about to state it.

Then he said:

– Here are the rules of the game. You will roll these two dice. You only have one chance. We will multiply the two numbers you get to know how many throws you will have to receive.

"That's risky," I replied, pouting. "What if I make two ones?"

"Quite right," he said, scratching his head. "To be on the safe side, we'll make it a principle that 'one' equals seven. And to spice things up a bit, we'll say that if you make two odd numbers, you won't get your reward."

He thus played with my desire, reserving for himself the privilege of deciding whether or not the ordeal should be followed by caresses and pleasures. Often, it was enough for me to appear a little too excited or enthusiastic for him to refuse me this satisfaction. Or else, as in the present case, it was just one more rule.

I knelt at his feet, my heart pounding, gave him a feverish look, and threw the two dice on the mat. They came up as "one" and "five," which was about the worst combination I could imagine.

– No luck, observed Julien.

Without answering, I undressed and sat on my knees on the bed, in position to receive what I deserved. He gave me the thirty-five lashes of the whip without any consideration, then sat down in front of me, and undressing, he whispered to me:

– Suck me. Make me cum. I want to cum in your mouth.

I was excited from being whipped, my sex throbbed with desire, and I knew he wouldn't relieve me, which only amplified my confusion. Panting, I looked at his penis straining towards me and placed the tip of my tongue on the base of his glans.

He let out a groan of pleasure as I ran my tongue around the edge of his cock, playing at moving the sensitive skin of his tail up and down, and sliding a pointed tongue into his meatus which was already leaking a few drops of salty liquid. I took my time playing with him, alternating long sessions of very delicate caresses with intense sucking, licking his tail, his glans, his balls tense with pleasure. When he felt that he was going to come, he grabbed my hair to hold my head, and he breathed:

– You swallow. Everything. Every last drop.

This constraint drove me crazy and brought my excitement to its peak. I felt his sperm bubbling into my mouth in several jets, and his hand holding me firmly, while I let the thick substance flow down my throat. When he let go of me, I straightened up, and we both leaned over his cock to check that I had followed his instructions. There were still a few drops of sperm that glistened at the base of his glans.

– I said, until the last drop, he reminded. Lick.

I leaned over him and with the tip of my tongue, finished freeing his sex from the traces of his pleasure. When I had finished, he kissed me and murmured:

– It was good. Terribly good.

He laid me down on the bed, completely naked, and taking a rope that he always kept close at hand, he tied my wrists to the bedposts, without tightening too much.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but you're going to have to sleep like this. I don't want you taking advantage of my sleep to jerk off."

"I'm never going to be able to sleep," I whispered, as intense waves of tension tightened my lower abdomen in spasms of desire I was unable to control.

He just smiled at me, shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the other side to savor the relaxation I had offered him. I woke up in the morning with my sex flooded with desire, in a state close to hysteria. He made me wait again until the evening, specifying that if I was weak enough to masturbate, the punishment would be merciless... But it must be recognized that the pleasure that followed, when he finally granted it to me, was immeasurable, equal to what it had cost me in frustration and painful waiting.

It was during this period of euphoria that I had the opportunity to significantly deepen my knowledge of the Andringer family, in various ways. One day I asked Julien why the archives to which he had given me access did not contain any documents after 1967.

- The rest is in the current archives.
- That's to say ?
- In my office.
- You know, I'm going to need to access it to make the filing plan. Otherwise it's useless.

At first he was quite reluctant, but he finally gave in and opened the door to his secret archives: those where there was mention of his close family and people I met very regularly, some of them like Pierre. They were stored in a room adjoining his office, a kind of storage room furnished with metal shelves. Since he hated it when I moved the documents, he made me work on them on the spot, in his office. I sat down right on the floor, like in the early days in the mezzanine of the library, with my laptop and all the boxes spread out around me in an apparent disorder, which I nevertheless completely controlled. Julien worked at his desk and, if from time to time he gave me an amused look, overall he respected my concentration.

Most of the recent archives were actually not very compromising, apart from the session registers. They formed a continuity with those of the previous period, but they were no longer coded. It was therefore very easy to trace the activity of one and the other.

[Pre-inventory of the archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie.

Administrative documents.

Host File, 1926-1967 – boxes B9 and B10.

Hotel registers, 1926-1967 and session registers,

1952-1967 – Registers, Series R and S.

Hotel registers and session registers from 1967

– Registers, Series R2 and S2.

The mentions in the registers of the members of the Andringer family are interesting to determine their relations with the activities of the Manor at different periods. If we combine the registers and the File, we obtain the following information.

Gabriel Armand Andringer appears in the documents as master, but mainly in the role of witness, until 1934, the year of his death. Philippe Andringer, his eldest son, is also mentioned since the origin of the series of registers (1926). He must have had a real collection of submissives, if we are to believe the number of contracts made in his name.

Philippe had three children with his legitimate wife, born in 1912, 1915 and 1918; none of them appear in the registers. To these must be added his daughter Esther, born from his relationship with Elsa Driss in 1937. Esther's case is not very clear.

It would seem that Philippe Andringer shared the administrative tasks of the Manor at one point with a lawyer named Hubert Certon. The latter appears very regularly in most of the important transactions, particularly land transactions, from the end of the 1950s. He intervenes both in the specific affairs of the Manor and in current family matters, and seems to have played an important role in the "split" of 1964, the separation of the Manor into two parts, one of which was given to Léon Andringer, Philippe's youngest son, and the other took the status of SARL for the management of the hotel business. Certon also frequented the Manor in a more "informal" way if we are to believe the session records, which see him intervene on various occasions from 1947. At this date he is mentioned as master in the File, his date of birth is also specified (1926).

In 1955, Hubert Certon took a woman named Esther as his submissive. Their contract is the one and only appearance of this Esther in the session register. If it is indeed Esther Driss, which is impossible to confirm, she had just turned eighteen when the contract was made, and she would be the only descendant of the Andringer blood to have participated in the sessions only as a submissive and never as a mistress.

The session records reveal that it was also Hubert Certon who initiated Patrice Andringer, Léon's only son. He was attached to him by contract in 1966, the year he turned eighteen.

From 1967, Patrice is described as master in the registers on one or two occasions, then we do not find him there again until 1972, the date of Philippe Andringer's death. At that time, Patrice began to get involved in the management of the Manor with Hubert Certon. He must have met his wife, Sonia de la Marterie, at that time in the sessions. She appears under this name in the registers from 1971, already as mistress. We find her under the name of Sonia Andringer from 1975. Most of the contracts mentioning Patrice and Sonia involve them together, always as masters. Among these, note the contract of Pierre Tourné, made in 1983 with Sonia as mistress, and Patrice as witness.

From 1972, the registers were no longer coded. The File was therefore no longer fed from this time, which seems to correspond to Patrice's arrival in business. In 1979, he became the sole manager of the Manor and Hubert Certon disappeared completely and definitively from all available documents. A probably violent break-up could explain this sudden turnaround. Patrice remained administrator until 2005, but he no longer appears in the registers, even as a witness, from 2003.

Of Patrice's three children, two appear in the records: the eldest Olivier Andringer (born in 1976) appears as subject to a woman named Céleste in 1994, and as master the same year. His presence is then quite marginal, episodic.

Julien Andringer (born in 1979) appears as a submissive in 1997 and as a master the same year. He is completely absent from the registers between 1998 and 2000. He then appears regularly again, and took responsibility for the administration of the Manor from 2005, first shared with his father, then alone. However, no contract was made in his name and he appears exclusively as a witness, and this until 2009 .

One morning in late August, I was in the library, busy re-filing a pile of bound books that I had taken out to dust them, when I was disturbed by an unwelcome visitor; a tall, brown-haired man in his early thirties, whose face seemed vaguely familiar to me. He called out to me spitefully:

- What are you doing here?

I wondered for a moment if he had mistaken me for a submissive loitering where she had no business being, but looking at me, it seemed unlikely, given that I was wearing my usual dirty work jeans and a red tank top that was not provocative at all. Since I had the impression that I had seen him somewhere before, I assumed that he had recognized me from seeing me in session; but if that was the case, he must have known that I was related to Julien, and it was very imprudent to attack me in this way.

- And you, what are you doing here? I answered him without even trying to be polite.

- I live here, I'll let you know.

I was beginning to get a little idea of his identity, but that didn't make his arrogance any less unbearable or more justified, so I continued in my tone of insolence and provocation.

- Oh really? I live here too, imagine that.

"You want to know who I am?" he said, standing up straight like a rooster on its spurs. "You want to know my name? I'm Olivier Andringer."

– Oh. Very impressive.

I went back to putting the books away, displaying total indifference. Vexed, he began to get agitated; he approached me, and roughly snatching a book from my hands, he continued:

- I don't know who you think you are, strutting around my library like that, but I guarantee you, you'll change your tune.

– Your library! What you shouldn't hear!

– Why not? You weren't even born and I was already participating in the sessions in this place, you little...

– We must not exaggerate, I interrupted calmly.

I counted ostentatiously on my fingers, and continued:

– I was eight years old, at the time when you were submissive and were being whipped complacently by a certain Céleste, with your father's blessing.

Enraged, he cornered me against the shelves and slapped me hard on the left cheek. I stared at him, stunned: since I had set foot in the Manor, I had never been hit in the face. He had just crossed the barrier between consensual play and gratuitous violence in a second, a barrier that I didn't even know existed before he threw me to the other side. I wanted to free myself, but he blocked me with his knee, and gagging me with one hand, he slid the other under my T-shirt to feel my breasts. I was starting to panic; my relief was infinite when I heard the library door open and then close with a familiar click, and Julien's serene voice resounding very close to us:

– Ah! Olivier. Edward told me you had arrived; I was looking for you everywhere.

The other stopped his gesture, but without releasing me. I heard Julien slowly walking around us, and he entered my field of vision on my left. He was looking at me, his hands in his pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels. I gave him a pleading look. He turned to his brother and spoke again:

– Hey, I guess you noticed she's one of my employees. I suggest you let her go.

– Employed? What on earth do you employ a little dog like her for?

– It is useful to me for all sorts of things.

– I can imagine, bro. But that little whore disrespected me. She owes me reparations.

Julien didn't lose his calm, but I could see from small signs that he was starting to get annoyed: his jaw was clenched and he nervously ran his hand through his hair.

- I'm telling you to let her go. We have rules here. What you're doing is rape.

- Only because she refuses to submit. You should punish her for that.

"I will," my master replied coldly.

A silence that seemed interminable to me passed again, without Julien showing any intention of physically intervening. Finally, Olivier released me and took a step back, without taking his eyes off me. I adjusted my tank top while giving him a dark look and ostentatiously moved closer to Julien.

"I demand reparation," his brother repeated.

- Later.

– Later, when?

– Later, when I decide.

The two brothers measured each other for a moment with their eyes, in a power struggle of rare violence. It was Olivier who looked away first.

"You're still such a killjoy, Julien," he said as he left the room.

Julien waited until he heard the sound of his footsteps diminish in the corridor, then said to me in a low voice, gritting his teeth:

– It looks like you just met my brother.

– He really is... odious.

Julien gave me a disapproving look, and I wondered if I had gone too far.

- What did you say to him to put him in such a state?

– Oh! Not much. Well, I may have made a little comment to him about things I read about him in the archives...

– Pauline, shit. I thought you had a work ethic.

– But I didn't tell him anything he didn't already know. Unless he forgot the time he was submissive, of course.

Julien's eyes widened, then he hid his face with one hand and turned his back on me; I could see his shoulders heaving with a silent laugh that he was trying

as best he could to hide. When he turned back to me, he had more or less regained his seriousness, except for a small sparkle in one corner of his eye.

- Okay, come on. On your knees, hands on your head.

I hastened to obey, while he went to open the chest that was under the third pillar, where the various instruments that were used during the sessions were stored. I ground my teeth, a little worried, and felt the blood drain from my face when he turned around holding the cat o' nine tails in his hand. It was a kind of whip with nine strips of braided rope, each ending in a small metal claw. Julien did not use it often, but often enough that I had learned to fear it greatly. I gritted my teeth to hold back the tears that were already coming to me as he slowly passed behind me, waving the whip to make the strips rustle menacingly. Without further warning, he began to flog me, striking horizontally across my bare shoulders. The hiss of the instrument announced the burning of each of the straps which cooked my skin, before the metal ends came to add their cruel claw stroke.

I only endured two or three blows before I was toppled forward by their force, and I placed a hand on the floor in front of me to keep myself from falling. Then Julien stopped hitting, but he didn't move. I felt his presence heavy behind me, motionless, waiting. I knew exactly what he was waiting for. Forcing myself to keep calm, I slowly straightened up and replaced my hand on the back of my neck, intertwining my fingers. Then the cat o' nine tails resumed its terrible race on my shoulders, in the warm sound of the braided ropes rubbing on my skin.

He stopped well before he could risk blood dripping onto the iron claws, but my face was still flooded with tears, and my throat tight with pain. I sat cross-legged on the floor and nervously wiped my face. Julien watched me, sitting on the chest where he had taken the instrument, caressing the straps with his fingertips. He spoke, and his soft, deep voice seemed to resonate against the walls of my brain.

- You're right, he's quite odious, but he's still my brother, and he's a master. As a result, you owe him a minimum of respect. So be a little careful about your behavior.

- You would have wanted me to submit? To obey him?

- Oh no! I already have so much trouble making you obey myself that if you start submitting to just anyone, I might be quite upset.

My master smiled at me quietly, and it was impossible to tell if he was serious or joking. I felt a new wave of tears well up in my eyes, and I brushed them away with the back of my hand. I needed to talk, to be able to control my emotions and the pain that was giving me a metallic taste in my mouth.

- And you punish me anyway?

He shrugged and replied:

– It was deserved.

It was at this precise moment that Sarah chose to enter the library unannounced.

When she saw us, she stopped and opened her eyes as round as billiard balls. My shoulders were lacerated with scarlet marks and my eyes were puffy; as for Julien, he still held the whip in his hands. Things could not have been clearer.

Perfectly serene as in all circumstances, Julien addressed the young cleaning lady:

– Sarah, now that you have satisfied your curiosity, perhaps you can tell me what you are doing here at this time of day?

Trembling, she apologized profusely and pretended in a quavering voice that she had forgotten a broom when she had come to clean that morning. While Julien ordered her to go and get it, I had hidden my face in my arms around my knees, feeling the tears rise again that the confused emotions of the morning had made bubble deep inside me, like a volcano ready to erupt.

– Pauline, come here, my master called me softly.

Look at me.

I stood up and once I was close to him, I let myself be caught up in his intense gaze. His eyes were the color of a stormy sky, I could see the shades of blue and gray swirling, agitated by a storm of indecipherable feelings. Sarah was about to pass near us, on tiptoe, trying to go unnoticed, when Julien declared, loud enough for her to hear:

- Since this dear Sarah is going to spread a lot of rumors about us, I wouldn't want her to miss half the story.

He put his arms around my waist, pulled me against him and hugged me. I only considered resisting him for a split second.

The touch of his burning hands awakened sensations in my body that I would not have thought myself capable of at such a moment. I was a little stiff; the breath of his breath on my face softened me. Our lips sealed in a languorous kiss, which absorbed me so completely that I did not hear Sarah discreetly leave the room.

Within the hour, Sarah had already told her little story to anyone who would listen. The news spread like wildfire among the small team of staff at the Manor.

That same evening, Julien invited me for the first time to dine with him, at his table, in the large dining room adjoining the library where the guests took their meals.

If he had never done it before, it was because Mary and Sarah were the ones serving there. Obviously, as long as he wanted our relationship to remain a secret, he was obliged to avoid it.

Now that this precaution was no longer necessary, he saw no reason to deprive himself of the pleasure of my presence.

The dining room was a fairly neutral, long room, furnished with six round tables and a large buffet that served as a serving trolley. Julien sat me down at the table near the door and left me for a moment to go and take care of his guests. A few minutes later, Pierre arrived and sat down right across from me.

My relationship with Pierre was rather good, since my relationship with Julien had fallen into the framework of what he considered normal. A certain complicity had developed between us, and he played the role of a sort of protector for me. When I had a problem or a doubt about Julien, I knew that I could come to him, and he was always ready to listen to me and reassure me. He was also one of the small number of people to whom Julien granted the privilege of touching me, and we had on several occasions shared an intimacy that went far beyond words. I had ended up getting used to his almost monastic rigor, and he had learned to tolerate my escapades, to the extent that Julien tolerated them too.

Pierre had been away for almost two weeks and I was happy to see him again, relieved also to find myself on familiar ground for this first time at my master's table.

- So Pauline, how are you? Julien isn't too hard on you?

I answered with a doubtful pout and saw a flicker of worry pass over his face.

"What's going on?" he asked me, suddenly very serious.

- It's not him. It's his brother.

- Ah. That's right, Olivier is always around at this time of year. Have you met him?

- You could say that, yes. And it's weird, but it seems like we don't have much in common. I wouldn't want to be his submissive anyway.

"I don't think he's been much into SM lately," Pierre said enigmatically, and I didn't get a chance to ask him to elaborate, because as I turned to see what he was

looking at over my shoulder, I came face to face with Olivier, who grabbed the chair just to my left and plopped down heavily on it.

"I haven't been told everything, I see," he said, looking me in the eye.

At that moment, Julien joined us; he stared at his brother as he sat down and said to him in a sarcastical tone:

– Olivier. What a privilege to have you at my table.

– It must be the best, since it's yours.

So saying, he gave me a pointed look. Julien glared at him, showing that he had understood the allusion, and began to help himself. Then Olivier continued:

– I'm glad to see you've finally made up your mind.

- What for?

– To choose a girl for you. And a charming one at that...

He reached out to me, I stiffened in my chair, and as he was about to touch my cheek, a loud noise made us all jump. Julien had just banged his fist violently on the table, imposing a great silence on the whole room. He articulated in a firm but very calm voice:

- She's mine. If you want to touch her, you ask my permission.

Olivier, stunned, slowly withdrew his hand, under the half-surprised, half-amused gaze of Pierre who intervened in a casual tone:

– Come on Julien, don't be so possessive.

"I'm possessive if I want to be," Julien retorted harshly.

A leaden silence fell over our table, broken only by the sound of cutlery and the conversations at the other tables. Then Olivier spoke again in a conversational tone, as if nothing had happened:

- So, are you going to come with her on Sunday?

– Certainly not, Julien replied without looking up from his plate.

– Oh? And why?

- You know very well why.

- You're wrong, it would have a certain effect... And then you know that the longer you wait, the harder it will be.

– Leave me alone! Julien exploded again.

I had never seen him get so worked up, and I suppose in other circumstances it might have seemed almost comical. But in this case, I found it rather disturbing, and I gave Pierre a pleading look for him to intervene, to do something, anything.

"You're celebrating your father's birthday, right?" he asked, coming to my rescue.

– Yes, said Olivier with a grimace, like every year, it's the same thing, dear dad wants all his offspring with him for the big family celebration.

– But by the way, intervened Julien, who had found his smile again, and you, your Irish girl, isn't she coming?

"She's coming on Saturday," his brother replied, scowling.

- And you told him, finally?

– No but... I will do it...

– That's not true, Olivier! You've been with her for almost two years, and she still doesn't know about the SM! But I swear you have a taste for risk.

The two brothers continued to bicker throughout the meal, and Pierre and I ended up laughing about it, busy keeping score. As we left the table, Julien left me in his friend's hands and got down to preparing for the session. Pierre led me out onto the terrace, where he sat down in a wooden chaise longue. I folded my loose burgundy velvet skirt under my knees to use as a cushion before kneeling down next to him. I leaned lasciviously against his chest, my head close to his so that we could chat discreetly. He slipped a cigarette between his lips and offered me one.

"Family meals must be really terrible at their house," I murmured.

– And yet, you haven't seen anything, Pierre answered me in the same tone, his left hand playing at making twists in my hair. There's the little sister, Caroline. She's a real pest, and she loathes anything that even remotely touches on SM. You can imagine how it goes with Julien.

– And Olivier? His wife doesn't know, does she?

– You got it. He's in a vanilla phase right now...

– But this morning he said he wanted me to make amends. What kind of compensation will he demand?

– You know, he's a bit of a brute and the rules of SM go way over his head, but he's not mean. You don't have to worry too much in my opinion.

- Do you think he won't do anything?

- I didn't say that. You'll see. But you're more than capable, you'll do just fine.

Julien came to get us himself to accompany us both to the library, still deserted. He had me undress and put on me a kind of cream-colored silk kimono, with intertwined brown and red flower patterns. It was open at the breasts and slit down the back from the feet to the waist. In fact, the garment only covered my shoulders, which was surely the desired effect given that I still bore the marks of his morning whim. He tied my hands with a very thin cord that he passed three times around each of my wrists; and as soon as Olivier entered the library, he handed me over to him, without further ado.

At that moment, my astonishment and anger overcame my fear.

She came back at a gallop when Olivier set his gaze on me, a wet and heavy gaze, embellished with a jackal's smile.

With him, there were no rules, no order of passage and no ceremony. He led me aside, towards a sofa whose wooden armrests formed two elegant scrolls, under the mezzanine. I threw a slightly desperate glance at Julien. He had just sat down in his red armchair and had slipped a cigarette between his lips; I met his clear gaze under furrowed eyebrows and felt reassured to see that he was watching me all the same.

Olivier sat on the couch, and placing his two powerful hands on my hips, he placed me in front of him. To begin, he untied my hands. Then he spread the sides of the kimono and looked at me for a moment with greed, before plunging his head between my breasts. I felt a wave of disgust overwhelm me. What bothered me the most was the obvious feeling that his lust derived more from a form of jealousy towards his younger brother than from a real desire. He ate my breasts like one deliciously bites into the forbidden fruit, his tongue swirling around my nipples as if in triumph.

And then, little by little, he concentrated on what he was doing, forgetting the slightly awkward context of the situation. He let his hands slide over my stomach and my pubis, and with his fingertips, with a delicacy I wouldn't have thought him capable of, he aroused my pleasure. I shivered, and throwing my head back, gave up struggling. He handled me carefully, aware of his strength, without ever brutalizing me; he guided me gently with his voice and gestures so that I would give him exactly what he expected. Kneeling between his legs, I licked his cock, from the testicles to the glans, running my tongue over his penis again and again, following his instructions. Then he sat me down on my knees on the sofa, turning my back to him, and uncovering my ass, he asked me to wait for him. I

expected him to spank me, but instead I saw him come back with a silver, smooth, oblong object, the base of which narrowed before ending in a sort of flat handle.

– It's a plug. Do you know what it's for? he asked me, showing it to me.

I nodded, but I must have looked a little pale, because he felt compelled to clarify:

– Don't worry. I'll push it in slowly.

He slid two fingers into my sex and slowly stuffed me, nibbling on my neck. I writhed with pleasure, moaning shamefully, when I felt his hand move back towards my anus. I let out a groan, and his other hand firmly grabbed the back of my neck, while he quietly ordered me to let him do it. He slid a finger into the tight orifice of my intimate cavity, and a searing pain shot through my stomach. I turned my shoulders to see Julien; he was watching the session taking place on the other side of the room with a distracted air, but he was three-quarters turned towards us. When his gaze met mine, he stood up and walked towards us. I breathed a sigh of relief a little quickly: the next moment, he grabbed me severely by the hair to make me lower my head. He asked his brother:

- Is it going the way you want?

– Perfect, don't worry.

- GOOD.

And he returned to his place and sat down.

Having understood the message, I took a deep breath and tried to relax. Olivier gently massaged my ring and pushed the plug into my ass, very gently. I had the strange feeling that it was filling me up to my throat. My sphincters tightened reflexively around the base, keeping the object firmly in place. Olivier then regained his interest in my sex, which he caressed with his fingers, then with the tip of his penis that he rubbed against my clitoris, tearing moans of pleasure from me. When he penetrated me, his hard penis pressed forcefully against the thin wall that separated my vagina from the steel object that occupied the other way, and an enormous wave of pleasure rose from my stomach and made me stagger. My partner must have also enjoyed this very particular sensation, because he let out a moan of satisfaction and dug his nails into my shoulders through the silk kimono. The pain made me jump, but he misunderstood and, believing that I was showing my desire, he began to pound me savagely. He went in and out, in and out, and with each of these back and forths, my insides contracted around him with an involuntary violence that overwhelmed my senses. I cried out with pleasure, without even realizing it. He unloaded.

It was only when, having turned me around and sat facing him, he wanted to kneel down to lick me in turn, that Julien intervened.

- No, she doesn't deserve this. She needs to be beaten for her behavior this morning. Do you want to do it?

- No thanks, do it yourself.

Still a little dizzy from the pleasure, I wondered if I had heard correctly. Fight? Julien had already done that, and if Olivier didn't think it was necessary, I thought that was fine.

Obviously, with my master, nothing was ever that simple.

He took me by the wrist and led me towards the fireplace, where the session was taking place.

The others waited respectfully for him. He tied me to the last post on the left, taking pleasure in leaving my plug in full view of everyone, and asked the crowd who wanted to whip me. I didn't even look at the face of the one who volunteered. I didn't know him.

In the end, I had no reason to complain that Julien had decided not to carry out the punishment himself. The stranger was lighter-handed than my master would have been. At no time did he remove the garment that covered my arms to the elbows, and hid the marks of the cat o' nine tails. I don't think Olivier ever knew how severely I had been punished for insulting him.

The great virtue of a very severe punishment is to wash away all resentment. As if we were resetting the counters to zero, as if once the storm of pain, the crack of the whip and the screams had passed, we could start again on new bases. This is how the next day, having spent an excellent night in Julien's arms, I was rather in a good mood. In addition, I was working on the recent archives, appreciating this pretext to stay with him, in his office. Suddenly, he broke our studious silence:

- You have to stay at the Manor this weekend.

- What for?

- I would like you to accompany me to my father's birthday.

Trying to remain calm, I looked up from the archives and stared him straight in the face, unblinking.

- I thought you didn't want to.

- I changed my mind.

- May I know why? I asked respectfully.

– Olivier is right. The longer I wait, the worse it will be. I have to introduce you to my parents.

I grimaced.

– Can't it wait for another time? Let's say, a time when your whole family isn't here, brother, sister, extras...

– That's fine. Hopefully they won't focus too much on you.

And so it was done.

Julien is not a very outgoing person, but when you upset him, he becomes downright mute as a tomb. If he spoke ten words to me between this conversation and Sunday morning, that was the most. The ten words in question were mainly instructions aimed at telling me how to present myself. Julien, for once, was wearing a black shirt and cotton pants. I was dressed like a young girl from a good family, with a light skirt that fell modestly above the knee, and a low-cut but not provocative neckline. Julien was a little nervous. I was in the last stage of anxiety.

The large kitchen on the mezzanine floor occupied a space almost as wide as the entrance hall, behind which it was located. It had three exits: the access from the corridor of the west wing, behind Edward's office, the door of the staircase that went up to the commons and the staff rooms, and a third door which was the only access to the east wing. Of course, the latter was always locked.

For me, the East Wing was a kind of myth, a world on the other side of the mirror that I had read about in the archives, but which remained inaccessible. This barrier was also for me a form of symbolic protection, the border of a real world that I imagined to be particularly normal and boring: the side of dreams, of madness and senseless mysteries, that was ours.

When Julien turned the key in the lock of that fateful door, my heart was beating fast. After climbing a few steps, we found ourselves in a world that had nothing in common with the Manor. Well, with my Manor, the one I knew and had learned to love. The space had been redefined in an ultra-modern and very stripped-down style, the partitions knocked down to form an immense room, only symbolically divided into two symmetrical parts by a smooth white archway. On the courtyard side opened a long kitchen, gleaming with chrome and electronics. On the garden side, the living-dining room opened onto a vast veranda. All the furniture was coordinated in bright beige and cream tones.

Sonia de la Marterie, well, I should say Sonia Andringer, or even rather Madame Andringer to be fair, in short, Julien's mother, was also perfectly coordinated with this universe in her image. She wore a beige suit and incredibly

high heels. Although she was approaching sixty, she didn't have many wrinkles, not an ounce of fat, and not a white hair. Her hair was smooth, shiny, chocolate-colored, her hair impeccably styled. Her blue gaze pierced me to the bone. Next to her stood a tall redheaded girl with a pretty face full of freckles, surely Olivier's Irish girl.

Julien kissed his mother and introduced me; I had taken on a pretty peony tint and barely managed to articulate a "hello" broken by shyness.

A young girl in jeans appeared on the spiral staircase that wound around a corner of the room. She was dressed simply, and her hair was tied in a ponytail, but her presence was every bit as impressive as her mother's: I recognized Caroline immediately. She threw Julien a hostile look and greeted him icily. Then she came over to me and shook my hand, barely suppressing a grimace of disgust.

The atmosphere was already enchanting, and I was impatiently waiting for Olivier to arrive, who would, I had no doubt, put the cherry on the cake. We saw him approach through the garden, where he had gone to smoke. To my great surprise, he did not make any disparaging remarks, contenting himself with throwing at Julien:

– Hey, did you come with Pauline?

He kissed me on both cheeks; I avoided the Irish woman's gaze, embarrassed. No one spoke, we all remained standing in the middle of this immense, sanitized room, and I wondered how we were going to get out of it, when finally Patrice Andringer entered. It was as if a gravitational field had just appeared in the room, absorbing all the tension emanating from our motley group. He was a handsome man - Julien actually looks a lot like him, apart from his darker hair - a little phlegmatic, who gave off a sort of severe coldness. He first greeted his wife, his daughter,

Olivier, the Irish girl, Julien, and me last. Well no, he didn't greet me, he stood in front of me and asked Julien to introduce me.

– Her name is Pauline, she's my partner, we're... engaged.

I blushed again, because behind the poetry of this description there was a very clear situation, and obviously Julien's father had understood perfectly.

He turned to Olivier's friend and paid her some kind of compliment, which left everyone time to go about their business, such as opening a bottle of wine, grabbing an aperitif cake from a bowl, or slipping discreetly into the kitchen. When everyone's attention had dispersed a bit, Patrice Andringer turned to Julien and said:

– Come to my office for a moment with your friend.

We followed him into a small room overlooking the garden, its walls lined with books. My trained eye instantly recognized the leather bindings stamped with the gilded irons of Gabriel Andringer. There were doubtless some very beautiful pieces here that were sorely lacking in the library.

Patrice Andringer sat down in his deep armchair in front of the mahogany desk, but Julien remained standing, still holding my hand. The atmosphere was a little heavy, without me being able to put my finger on what was wrong. Julien's father spoke.

– Julien, you know that I am very concerned about your well-being.

It's been a long time since you brought us a companion, and I'm happy for you.

Julien didn't answer, and the silence thickened; I was waiting for the "but" that would inevitably follow this somewhat too delicate introduction.

– But... I know that you are someone sensitive and particularly demanding, on an intellectual as well as physical level. So if you commit, I would like to be certain that she will be able to take it on.

I shuddered: of course, I knew the role that Patrice Andringer had played at the Manor, I had read things about him in the archives, and what Julien had told me about him had not given me the impression that he was someone harmless. However, I could not believe that he could make such a huge allusion, in front of me, while the rest of the family was waiting for us to have lunch in the next room.

"She is quite capable of it," Julien replied in a somewhat solemn tone.

"I want to make sure," his father replied, turning slowly toward the window.

I followed his gaze as it slid to the ground and my eyes fell on a sort of brass umbrella stand, which did not contain an umbrella but a cane, an English cane.

It was a long, slightly flexible rattan wand, with a slightly curved handle covered in leather. Having seen this type of instrument in the sessions, I knew that it was particularly cruel, even if I had never tasted it. I squeezed Julien's fingers until my knuckles turned white and looked at him desperately. I couldn't imagine being subjected there, in front of his father, while a family lunch awaited us. A real terror took hold of me. Although Julien had never wanted to give me a safeword, I knew that I only had to say the word to stop him, and I considered doing so because the idea of such an ordeal was unbearable to me. But when our eyes met, I gave up. He looked vaguely troubled, and at the same time engaged in something that seemed important to him, and perhaps I did not have the heart to question it, or

perhaps I let myself be convinced by his own determination and by the pride I felt in seeing that he considered me worthy of going through this. He gently freed himself from my hand, stroked my cheek and went to take the cane from the brass pot, asking:

- How much do you want me to give him?

– Seven blows should be enough, if you apply them severely.

I was petrified like a beginner. Julien gently took me by the waist and placed me in front of the short side of the mahogany desk, my back to the window. He made me bend forward and I put my elbows on the desk, finding myself facing his father, and much too close to him for my taste. He slowly lowered my panties to my knees, and placing himself perpendicular to me, he pulled up my skirt and held it behind my back by placing his left hand on the small of my back. My heart was beating wildly.

– Seven shots, Julien murmured as if to himself.

And he struck.

The pain took my breath away, then it grew louder like the resonance of a gong strike until it became insane. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I made a small plaintive noise between a hiccup and a sob. Julien's father looked at me gravely, without rejoicing or taking pleasure in my suffering, as one inflicts a necessary punishment without taste. I took a deep breath that Julien took as a signal, and he knocked again.

I had puffed out my cheeks to keep from screaming; the air suddenly emptied, as if released by a safety valve.

I had seen girls in the session start crying and begging after the first stroke of the cane. To give myself courage, I thought back to the contempt they had inspired in me, even though I suddenly understood them much better.

The cane fell once again on my sore behind, and my legs sagged a little under the shock. I hastened to straighten up, so as not to give the impression that I was shirking. It was difficult because of this pain that came delayed after the impact and continued to increase. Julien waited for it to reach its peak, and all three of us held our breath during this moment of tension. I took two breaths with the greed of a drowning man, and took another blow.

With a new wave of pain, I felt the beginnings of panic overwhelm me. "Only three more, just three," I repeated in my head, and this goal seemed both ridiculously close and impossible to achieve. I was going to scream, jump, fall,

collapse in front of Julien, disappoint his father, lose everything for seven miserable and unbearable blows. Julien struck a fifth time.

If I hadn't screamed at the moment of impact, I was unable to hold back a desperate moan that climbed from my throat at the same time as the burning in my buttocks grew. I buried my head in the crook of my arms to hide the tears that I was no longer able to hold back. I felt Julien's hand pass over my buttocks, brushing them like the flapping of a butterfly's wings, taking away some of the pain. I had a small sigh of relief, immediately cut down by another blow from the cane.

Julien waited another long and painful minute, the time to let the resonance of the impact settle in. I was neither completely still nor completely silent, and he knew me too well not to be aware that I was on the verge of breaking. It made him nervous, I could feel it in his breathing a little too quickly.

– The last one, he whispered in a soft voice.

I gritted my teeth, braced myself as best I could, and he struck one last time. Immediately after, he let my skirt fall over my buttocks, and I heard the dull sound of the instrument returning to its metal pot. But for me it was not over, the violent bite of the cane continued to devour me, throbbing, terrifying, and I knew that I would have to endure it for several hours, without complaining or being able to rest. I remained motionless, still leaning over the desk, my head in my arms.

- Are you satisfied? Julien asked his father.

– Very, he replied. She is docile, courageous. Bravo for the preparation.

"She hadn't really been prepared for that," Julien retorted with a bit of annoyance in his voice. "I think you noticed that."

Patrice Andringer stood up and placed a hand on my shoulder.

It was a strange, vibrant touch, filled with a reassuring warmth.

"That's good," he said. "But you know what I think about all this."

– Yes, father, and I don't care.

– I know you don't care, Julien. I know that. You've been warned, that's all.

He went out and I heard the door close behind him. Julien walked around the desk and sank into his father's chair with a sigh. Then he took my hand and gently pulled me towards him. Embracing me warmly, he kissed my hair and whispered:

– I'm sorry Pauline. But if I had warned you, it would have been... worse, much worse.

"Did you know what was going to happen?" I asked him in a thin voice that seemed foreign to me.

– As you know, I don't have much experience with these things... But, yes, I had already seen him do that.

I snuggled up to him and sighed. In every family, there are rites of passage for new spouses. However, I found the Andringer one to be quite excessive.

Standing in front of the large mirror in Julien's apartments, I looked at my buttocks, striped with seven beautiful, parallel red marks. Professional work. The seven scarlet stripes, well drawn, were arranged with impressive regularity, horizontally, between the middle of my buttocks and the top of my thighs. They reminded me of those improbable photos in the naughty magazines of the fifties, which used the description of the duties of a good housewife as a pretext to introduce the most embarrassing situations in terms of marital discipline. I took a disconcerting pride in this trophy printed on my ass, which I myself had a little trouble analyzing.

Julien's suite, on the first floor of the west wing, consisted of three adjoining rooms. At the far end was his bedroom, which I frequented more and more regularly. The large mirror took up an entire wall in the middle room, which also contained a dressing room and a sitting area with several comfortable armchairs set around a circular pedestal table.

Julien was doing something or other in the third room, the one that was forbidden to me, and where he was engaged at all hours of the day and night in mysterious activities that I suspected, because I had read things in the archives that corroborated this theory, were of a creative and artistic nature. Difficult to verify, because I was not allowed to ask questions about it.

There was a knock at the door of the room where I was.

– Pauline, can you open the door, please? Julien called to me from his workshop.

I let my skirt fall over my sore bottom, and led Pierre into Julien's little living room. The visitor kissed me on the forehead, and asked me:

- So, did it go well?

– Are you kidding me? It was hell!

Julien appears, busy cleaning some traces of color on his fingers with a damp cloth.

– You're exaggerating, Pauline. Overall, we can say that everything went normally.

I shrugged with a grimace at the memory of the welcome Julien's father had given me.

- Did he beat you? Pierre asked.

- Who ?

– Patrice.

I gave Julien a sideways glance, heavy with innuendo, and a little offended. Apparently, everyone knew about this ritual, except me!

"He asked me to do it," replied my master. "Seven strokes of the English cane."

– In front of everyone?

– Oh no, not at all! I exclaimed. In his office.

– It could have been worse, then.

I stood there speechless, covered in a cold sweat. I hadn't seen things that way. In other circumstances, if Caroline and Olivier's partner hadn't been there, Julien's father probably wouldn't have bothered to seek the privacy of his office.

Julien offered us an aperitif, and the three of us settled down in his private lounge, around the pedestal table, where we relieved Pierre of his curiosity about the ordeal that Julien and I had just been through. The Andringer family is quite comparable to a pack of wolves. If you see one isolated, from a distance, and preferably sheltered behind a steel gate, you will probably find it magnificent. But in truth, I would not wish anyone to find themselves in the middle of them when they are hungry, angry, and all in a pack. Personally, I had faced this ordeal in silence, swaying from one buttock to the other, not knowing what position to adopt to forget the burning of my posterior. Olivier, Sonia, Caroline, all knew why Patrice had called me into his office, and what had happened there; and even if none of them had made the slightest comment on the subject, I had spent a particularly trying time at their table, to the great pleasure of Julien, who had been amused by my confusion and the sometimes borderline irrational reactions that it had inspired in me.

"I loved how you told my sister off," he observed.

– Tell me, demanded Pierre, enticed.

"It's not my fault," I said. "We were outside having a cigarette, I was trying to make conversation, to be polite, and she said, 'Hey, we didn't herd sheep together, you could still address me formally.'"

"That's all her," Pierre whispered.

Julien gave a soft chuckle that excited me a little, as he motioned for me to continue. I continued with more confidence, not a little proud of myself, in fact.

– You see, I find it annoying, on the one hand she prides herself on despising everyone for their SM tendencies, and then, she shows herself to be even more pedantic than them. I told her so, and I told her that I didn't address Julien formally, and that she shouldn't count on me to be formal with her.

– How did she react? Pierre asked, amused.

I gave Julien a knowing look.

– I don't know. Oddly enough, she looked a little shocked.

– You know, Pierre answered me, the problem with Caroline is that she is an Andringer. She has it in her blood, despite everything... But since she represses it, she has never learned to control it. I advise you to be wary of her. She can be dangerous.

We continued the story of our family misadventures until late in the afternoon, and as the day grew gray and receding over the trees of the forest, I don't know how, the conversation took other detours, finally leading us to where I was to discover the last unexpected news of this busy day.

– When are you closing the Manor? Pierre asked our host.

– In two weeks, replied Julien.

I stared at him, stunned, and although he would probably have appreciated a little more restraint on my part in front of his friend, I couldn't help but ask him:

- You're closing the Manor? What does that mean?

He answered me patiently.

– Every year in September, I close the Manor for three weeks. I give everyone the day off and I go on vacation. A little well-deserved rest, if you ask me.

For my part, I was too absorbed in my work to have considered the possibility of taking a vacation. It was not a subject that had even crossed my mind. The archives of the Manor had become like a second skin, a parallel

temporality in which I took refuge without thinking about it, in a completely natural way.

– A holiday! But I didn't organize anything, I cried.

"Don't worry," he replied, still maintaining his usual composure, "I'll take care of everything."

I stared at him in disbelief, wondering if I had understood his allusion correctly.

– What are you doing... exactly?

– To organize the holidays.

"Are you asking me to spend the holidays with you?" I asked, stunned.

He just looked at me with an equivocal smile, before finally saying:

– Why, did you have something else planned?

– Uh... no.

- Perfect.

And with that he dismissed us, for it was late, and his guests were waiting for him.

Chapter 5.

Julien had therefore decreed that we would spend the holidays together. It had taken me a few days to convince myself of the reality of his intentions, and I had gone to see him several times to ask him if he really intended to do it and if he was serious. He had even ended up getting angry and threatening to beat me up if I continued to harass him with the same question over and over again.

And here we were, both of us on the road, Julien's car loaded with two large suitcases, setting off on a mysterious escapade whose stages he hadn't told me about. Quite simply, our trip began in Paris, on a large avenue in the seventeenth arrondissement, not far from Parc Monceau. In this neighborhood the facades were renovated, the plane trees generous, the cars gleaming and outrageously expensive. It wasn't late enough for the fathers to have returned from work, and Julien had easily found a parking space on the avenue. The sky had that strange, slightly metallic gray-pink color that you only see in Paris.

I wore a fitted black leather coat that hugged my hips, a skirt that was barely long enough to hide the tops of my stockings, and tall black leather boots. Julien hadn't changed out of his usual jeans, but he was wearing a charcoal shirt and a cashmere jacket. He was incredibly classy and casual at the same time, his hair

disheveled above his impeccable attire. I was melting with desire just looking at him.

He led me out onto the sidewalk and began to rummage through the trunk of the car. He had taken out a canvas bag that contained some of his favorite instruments, and I knew that was what he was searching in, looking for something the mere sight of which would probably send me into a frenzy. Suddenly he grabbed me, turned me around, clasped my hands behind my back, and I felt him tying my wrists with leather straps. I turned scarlet. Just then a little old lady, bourgeois to the tips of her pumps, passed by, holding a Pomeranian on a leash. Her hair was like her dog's, and she looked at me as if she had just swallowed her Earl Grey the wrong way.

– Julien... I whispered. Not in the street...

– Don't worry, we're not going far.

He slung the bag over his shoulder, locked the car, and then put an arm around my waist. It didn't hide the fact that my hands were tied behind my back, but it did soften it a little.

A hundred meters separated us from the carriage entrance where Julien let me in. There was a code outside, and inside a glass door controlled by an intercom. Julien rang the bell and announced himself. I squinted at the intercom to see the name on the bell, and as I deciphered it I was overcome by a shiver:

"Stone Turned".

Pierre lived on the fifth floor, the ideal floor in these old Parisian buildings: high enough to benefit from the light above the plane trees, it was also the noble floor equipped with a balcony that ran the entire length of the apartment. His home had a bit of the same old-fashioned charm as the Manor, with its moldings on the ceiling and the parquet flooring that creaked under the thick Persian silk carpets. The furniture was all solid wood, and the sofas were leather. The melancholy song of a cello, a piece of chamber music that I did not know, enveloped the atmosphere in a strange serenity.

Although it was still early in the evening, several people were already there, familiar faces I had met at the Manor. Julien handed me over to Pierre and went to greet them. Pierre untied me to take off my coat and whispered in my ear:

- I need you tonight.

I rubbed myself against him with a firm gesture to arouse his desire, and replied in the same tone:

- What can I do for you, master?

– Be perfect. As usual.

He placed a furtive kiss on my lips and tied me back in the same position. Then he led me to the living room, where he made me kneel next to my master.

The living room was a long room that ended at one end with a wall pierced with an archway overlooking the kitchen.

On the other side, the brown leather sofas formed an arc around a glass table laden with various victuals, toasts and petits fours. Julien nibbled while chatting with Héléna, this pretty mistress who came regularly to the Manor. I was dying of hunger, but it would have been inappropriate to complain.

Pierre sat down right in front of Julien, and the latter leaned forward to ask him:

- So? He's not here?

"He's coming at eight o'clock," Pierre replied, glancing at his watch. "You'll see, he's superb. Barely twenty-one years old, and a real little bundle of nerves."

- And he knows what you're planning to do?

– No... I told him we would talk about it tonight.

Julien smiled as he crunched a handful of cashew nuts:

- And you think he will accept?

– I'm counting on Pauline to help me convince him.

The doorbell rang and Peter got up to answer it.

We found ourselves a little apart. Julien took a small, appetizing-looking puff pastry and presented it to my lips. I was hungry, but the feeling of being a small animal begging at the table was unbearable, and I politely turned my head away in refusal. The reason for this did not escape my master, who reprimanded me in a low voice:

– Damn, Pauline, do you know what “submissive” means?

I gave him a dark look, which I thought was telling enough. He sighed, and glanced around to see if anyone had overheard our exchange. I knew that if they had, he would certainly have to force me or punish me.

But the others were absorbed in their own conversation.

Then he leaned over to me and untied my hands.

"Help yourself, if you're hungry," he said in a voice loud enough for us to hear, and to know that I was acting with his consent.

I slid over to the table and literally threw myself at the petits fours. You have to take what comes along, because with all this talk of sessions, you never know when this type of simple pleasure will present itself again.

Pierre came back accompanied by a boy with an angel's face, light brown eyes tending towards green, and slightly curly mid-length blond hair. It was difficult to identify the status of the young man: Pierre guided him with a hand placed on his back, too much familiarity for him to be a master, too much distance and respect for him to be a submissive. On this point I had confirmation when he introduced him to my master:

– Arnaud, let me introduce you to Julien.

"I am very honored," the newcomer said respectfully, shaking his hand.

Julien responded with a silent, enigmatic smile.

– ...and Pauline, his submissive.

The boy turned to me, and I froze, trying to hide the fact that my mouth was full. His lustful gaze aroused a ball of heat between my legs. I immediately felt ashamed of myself for having felt such immediate desire, under Julien's eyes. But he still displayed his beautiful, quiet smile, more promising of complex amusements than of any punishment.

The young boy sat down on an armchair between Pierre and Julien; he had trouble taking his eyes off me, but Pierre discreetly called him to order. And then, Julien started the conversation, in a playful tone:

– So, you want to get into SM?

"Yes, I would like to," replied the young man, visibly intimidated, but firm.

– And what is your best fantasy?

Julien had asked the question calmly, naturally, and visibly without particularly trying to make the boy uncomfortable, but that was nevertheless the effect obtained. He tensed in his seat, seeming to turn the answer over in his head, then launched into the beginning of a rather laborious explanation:

– I mean... I like spanking and...

Julien cut him off sharply:

– I didn't ask you what you like to do. I want to know what your wildest dream is.

This time the boy remained silent, his lips pursed, visibly annoyed by the tone Julien had taken with him. Sensing that it was time to intervene, Pierre addressed me:

– Pauline, come here.

I approached him and he handed me a glass of water. Guessing what awaited me, I quenched my thirst greedily. When I handed him the empty glass, he ordered me:

– Suck it.

I didn't need to be asked twice, because the idea of taking in my mouth this young boy with a face chiseled like an ancient sculpture, who seemed stunned by this prospect, tense between his impulses and the respectful fear inspired in him by the two experienced masters, this idea delighted me completely.

I settled between his legs and slowly undressed him. His gaze was burning with desire, and he remained motionless, petrified in his chair, at my disposal. His cock was of beautiful proportions, young and vigorous, and I placed my lips on it with delight. The three men watched me do it in an almost religious silence. As I moved his cock back and forth in my mouth, I felt his pleasure vibrate against the softness of my lips.

I felt good, I could have continued, it was Pierre who stopped me severely with a single word. I stepped back, and Julien brought me back near him. Our young novice was in a state of advanced excitement, almost a trance.

– So, this fantasy? Julien insisted.

The boy had closed his eyes. His breathing was rapid. He recited, panting:

– There are two gorgeous girls, almost naked except for garters and see-through underwear, they are rolling around on the floor, and kissing, and touching each other, caressing each other's breasts and pussies, kissing each other. I am standing next to them. I have a whip. I slap their asses and they moan and ask for more. They are making out and touching each other and I whip them...

He stopped abruptly. His cheeks had colored a little, and he gave Pierre a somewhat fierce look, a form of defiance, but still in search of assent. Pierre spoke in a calm but uncompromising tone:

– Arnaud, there is one thing you need to know.

- Yes ?

- If you want to become a master, you must first be submissive. That is a rule that cannot be broken.

The boy's eyes widened in bewilderment and his mouth twisted into a grimace of disgust. My two companions explained to him all the reasons for this demand, in all its subtlety and perfectly sensible aspects. He was not convinced, however.

– But, he protested, it's just not my thing at all, I can't imagine... I would have to... if a woman...

- Who is talking to you about a woman? Julien cut in with contempt.

Peter intervened with greater calm and patience.

- What I'm proposing to you is to take you as my submissive. And I can assure you that it's a great privilege.

Arnaud turned to me, full of contained anger, seeming to watch for the reaction of someone who might have a chance of being on his side.

– Yes, it's true, I said.

I had spoken without being invited, which earned me disapproving looks from Pierre and Julien. I shrugged, playing innocent, and they turned their attention back to the young man.

– And I have to do this... for how long? he asked reluctantly.

– As much as necessary, replied Pierre.

– But roughly? A week? A month? More?

– It depends on you. The faster you learn, the shorter it will be. But it still takes a few months in general.

- I'm not decided.

– Pauline, help him, Julien ordered.

- What do you want me to do, master? I asked.

- It's up to you. Do whatever it takes to convince him.

I thought for a moment. I could only think of one thing that could convince a man to accept such an offer against his nature. He would have to be mad with desire, ready to do anything to achieve his ends. I approached the boy and placed myself between his legs again. He stiffened, but let me do it, with a hard look, his face closed. I straightened up and wrapped my arms around his neck. His breathing became ragged, tense. I put my lips to his ear and whispered very quietly:

– Hit me.

And then I settled across his left thigh, and with one movement, pulled my skirt up to my waist, revealing the two white hemispheres of my ass separated by the thin strip of lace of my thong that hid almost nothing of my intimacy. I held out my two hands to Julien, who took my wrists and blocked them against his thigh. I felt that Arnaud was burning with desire, and the hard bump of his cock pressed against my hip, but he hesitated.

– I thought I didn't have the right...

- We're watching you, said Pierre. And with your hand, there's not much risk. So hit hard.

The young man gave me a timid slap on the left buttock. Julien gave a little mocking laugh. I had trouble recognizing my master in this childish attitude, and I felt a little resentment at such gratuitous nastiness.

But the young novice seemed able to bear it; there emanated from him a very particular type of strength, similar to that which characterized Julien, and which provoked a deep attraction in me.

– Hit hard, Pierre repeated.

This time Arnaud let himself go. His hand crackled on my buttocks with an incredible noise. Pierre encouraged him, again, harder, harder, until he saw me writhing and shuddering in Julien's hands who was still holding me, until the blows finally tore a few moans of pain from me. This time, it was Julien who stopped him:

– That's enough.

But Arnaud was well launched and he continued to hit at full speed.

– That's enough. Enough!

Finally the avalanche of blows stopped. I let out a small sigh of relief. Julien let go of me and I took refuge against him.

– You see, he finally said to Arnaud, you need to learn to control yourself.

Pierre's apartment had a duplex section that extended into the attic above the floor. It was almost devoid of furniture, except for two futons laid on the floor. The exposed dark wood frame extended into two posts in the middle of the room, the bases of which seemed to sink like roots into the thick gray carpet.

We all went up.

Pierre had managed to convince his young companion to try the game for one evening. He would have to make up his mind afterwards. I could sense that he

was extremely reluctant and I couldn't imagine how Pierre intended to change his mind in one evening, but he seemed confident. And I was clearly part of the plan.

Having gathered us around him in his kind of attic,

Peter looked at us as if we were his property, then pointed at me. I felt my heart quicken as I took a step forward, my eyes lowered.

– Arnaud, would you mind undressing her? Pierre asked.

The boy came up to me and grabbed me firmly by the shoulders to turn me towards him. Our eyes met, and he began to undo the buttons of my blouse, without looking at his hands. In his burning eyes I read a violent desire but also a little contempt, something that said "I'm not like you, I will never be like you, I can pretend to obey, but I am free." He unhooked my bra and grabbed my breasts, then he crouched down in front of me to take off my stockings, my skirt, my boots and finally my thong. Finally he turned me roughly towards Pierre and pushed me in his direction. He pointed to the nearest post. I sat down just in front of it, my feet apart and firmly planted in the carpet, and raised my hands to place them on the upper part of the post, where it joined the frame. Julien appeared on my right, equipped with a rope that he began to put around my wrists.

I didn't want him to tie me up, I felt well enough not to need it. I made an almost inaudible plea, to which he responded with an order to be silent, and he strapped me firmly to the post.

When he pulled away, I took a deep breath and focused.

A few months ago, I would have twisted my neck trying to see who would beat me, and with what instrument. Today I knew it was better to save my energy for the mental preparation that would help me endure the ordeal.

They started with the whip, the leather straps burning my buttocks and thighs evenly. It was just a warm-up. When the heat of my ass was perfectly uniform, they moved on to the riding crop. Each blow caused a sharp, targeted pain that tore a muffled cry from me. After about ten blows, there was a pause, but I knew it was just because the riding crop was changing hands. The ordeal resumed, more painful. I recognized my master's hand, by the way he pressed roughly along the entire length of the instrument. Since I was tied up, I was less careful, and in spite of myself my legs gave way and my body writhed against the post.

– Come on, Pauline, behave yourself, Julien reprimanded me.

I caught my breath and settled back into position, legs spread, back arched. He started pounding again hard.

When they had had enough of whipping me, a new form of ordeal awaited me. I had closed my eyes, and I was working on myself to control the pain. Hands were placed on my ass, they were soft and cool, women's hands, and their touch soothed my suffering. I felt them slide towards my sex, prepare me, open me, and an oblong object penetrated me deeply. The hands that had installed it continued to feel me, flatter me, caress me, and drew moans of pleasure from me. Suddenly, the object began to vibrate and I had the impression that my whole belly was turning like a planet around this slow, deep vibration, which gave rise to circular waves of pleasure, which rose up in me, all sensation in my body concentrating around this center of gravity with its insane intensity. The sensation grew, grew, and suddenly I felt every muscle in my body liquefy in the pleasure of a violent, animal enjoyment.

I was untied; I was moving in a slightly blurred haze, barely aware of the movements around me, and I found myself sitting on the ground in the arms of my master, who embraced me gently, placed his lips on mine and kissed me for a long time. I loved it when he did that. It's quite frowned upon in sessions, this kind of demonstration of affection, but Julien, apparently, could get away with anything. Helena's look, at that moment, full of jealousy and contempt and indignation, redeemed in my eyes all the pain in the world.

When I had regained my senses a little, Julien, who was still holding me against him, gave me his instructions for what to do next, in my ear:

– Now you're going to take care of Pierre's protégé. Prepare him, warm him up well. Make him on the verge of implosion. You can do whatever you want, but no penetration.

I nodded and crawled over to the young man, who was sitting on one of the futons, watching the session continue. Pierre was standing next to him, leaning against the wall, a long brown leather riding crop in his hand. He watched me approach and gave a small, very discreet nod of approval. I had practically carte blanche.

I stopped in front of the boy who was eating me out with his eyes, and before I had time to react, he grabbed me by the hair and stuck his tongue in my mouth. Obviously, it was extremely inappropriate; but after all, Julien had said that I could do what I wanted. I hugged Arnaud and we both rolled like one body on the futon, united by our mouths and our tongues that searched and discovered each other, like teenagers. It felt good, shivers of pleasure woke up my body, I told myself that this would have a price, that one of us would have to pay for it. I undressed him feverishly, jerking him off as I went, digging my nails and teeth into

his skin that was incredibly soft, like a woman's. He responded with as many scratches and bites, and our moans of pleasure punctuated this mock fight.

He tried once or twice to take me, but I shrank away, and when I was certain that he would have given anything to have been able to do it without waiting a second longer, I rose, took his hand, and led him to the centre of the room.

Helena had just finished with her submissive, and the place was free. I led Arnaud to the post; he didn't even hesitate a little. I made him put his hands where I had mine a little earlier, and slipped between him and the post. I kissed him, then settled on my knees at his feet and took him in my mouth. While I sucked him, Julien tied him up in turn, then he grabbed me by the arm to dislodge me and brought me back near him, a little to the side, at the right distance to watch the show.

Peter stood behind the boy, his riding crop in his hand; he waited a few seconds silently, and then without further warning, he struck.

He was whipping at full speed, a real brute, and although Arnaud was clearly trying to bear it, he was screaming and jumping at each blow. It seemed much too violent for a first time. I said this in a low voice to Julien, who answered me:

– Pierre knows what he's doing. Don't worry.

I was still worried, and after a while I appealed to my master again, begging him to intervene.

"Certainly not," he replied. "I trust Pierre. If you don't, you can just step in."

– Pardon ?!

- You heard me correctly.

I hesitated only for a second. Arnaud's condition was such that it seemed to me that I had to do something. I stood up and, taking advantage of the momentum that Pierre gained by raising his riding crop, I pressed myself against the young novice's back, my arms around his waist, and the riding crop, instead of drawing a new red line on his quivering ass, landed on mine with unexpected violence. Pierre swore, Arnaud gasped with surprise and relief, and time stood still for a moment. Finally, after this tiny hesitation, Pierre declared:

- Alright.

And he resumed his work, at the same pace. I took it as best I could, since I had already had my fill before, and I clung to Arnaud's chest with my left hand. With my right, I jerked him off forcefully, and he moaned as much as I did.

When it became unbearable, I whispered in his ear:

– I'm sorry.

And, letting go of him, I withdrew as I had settled in. Pierre stopped again and I saw him make a sign to Julien. Julien approached, turned me around, and pushed me between the post and the boy, this time with my back to him. He prepared the young novice's cock himself, and slid it into me. I vaguely heard that Pierre had started to hit again, but all that was very far away now. Finally allowed to do what he had been dreaming of since the beginning of the evening, Arnaud fucked me hard, powerfully moving his pelvis behind me with a dull rumble that sounded like a cry of victory. It was very short and he unloaded brutally, with a spasm that testified to the extreme intensity of his pleasure.

Peter untied him and ordered him to kneel. To my surprise, he obeyed without question.

– Now, said Peter, I want you to thank me for the pleasure I have just granted you.

Arnaud said nothing but turned his head towards me. He seemed to say that I was the one really responsible for the part of the evening that he had liked. Pierre continued:

- I gave you this girl, I allowed you to take her. I want you to thank me for that.

– Thank you, Master Pierre, said the young man, a little bitterly.

Then Pierre and Julien left us to devote themselves to the other submissives and to their own pleasure. I spent the rest of the evening on the futon, wrapped in Arnaud's arms, who clung to me like a castaway to his raft.

- What are you going to do? I asked my young accomplice.

- I don't know. What would you do, in my place?

– That's a stupid question. I'm in your shoes.

- You think I should accept, then. Become Pierre's submissive.

- I think you have no choice.

He hugged me tighter and said nothing more. He had just entered my world.

We left Paris by car, heading south, avoiding the motorways and major roads. Julien made us take the school route, towards a destination that was unknown to me.

In the evening we stopped at guest houses or small hotels that he seemed to already know well. During the day, we covered the miles, stopping regularly to

walk or visit remarkable places. Our itinerary resembled an art history course program: Vézelay, Cîteaux, Issoire, Saint-Nectaire, Conques,

Moissac... Julien approached these sublime places in a contemplative, almost mystical way. While I always needed to know when each stone was made, to identify the iconography of each capital, to compare the style of each sculpture, to know the why and how of each building, Julien would sit in a corner of the nave of an abbey and spend hours looking in silence, soaking up or making sketches of columns, arcades and stained glass windows. It was especially important not to disturb him at such times. While he was meditating in this way, I would wander around alone, studying the photocopied leaflets that had been provided to us at reception, amazed by the beauty of these monuments that looked down on us from so many centuries ago, in complete bliss.

Julien's suitcase of essentials contained a riding crop, a whip, a meter of rope, and other objects of the same ilk. Mine contained books. My new game was to search through twentieth-century SM literature for allusions to the Manor. There are more of them than one might think. Patrice and Sonia Andringer are quite recognizable in one of the couples portrayed by Vanessa Duriès in *Le Lien*. I could cite others... but the one that was the subject of the greatest debate between Julien and me was undoubtedly this excerpt from the beginning of *Histoire d'O*: "Finally, when dinner was over, the two women came back to get her. (...) They crossed a vestibule, two lounges, and entered the library, where four men were having coffee. (...) Then they made her move forward, stumbling a little, and she felt she was in front of a big fire. (...) Suddenly, her blindfold was removed. The large room with books on the walls was dimly lit.

(...) » Obviously, there was a slight whiff of déjà vu there. I maintained that Pauline Réage had always denied having been inspired by a real place, claiming that Roissy only existed in her imagination. Julien felt that this was denying the obvious, the reference to the Manor seeming to him to be completely indisputable.

Only the registers could have closed the debate, but not having them at hand, we could have argued for hours.

Julien liked to catch me reading a slightly hot passage with one hand between my legs. He would then ask me to continue out loud, and slide his head between my thighs to make me come with his tongue. Or he would make me read on all fours on the bed, at the same time as he spanked me or whipped me with the riding crop; if I had the misfortune to interrupt myself or stumble over the words, he would redouble his force until I finally gave up, broken and delivered to his good will. Even though we were on vacation, he had not lost his taste for games. His imagination was as overflowing as usual.

So, one day when we were walking in the forest, after one of our visits, holding hands and chatting pleasantly about this and that, he suddenly called out to me:

– Here, since we're in the woods, find me a nice flexible branch so I can whip you.

My heart skipped a beat. He loved to surprise me, and I walked on every time. He resumed the conversation where we had left off, but my mind was elsewhere and I was scanning the underbrush for a small ash or a birch. Suddenly, I let go of his hand and plunged two meters into the undergrowth. I approached the shrub I had spotted and broke off a very straight branch. It was about forty centimeters long, a little less than a centimeter in diameter, and it was, as he had asked, very flexible. I returned to the path, and we walked in silence this time, while I cleared the branch of its small leaves and rough edges that would otherwise have risked injuring me. When I handed it to him, he stopped, pointed to the first tree that was there, and asked me to lean on it and get ready. I was wearing sneakers and a simple little blue cotton dress: I didn't have much to take off.

"Don't you think we should still move away from the path a little?" I asked him timidly, worried about being surprised by other walkers.

– Absolutely not, he replied with a menacing smile, before continuing: your panties will bother us all the time. Take them off.

I obeyed, and not knowing what to do with it, handed it to him. He put it in his pocket, motioning for me to turn around again.

I leaned against the tree and lifted my skirt up to my waist, holding it with my left arm. He slashed my buttocks four or five times with the improvised stick. He was not too severe, and I felt the sweetest warmth invade my behind and spread between my legs, as he took my hand to draw me on to continue our walk. He had kept the branch in his hand and was playing with it conspicuously, whipping the air in front of him or the grass at the side of the road, the stick emitting a little whistle that made me jump each time.

A little later, noticing a small path that left the main road on the right and climbed into the undergrowth, he asked me to take it and passed behind me. As I walked in front of him, from time to time he lashed my thighs with the stick.

– Stop, Julien, you're going to make marks on me.

– Brands? What a great idea!

And he hit me harder.

I sighed, and to invite him to focus his attention, I lifted my dress again and blocked it at the hollow of my back by crossing my forearms behind my back. I walked like this with my buttocks in the air, offered, exposed. Seduced by the invitation, he drew new scarlet lines on my ass. We walked like this for a while; from time to time, he used his wand, but not regularly or systematically. Finally, as we passed a tree trunk lying on the ground, he sat on it and took me on his knees to kiss me.

- You are wonderful, you are beautiful, I want you, I want to fuck you, here, right now...

As he continued his cajoling, I nervously opened the notch of his belt and made his hard cock emerge; then I lifted myself up and made him enter me. He tightened his hands on my buttocks and threw his head back, groaning with pleasure. I was moving on him fervently when we heard a noise on the path. There was a whole group of sixty-somethings approaching in single file, in hiking boots and with sticks in hand. I bit my lip, embarrassed, as Julien pulled down my dress to hide my reddened buttocks and conceal our indecent lovemaking. He giggled into the hollow of my neck; his hilarity was contagious, and I had a hard time stopping myself from bursting into laughter myself. The seniors passed by us with offended expressions, averting their embarrassed gazes from the cheeky couple that we formed.

When the last in line had rounded the bend in the path, we gave free rein to our laughter, our desire and our sweet bucolic madness.

[Archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie. Oral Archives, August 2009.

Interview with Édouard Chatham. Full transcription on recording.

– Can you introduce yourself in a few words?

– My name is Edward Chatham. In fact, the original spelling of my first name would rather be Edward. My father was English, my mother French. I was born in India in 1949, but I lived in France from the age of five. I have worked at the Manor since 1969: from 1969 to 1972, I was a “forest ranger”

(Thomas more modestly calls himself a gardener today, but it amounts to the same thing.) From 1972 to 1979, I began to take care of various things for the Andringer family, and since 1979, I have been the Butler for the West part.

– How did you find out about the Andringers and the Manor?

– My father was an architect. The firm Chatham and Mornille, does that mean anything to you?

– Indeed. They were the ones who led the work in 1964. I hadn't made the connection...

– On this occasion, my father formed a very... special friendship with Philippe Andringer. When he had to find me a job, somewhat urgently, he immediately thought of him.

Just then, a place had become available... it happened very quickly.

– Tell me about your beginnings at the Manor.

– Before I could be hired at the Manor, I had an interview with Philippe Andringer himself. He was eighty-six years old, but still well-balanced. He immediately told me about their sadomasochistic activities, and the fact that I would have to live with them, but without being allowed to participate in them. It was forbidden to the employees of the Manor, it still is, besides the liberties that our current master allows himself... Then I met Hubert Certon, the administrator at the time. He was a round and smooth man, who gave little room for discussion. He always wore this incredible gray checked suit, a real trademark. I always knew him like that.

– Tell me more about him. What exactly were his relations with the Andringers?

– They were more than close. He shared Philippe's very particular tastes and they were long-time friends. For Patrice, at first he played the role of a sort of mentor. He taught him everything about managing the Manor, but also about some more... personal things.

- You are referring to the fact that he was the one who did his initiation.

– Indeed. But I only know it by hearsay. I arrived after that period.

– And Esther?

- You know about this too?! You are well informed, you will soon be competing with me...

Esther was Philippe Andringer's natural daughter, but she was also his dearest treasure. He had very formal relations with his children, whom he saw little, except for the youngest, Léon, who lived in the East. Their mother had died in the early 1960s. But with Esther, it was different. She was incredibly close to him, he did practically nothing without consulting her. They were seen together very often, with Hubert Certon. She was practically married to him, if that word has any meaning for these people. They had a daughter, Cécile, who must have been six or seven years old when I arrived at the Manor. In short, only Patrice

began to have as much importance in the eyes of his grandfather at the end. But the complicity between Philippe and his daughter dated back much longer.

– Do you know what happened to Elsa Driss, Esther’s mother?

– I think she died in the war. It's hard to say. They never talked about it.

– If the relationship between Esther and her father was so good, how can we explain that she did not inherit part of the Manor, or his other assets?

– It's not that simple, you know that as well as I do.

Philippe had separated the West from his personal assets. I suppose he thought that Hubert and Esther would take over his shares and continue to manage his activities. But that was without counting on Patrice.

– What happened in 1979?

– There was a very serious disagreement between Hubert and Patrice.

Hubert preferred to retire. He sold her his shares. Esther followed suit. They never set foot in the Manor again.

I found out that Esther died in 2001.

- What was this disagreement?

– I can't tell you, sorry.

– Tell me about Patrice.

– No... You will meet him. I prefer to leave the surprise for you.

– Do you have any memories of Julien and Olivier when they were children?

– Of course. I made them jump on my knees... Julien was a mischievous child, he loved to play jokes. He would hide in the Manor, we would spend hours looking for him.

We found him in the depths of an attic, reading with his flashlight under a blanket... Olivier was more difficult, and a little taciturn. The youngest, Caroline, was a real treasure. I have never seen such a beautiful kid. She could turn anyone's heart. But she became more irritable as she grew up.

– Do you have an interesting anecdote about Julien to tell me?

– That's very delicate! You're not entirely neutral,

Pauline: Well, there are probably things that can be said.

For example... when Patrice retired for good and Julien was left to run the Manor alone, he called me into his office. He explained that his father trusted him

absolutely, and that most people felt too much fear or respect for him to dare contradict him.

But I, he told me, knew him better than anyone. He told me that if he started to "mess up" (his words) he was counting on me to put him back in his place. He didn't hold back, and in fact he always treated me more like a confidant than a servant. This episode reflects his personality quite well.

- You have a lot of respect for him.

– That wasn't a question, was it? Indeed, Julien is a remarkable man. He is a great gentleman, worthy of his great-grandfather.]

In Moissac, we had slept in a hotel overlooking the village square, opposite the impressive portal of the abbey whose filiform figures gave off an almost disturbing modernity. We contemplated them one last time before leaving. As I was soaking up the vision of this stone marvel, Julien announced to me:

– Today's stage is going to be a bit special, so I'm imposing a special rule on you. I don't want you to say a single word, during the entire trip.

– Not a word? I exclaimed, surprised. What if I need to go to the bathroom?

He glared at me. Okay, we don't mess with Julien's orders. I immediately made amends.

– Understood. And when does it start?

- As soon as we get in the car.

– Oh! And where are we going?

I had hurried to ask the question in a casual tone, as if it were nothing, while I still had the right to express myself. But Julien was clearly still not in the mood to laugh. It was with a threatening air that he answered me:

– I changed my mind. It starts right away.

I sighed and walled myself up in this imposed silence. We got back on the road; Julien was driving without saying anything either. He was listening to the latest Archive album, the volume of the sound system turned up to full, a cigarette stuck between his lips, which he didn't light, out of consideration for me. I let myself doze off for a moment. When I opened my eyes, I saw that he had joined the motorway; it was the first time since the beginning of our journey. I scanned the names on the signs to try to get my bearings and took the map of France out of the glove compartment. He snatched it from my hands and threw it on the back seat, smiling at me.

I was excited when we arrived in the suburbs of Bordeaux. I knew now what the only question he had wanted to stop me from asking was: "Are we going to see Alicia?" The answer was definitely yes, otherwise why all the drama? Unless that was precisely what he intended, in which case he had imposed silence on me to prevent me from boring him by trying to convince him... I would have done everything to convince him, everything, I would have harassed him, he would have ended up having to stop at a motorway service station to correct me... But no, since we were going to see her, he had planned it for days, it was his way of surprising me. Or was it?

The ban on talking increased my ability to tie myself in knots. Julien watched me out of the corner of his eye and was having a blast.

– It's hard, isn't it? he provoked me.

I bit my hand to keep from answering him.

Our final destination was a small, ordinary house in a brand new subdivision. When I recognized the address, I jumped on Julien's neck and covered him with kisses. After all, he had forbidden me to speak, not to show my feelings.

- Well, I think you understand, I can lift the ban, he said to me, caressing.

– Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!

– Calm down.

I tried to obey as we rang the doorbell, and it opened to reveal Paul, Alicia's master, smiling kindly. He barely had time to greet Julien before we heard a stampede from the other end of the house, and a voice shouting:

– Pauline ! Pauline !

Alicia burst out from around the corner of the hallway, threw herself into my arms, and gave me a huge slap in the face.

– Oh, calm down! Julien exclaimed.

And the two men separated us like one throws a bucket of water on a pair of dogs.

Once the tension of the reunion had subsided a little, our masters allowed us to retire to the bedroom upstairs to talk quietly, on the condition that we behaved properly. (Julien went so far as to specify that he did not want to find us still fucking.) Alicia sat on the large bed, stamping her feet with excitement.

– Pauline, it's so good to see you!

I let myself fall rather than lie down next to her, exhausted by the journey and the tension that had accompanied it.

- Did you know?

– Of course I knew. I've been waiting for this moment for two weeks!

– Ah, the bastard, I sighed. And do you know if we're staying long?

– No, you're not staying, but tomorrow we're leaving together. There's some kind of big SM jousting meeting I don't really know where on the coast. Julien offered to take us there.

We spent the whole day chatting. It was surreal to be able to talk to her and touch her, after so many months where our contacts had only been electronic. I realized that the intimacy that had been established between us was no less real. She knew everything about me, my most secret thoughts, my fantasies, my hopes for Julien. And I felt like she had always been my best, my closest friend.

That evening, Julien and Paul decided to go to a trendy club in the city center. They had asked us to dress up to go out, and we had gone all out. Alicia had dressed in her leather mini-shorts, with boots and a transparent lace top that hinted at the round shape of her white breasts and their darker areolas. As for me, I had borrowed a pair of thigh-high boots from my friend, and I was wearing a tight black dress with a zipper on the front that allowed it to open completely. As we got into the car, Julien devoured me with his eyes, and he finally declared:

– My dear, your dress inspires me.

He put leather handcuffs on my wrists, attached them to the handle above the window of the back door next to me, and unzipped my dress. All the way down.

Of course, I wasn't wearing anything underneath, and as he fingered the two sides of my dress to reveal my breasts and sex, I turned bright red. Then he slammed the door and got behind the wheel. I fidgeted on the bench, then dared to ask him:

- Master, you're not going to leave me like this?

He turned around, stared at me for a moment, then exclaimed:

– Oh, pardon.

He came out, opened the door again, untied my hands. Without touching my dress, which was still open, he fastened my seat belt, making sure it didn't hide the most intimate parts of my anatomy. And he reattached me by the wrists before going back to sit down. This time, I didn't protest, more out of fear of possible

reprisals than out of resignation. Alicia, sitting next to me, looked at me with huge eyes, in which I read - is it possible? - a little envy.

– Alicia, it seems like you only dream of being united with your girlfriend, observed Paul. Come on, take your clothes off too.

Without being asked twice, she took off her shorts and blouse. She found herself even more naked than me, standing proudly on the bench, while I was dying of shame. She was truly incredible. She smiled at me and crossed her hands on her white thighs. Her master called out to her again:

– There's no point in undressing if you're going to hide with your hands. Put them behind your back, that'll keep you from being tempted... There, that's good. And now spread your legs wide, both of you.

Julien started the engine, and the car slid silently through the curving driveways of the subdivision before reaching the highway.

Every time we overtook a heavy goods vehicle, his repeated honking proved to us that the driver had had a good time, to the great delight of my three companions.

As they approached the town, there was more traffic and light, and Alicia politely asked her master if she could get dressed.

Paul nodded. As for me, I was tied up, and I couldn't close my dress... My friend motioned for me to ask Julien, but I didn't dare. She finally took the initiative:

– Master Julien, can I help Pauline close her dress?

– Mind your own business, Alicia.

She scowled and pressed me again.

– Come on, ask him!

"She doesn't want to ask me," Julien said, looking at me in the rearview mirror, "and she's right. She knows I'm going to say no."

I glared at him through the small rectangle of ice, which drew a smile from him.

– You are beautiful, my dear. Your body is magnificent. Be proud to show it.

As we entered the center, I kept my eyes closed, so as not to meet the gaze of motorists and passers-by, until the car stopped in an underground parking lot. It was only once I was out of the vehicle that I was allowed to get dressed. My heart was pounding, and my crotch was wet with excitement.

Arriving at the club, we sat down at a table slightly away from the main room, while we were served a glass of a local vintage with a strong and powerful aroma. Seeing that I was squirming in my seat, Julien asked me what was wrong with me.

"The ordeal you put me through in the car did not leave me entirely indifferent, master," I replied in a slightly aggressive tone.

"It annoys me to see you fidgeting like that," he replied.

Relieve yourself.

I widened my eyes, without reacting. He continued:

- Come on, jerk off. You'll feel better afterwards.

Alicia looked at me with bright eyes, visibly excited by the situation and, once again, giving the impression that she would have done anything to be in my place. Gritting my teeth, I pulled up my dress and slid a hand between my legs. The place, the moment, and even the position I found myself in seemed completely inappropriate to me, and I felt incapable of coming under the attentive gaze of my three accomplices. However, as soon as I slid my fingers into my intimacy, a violent shiver ran through me. I closed my eyes and explored my own body with a measured gesture, preparing it for pleasure, looking for the strongest sensations and the most sensitive areas. I was so excited that I was almost ready already. The pleasure rose quickly and intensely, and I came, jumping under the orgasm and biting my lips. When I opened my eyes again, I saw Julien looking at me, smiling, satisfied. He raised his glass in my direction and winked. He was right: I really did feel much better.

The four of us set off the next day and arrived at the villa in the evening.

It was an extravagant construction that clung to the side of the steep coast in a multitude of terraces and staircases, in the middle of an exotic English garden where strange varieties of cacti flourished, fig trees laden with succulent fruit and tall eucalyptus trees with fragrant leaves. At the bottom of the garden, a staircase dug into the crumbling rock led down to a small cove, where the Mediterranean lapped peacefully at a tiny pebble beach wedged between two rocky outcrops. Inside the villa, a labyrinth of tiled rooms was arranged in seemingly irrational tiers, each window cutting out a blue square of sky and opening onto a breathtaking view.

The mistress of the house welcomed us, she was a middle-aged woman remarkable for her impressive stature – she must have weighed at least one hundred and twenty kilos. The masters called her May. Alicia and I were handed

over to two young epebes who were visibly at her service, in the SM sense of the term. Julien hesitated to let me go, but faced with the insistence of his hostess, who did not seem inclined to let the submissives share the space she reserved for the masters, he finally accepted.

As for me, I only endured this separation thanks to Alicia's presence. In fact, I had feared that I would find myself penned into cells like in *Story of O*, but it couldn't have been further from that in reality. The two lower floors of the villa were reserved for the submissives, and they were hermetically separated from the upper terraces, in the sense that the only access to the upper floors of the villa was via an external staircase, going around one of the high salmon-coloured rendered walls of the building, which was closed by a wrought iron gate and permanently guarded by one of May's young men. Downstairs, we had three bathrooms, one of which was so large that it almost looked like a hammam, several dormitory rooms, a large terrace and unlimited access to the stairs that led down to the beach. In this space, we were guaranteed total freedom, since the masters were not allowed to go down there. The epebes of May regularly came to collect from among us those who were called to serve and accompanied them back when they had done their part, and this, at any time of the day or night.

We had no rhythm, food was available at all times, we slept when sleep took us, wherever we found space. It was enchanting. For the first time, I enjoyed the company of my fellow human beings, discovering behind the bodies offered as fodder to the worst fantasies of their masters people of an extraordinary richness of soul. Each one had his or her story, his or her own way of living this strange adventure in which we were all embarked, the offering of our beings to others for their pleasure, and ours.

Alicia never left my side, and being in her company was in all circumstances very enjoyable. She bonded with everyone with disconcerting ease. As always, she radiated, illuminating everything around her with an aura of good humor that went wonderfully with the idyllic setting that welcomed us. I was her shadow, silent, present, sometimes wondering why of all people she had chosen me, why it was in my arms that she took refuge to sleep. When the urge took us, we would wrap a sarong around our waist and go down to the small beach. It was almost inaccessible except from the villa, and we had no fear of being disturbed. We frolicked naked in the clear water, taking ourselves for mermaids, whose scales were the marks left on our thighs by the burning love of our masters.

On Friday I knew that Pierre had arrived because Arnaud was brought to our part of the villa. He was gloomy and taciturn, and looked tired. He sought no

company, and for my part I avoided him, so as not to find myself in a situation of which my master would have disapproved.

The first time I was called to serve, on Friday night, went very well. I was happy to see Julien again, and he too did nothing to hide his pleasure and all the affection he had for me.

The second time, I was disappointed.

[Pre-inventory of the archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie.

“The secret files of Patrice Andringer”.

3rd series R, containing: 3 photo albums, 2 press cutting albums.

Boxes B23 and B24: handwritten and typewritten documents (mainly correspondence) classified in chronological order.]

Patrice Andringer was trained as a historian, and this is evident in the way the archives were kept, from around 1967 to 2003. Everything in the archives cabinet next to Julien's office is perfectly well classified. The first series contains the administrative documents of the Manoir, from 1967 to the present day, including hotel and meeting registers, invoices and receipts, employee pay slips, contracts, business taxes and other miscellaneous official documents. The second series contains Patrice's personal archives, his private correspondence, property deeds, bank and medical notices, etc. The third series is smaller but not without interest. It contains Patrice's "secret files", the information of all kinds that he collected on the Manoir and its guests. This information was carefully labeled and classified, ready to be exploited.

The oldest article in the "files" is a short biography of Philippe Andringer, cut out of an erotic magazine from the 1960s (undated). The photo albums only start in 1972 and contain portraits of hosts and shots taken during the sessions, all dated and accompanied by the names of the people depicted. I had fun looking for the younger faces of the people I knew, there are not that many of them. Of course, we find Patrice and Sonia, Pierre, and Hubert Certon. I found only one photo of Esther, taken during a session; she is naked except for a garter belt and stockings, and half-reclining on a sofa, she shows her two beautiful round buttocks to the lens and turns around with a mischievous smile.

She has beautiful dark wavy hair, and the piercing gaze of the Andringer.

There is also May, very young, in 1977, at the time she was nicely plump, but nothing like the behemoth she has become. May's story is interesting... From 1977, aged eighteen, she frequented the Manor, then submissive to a man named Jonathan Clarke. She remained submissive for about twelve years. "May" is clearly

a nickname given to her by her master, but she is not known anywhere by any other name. She studied, then taught philosophy, and wrote two essays (under the name May Clarke) which had enough impact in the small Saint-Germain-des-Prés circles to be the subject of several articles in literary journals, copies of which Patrice carefully inserted in his press review. Having become a mistress, May frequented the Manor less, probably also because she had obtained a position as a lecturer at the University of Aix-Marseille. However, she maintained a regular and witty correspondence with Patrice and Sonia.

In the SM community, May has carved out a unique place for herself, the rarity of her appearances helping to establish her reputation.

She only holds sessions twice a year, once in the spring in Paris, once in the fall in her villa in the Var.

In 1993, an article from a specialist magazine, cut out by Patrice, relates: "The last weekend of September is favoured by a very special meeting in the small SM community. The imposing May receives the cream of the crop in her villa (...) You have to apply several months in advance to be there, and the selection is merciless (...) We manage to be among the chosen ones, and here we are admitted into the holy of holies (...) witnesses of debauchery worthy of a Roman orgy. The great lady reigns over these little people of the night, and we can say that her reputation is not usurped."

May truly reigned supreme in the middle of her world, a disturbing black queen seated in an oversized armchair, from where she covered the entire room with her gaze. This room—it was the highest in the house—opened through an arcaded gallery onto a terrace overlooking the bay. The nights of this early autumn were still warm, but May's submissives still maintained several small braziers, which diffused an uncertain light on the naked, tangled bodies, agitated by the spasms of pleasure. May's guests, hand-picked men and women, were installed around the room on a kind of chaise longue that effectively gave the whole thing a false air of a Roman orgy.

I was led before Julien, and I had the unpleasant surprise of finding him in the arms of a woman. She had a model's waist and endless thighs, and on her tanned skin a transparent shirt that barely hid her perfect measurements. Her mouth was luscious, her eyes were overly made up, and her auburn hair fell in a cascade of docile and regular curls on her bare shoulders, in a learned neglect totally devoid of naturalness. She was lying against Julien and was hugging him with one arm, and he let her do it with complacency.

When she saw me, she stood up and walked towards me with a seasick sway of her hips, took my chin and said:

– So, let's see what your little dog looks like. She's not bad, a little bland maybe. I have something to give her some color.

This woman made me feel uncomfortable, but I kept my eyes lowered, careful not to harm my master's reputation by showing myself disrespectful. She took one of my breasts in her hand with manicured nails and kneaded it slowly, until the nipple protruded, which she pinched between her fingers; then, taking out from somewhere a pair of pliers at the end of a metal chain, she placed it on the excited nipple. I let out a little cry of pain and surprise, and the woman slowly shook her head.

– What behavior!

She caressed my other breast and placed the second clamp, at the other end of the chain. This time I endured it stoically.

The pain radiated through my breasts which were now connected by the chain, and she grabbed them to pull me towards Julien. He said nothing and looked at me greedily. I was reassured to always know how to arouse his desire, but the woman lay back down against him, and while jerking him off she said to him in a suave voice:

– Have her whipped for me.

Julien took his riding crop; he was about to get up when she stopped him and continued, cajoling:

– No, don't do it yourself. You can ask any of May's slaves. I'll take care of you.

I want to see her get whipped on all fours while I fuck you.

Julien called one of the youths and gave him his riding crop, with instructions to get me on all fours and whip me until he told him to stop.

"She's got a tanned ass," he said, "so go for it."

He lay back down and I heard him call the woman by her first name: "Cataline"... While I submitted to the test, I could not take my eyes off this witch who was riding him proudly, waving her hair like a madwoman.

Since my first meeting with Alicia, I had learned to control my jealousy, I had often seen Julien take other women, without it really being a problem for me. But with all of them he remained the master, the one who dominates and chooses, and gets what he wants. While this woman, she dominated him, she manipulated him as if he were her toy, her thing. I wanted to scream, to tell him to wake up, that it wasn't him. I started screaming under the blows of the whip, to externalize all my

rage, because I wanted to be hit harder, until I was dizzy with pain, until I lost the unbearable awareness of the humiliation I was suffering and that, even worse, we were both suffering, Julien and I.

My loud demonstration didn't really have the desired effect. Cataline withdrew from my master, and he ordered my tormentor to stop. The woman took me again by the chain that connected my breasts and made me approach them, then Julien, grabbing me by the hair, guided my head towards his sex. He was asking me to suck him, while his cock was still all sticky from the pleasure of this woman! I resisted, with a grimace of disgust. Cataline burst into a pearly laugh that hung like a garland of frost and lace in the heights of the room.

- The little female dog has the audacity not to thank her master, who honors her with his tail? Julien, does she know how to make a woman cum?

- She has some practice. But I don't know what she's worth.

- We'll see.

Cataline lay down on the bed, her legs spread, one knee resting on Julien's body, and she revealed her completely shaved vulva to me. Pulling me by the chain, she shoved my face into her intimacy.

- Come on, lick it, little female dog, show your master how well you obey.

I carefully lapped at her sex and darted my tongue at her clitoris, telling myself to overcome my reluctance that this would excite Julien, that I should only worry about satisfying him and attracting his favors. My tongue was delicate but precise, and quickly, Cataline's thighs tensed, I felt her shiver and moan, and raising my eyes a little to assess the effectiveness of my caresses, I saw that she was clinging with both hands to Julien's hair, her head in his neck, arched by pleasure. Suddenly she opened her eyes, straightened up and ran her tongue over Julien's lips. He didn't defend himself, she nibbled him, and then kissed him. I gasped with surprise. His mouth, his mouth, it was reserved for me, it was the only part of his body that he gave only to me.

As I raised my head, Cataline grabbed my hair and again she pushed me against her sex. I licked her furiously, a spasm ran through her, and she screamed, lifted by a violent orgasm.

After she came, she straightened up towards me and removed the clamps, saying to Julien:

- Send her away. She doesn't amuse me anymore. I want you to fuck me again.

Without a word, Julien signaled to one of May's boys to take me back downstairs. The next moment, I was free, alone at the top of the stairs to the last terrace.

My breasts were throbbing painfully, my ass was burning, and I felt like the smell of this woman's cum was all over me. I went to the bathroom and compulsively cleaned my face. My hands were shaking, trembling with the frustration, the humiliation, the anger I was trying in vain to contain. And then I started crying.

The tears flowed like a fountain, inexhaustible. I wandered around the villa looking for Alicia, she wasn't there, she must have been upstairs serving, my tears flowed by themselves, flooding my face and my hands and my whole body.

I found myself sitting on a bed, still crying my eyes out, surrounded by people trying to comfort me and find out what had happened, but I was unable to utter a word.

Suddenly I felt a manly arm wrap around me and lift me up as if I weighed nothing.

“Leave him alone,” said a man’s voice, pushing aside the small group that had gathered around me.

He carried me, brought me to a room where there was no one, held me in his arms, covering me with kisses and caresses to comfort me. It was by his smell that I recognized Arnaud, and by the taste of his skin, and by the taste of his tongue when he kissed me tenderly. His saliva acted like a magic fluid, the only remedy capable of stemming the torrent of tears that overwhelmed me. I abandoned myself to him and suddenly in a totally natural way, without either of us really thinking about it, he laid me down on the bed and slid his cock inside me. We weren't really fucking, it was like a communion of our

body, almost unconscious, at least as far as I'm concerned.

I was covered in sweat and tears, half asleep, when the sound of someone banging on the door startled me.

– Pauline! Open up! It’s Alicia!

I staggered to my feet and went to unlock the door. She came in and took me in her arms, as upset as a mother cat who had just found her kittens. Then she noticed Arnaud still lying on the bed, completely naked, and she froze.

- Did you sleep together?

– Ben...

– It's forbidden! It's the only thing we're not allowed to do here.

Arnaud shrugged and replied:

– Meh. Nobody will know anything about it.

"It's not that simple," my companion continued. "Pauline, you have to tell them, otherwise they'll find out from someone else, another submissive who could denounce you."

– Whatever, sighed Arnaud.

– Believe me, it's better that you tell your masters, rather than waiting for someone to report it to May.

Pauline, please, you have to tell Julien, he will understand...

I made a disgusted face.

– No! At least not tonight.

– Pauline, you have no choice, you have to do it, you have to go and say it...

– Yes, it's okay, I understand! I cut in, annoyed. Very well. I'll talk to Pierre.

– Hey, what's wrong? Arnaud exclaimed.

He tried to hold me back, but I was already out the door, and Alicia stepped in to protect my escape. I walked straight to the staircase and up the steps to the wrought iron gate, where I found one of May's boys standing guard.

- What are you doing here? he asked me.

– I would like to speak to Pierre Tourné.

– It is the masters who summon the submissives, not the other way around.

– Please, it's important. Please. Tell him Pauline wants to talk to him, he'll accept.

The boy probably noticed that my determination barely concealed a deep unease that bordered on distress.

Without answering, he nodded and climbed the steps to the upper terraces. I felt dizzy and black spots were passing before my eyes. I sat down on the ground and rested my head on my knees, trying to take a deep breath.

A short time later, I was tapped on the shoulder; it was the young man returning.

– Follow me, he said.

He took me up only one floor, led me down a long corridor that formed a right angle, and into a modest-sized room. Pierre stood looking out of the small square window at the points of light from the coastal towns that sparkled in the night and were reflected in the calm sea. I approached him and knelt at his feet.

- It's okay, you can leave us, he said to the boy, I'll call you when I need you.

When the door closed, Pierre took my hand to straighten me up then made me sit on the bed before settling down next to me.

– What's going on, Pauline?

– Master, if you allow me, I would like to tell you everything from the beginning.

– I allow it. Go ahead.

I told him about the events of the evening, without going into too much detail, and trying to be as neutral and factual as possible. I wanted him to be able to tell me if Julien had really been obnoxious, or if it was me who had not lived up to expectations. He listened attentively to the end, without interrupting me, then he asked:

- This woman, do you know her name?

– Cataline.

He looked up at the sky and sighed.

– Julien thinks he's strong, but it's still always the same women who make him do the same stupid things.

Did you have anything else to tell me?

I nodded, took a deep breath, and dove into the water.

– So, when I came back down, suddenly, it wasn't going very well, I looked for Alicia but I didn't find her, so it was Arnaud who consoled me, he took care of me, and one thing led to another...

- Don't tell me you slept together. Oh!

Pauline... You know very well that you don't have the right!

He stood up and began pacing around the room.

– I'm sorry...

"There's no point in being sorry," he said curtly.

You will be punished for this. Both of you.

He paused briefly, then resumed both his circular pacing and the thread of his speech, but in a softened tone.

– I'll let you know when. In the meantime, you're going to go back down and rest. Sleep, okay? Don't worry about Julien. I'm going to talk to him.

He stroked my hair tenderly and handed me over to the boy who had brought me. Once back downstairs, I let myself fall onto the first bed I came across and fell into a deep sleep.

At night, some problems seem insurmountable. In the morning, the monster in the closet becomes a mere shadow cast on a wall, and we realize how much we panicked in vain.

That morning, I woke up with two certainties.

First, Julien's attitude could in no way reflect his feelings, it was just another ordeal.

Second, I had really behaved like an idiot. I had a hard time getting Pierre's promise of punishment out of my mind, and when I thought about it, the slightly metallic taste of fear filled my mouth. I wandered vaguely in search of Arnaud or Alicia, but found neither.

I spent a good fifteen minutes under a boiling shower, then sat down on the terrace in front of a platter of fresh fruit and pastries and gorged myself on figs and chocolate cookies.

Arnaud arrived a little later, looking sleepy. He sat down next to me, at a careful distance, and asked:

- So, did you talk to him?

- Yes.

- And? He exploded? He flew into a rage?

– No, Pierre is not in the habit of exploding with anger. He said we would be punished, that he would tell us when.

- You know, I've been thinking. There's no reason for you to be punished for this, it's not your fault, I took advantage of your weakness...

– Listen Arnaud. It's nice of you to play the knight in shining armour, but Pierre said we'd both be punished and he's not the type to go back on his decisions. So don't get involved, it would be counterproductive.

A little later, one of May's boys handed me a sheet of paper folded in four. It contained a note from Pierre:

"Pauline, Arnaud and you will be received early in the evening. May will decide on your punishment, with the agreement of your respective masters. Concerning what happened yesterday, I spoke to Julien, you don't have to fear that it will happen again. Pierre."

We had most of the day ahead of us, and Alicia did her best to make me forget what lay ahead and help me relax. We went down to the beach; the sea was unusually warm for this time of year. We both swam for a long time; the caress of the salty water on my skin soothed my senses and my mind. Arnaud had followed us. He had once again walled himself up in silence, taciturn.

Sitting on the beach, pensive, he watched us swim, clinging to this vision which seemed to reassure him, in his distress which he hid as best he could.

In the late afternoon, I allowed myself a real brunch to give me strength for the evening. Arnaud didn't want to swallow anything. His throat was visibly too tight to even say a word. For my part, I was a little afraid of the confrontation with Julien, but Pierre's little note had reassured me enough for me to also be slightly excited and impatient.

Around eight o'clock, May's two epebes came to get us, Arnaud and me. They took us somewhere on the intermediate floors, under the large terrace where I had been received the day before, to a room that seemed to be sunk into the side of the hill. It was a little cool and damp, like a cellar, and set up as a "dungeon", that is to say, in the appropriate way to play out the most caricatured SM sessions. Here too, there was a kind of throne, which May reserved for leading the festivities. We were presented to her, on our knees and completely naked.

- I have been informed that you have been committing acts of fornication, without permission, in the area reserved for submissives, she said. I am extremely offended.

I had my eyes fixed on the ground; I hadn't even dared to raise them to try to catch a glimpse of Julien. Pierre had given me to understand that he would be there, and that was enough for me. However, without having to raise my head, I recognized the bottom of his jeans and his shoes, right next to May. She continued her spiel.

– It is because of irresponsible people like you that we end up having to put you all in solitary confinement. It is therefore normal that you pay for it, in the name of the harm you do to everyone else. The price I have set will be ten lashes each. Execution.

There was a murmur in the room. I felt like I was free-falling into a bottomless pit. I finally looked up at Julien. He was next to May, his arms crossed,

holding the long whip made of a single leather strap in his hand. His face showed no feeling. Someone took me by the arm and made me stand up, I turned my head, and I saw that it was Pierre. He dragged me aside while the two epebes grabbed Arnaud. They led him to the other side of the room, to a large St. Andrew's cross. Julien approached and prepared himself, his face dark, concentrated, cracking the whip at his side. I was on my knees next to Pierre, who held me by the hair to force me to look; the adrenaline blurred my vision and all my perceptions. May's boys tied my companion in misfortune's wrists and ankles to the cross with leather straps. He let them do it with jerky movements that showed a slight passive resistance, and he was as hard as a horse. When Julien began to whip him, I saw his body writhe in pain. Like a reflection of the wooden cross, the whip drew a red X on his back.

The instrument whistled before biting into the shoulder and snapped just below the opposite hip, causing a cry of pain to resonate. He fought against the first blows, but in the end he was suffering, his body limp, close to unconsciousness. Julien nevertheless went all the way.

When May's boys untied Arnaud, I stood up like an automaton, and before anyone had even asked me anything, I went to stand in front of my master, my eyes lowered, submissive, ready to endure anything. He looked at me for a long time, an intense, serious look. I finally found him again. The epebes approached me, but he stopped them with a gesture and said:

- I'll take care of it.

He pushed me against the cross. As he strapped my wrists, he pressed himself against me, and I felt his erect penis pressing hard against me through the fabric of his jeans. He whispered in my ear:

– Breathe well. Try to stay relaxed.

I don't remember much of the rest, except for an explosive, insane pain, beyond all control. My brain, well trained, had taken things in hand. It sent me massive discharges of hormones that plunged me into a state close to a trance. My mind produced strange images, I had the impression of being connected to Julien by a thread, and this thread was alive, it was an enormous snake that wriggled, it was the whip that danced in Julien's hand, and each time it snapped at the bottom of my back, the snake bit me viciously, its venom seeped into me. I was floating in the current of a poisoned river, I was drifting, and I heard Rimbaud's verses chanted and hammered out: " As I descended impassive Rivers / I no longer felt guided by the haulers / Screaming Redskins had taken them for targets / Having nailed them naked to the colored posts... "

And then it was the end and Julien untied me himself, he took my face in his hands, he asked me:

- Do you want to go back down?

I shook my head, I was ready to do anything to stay with him. He went to sit on the floor along a wall and I curled up against him, sitting on his knees, my head on his chest, his hand in my hair. The session continued, ordered by May who chose her victims and asked for this or that test, without ever getting up, without ever participating. She lived her sexuality by proxy.

Julien felt that I was shaking.

- Are you okay? he asked me.

- I'm cold...

- One.

He stood up and helped me do the same. I stumbled almost every step of the way. He led me through the labyrinth of the villa, a corridor, a staircase, another corridor; in a fairly large room that looked like a kitchen, he found a kind of dressing gown that he handed me. I was still shaking like a leaf.

"I'll make you a pick-me-up," he murmured.

At that moment, Cataline burst into the kitchen. I jumped when I heard her voice. She threw herself at Julien and moaned:

- Why didn't you tell me you were going to the dungeon? We would have had a lot of fun.

I felt like throwing up. Julien pushed her away gently and said:

- Leave me alone.

- What's going on? You don't want to show yourself with me in front of her, do you? Your little female dog is jealous...

- Cataline, stop. Get out of here.

She simpered, and reaching out to him, she sought both to kiss him and to touch his sex. Then he grabbed her wrist and gave her that look I know well.

- If you act like a whore, I'll treat you like a whore.

He held her tightly, it hurt. When he gets that look, personally, I immediately stop provoking him. That's what she did too. She gave me a contemptuous look and left the room, mumbling indistinct protests.

Again, I felt dizzy, and nausea took over. I put a hand over my mouth. Julien watched me, worried; he made me sit on a chair and place my head between my knees.

The feeling of unease slowly ebbed away.

– Stay like that for a minute, he said to me.

When he came back, he straightened me up and handed me a small glass filled with a clear alcohol.

– Vodka. For the pain.

Oh yes! That's right, I was in pain, so bad I could scream, cry, and not breathe. My mental state was such that I had almost managed to forget it. I took the glass of vodka and downed it in one go. In his other hand, Julien held a larger glass, apparently freshly squeezed orange juice, which he was stirring with a spoon. He handed it to me in turn.

– Vitamin and sugar. To get you back on your feet.

I dipped my lips into the beverage and grimaced. It wasn't that it was bad, but my throat was tight and the liquid was hard to swallow. Julien stroked my hair and whispered:

- Now I'm going to take you back down. You need to go rest.

I refused again:

- I want to stay with you.

He frowned. I bit my lip: I had forgotten that I was not supposed to address him informally. I had forgotten that I was not supposed to say "I want." I had forgotten everything except the imperative need to stay with him. He put his arms around me and held me tight. I am not entirely sure, but I think I heard him say quietly:

– I love you, Pauline.

Chapter 6.

We set off again for Paris. After May's villa, the Manor seemed dark and a little gray, but wonderfully warm and familiar. I wanted to roll around in the gravel of the courtyard, hug the pillars of my beloved library or curl up under a fleece blanket in a corner of the outbuildings, sipping an oriental tea prepared by Marie, and devouring a good book. But I had decided to go and spend a few days at my mother's; not that I was happy about it or that I particularly wanted to, it was more the awareness of family duty, coupled with the vital need to take a break, to get

away from Julien's influence, to be able to live for forty-eight hours without fearing at every moment the escapades of an uncontrollable being.

My old banger, an antediluvian Ford with a bit too low bodywork, was still useful, provided it wasn't asked to overtake on hills or drive for more than two hours at a time. However, it had just spent three weeks inactive in the courtyard of the Manor, and as if in retaliation, it refused to start. No matter how much I turned the key insistently, the engine grumbled like an old tubercular goat, clearly determined to stay still. Hysterical, I slammed the door violently and poured out a torrent of kicks and name-calling on the machine.

– Hey, behave yourself, Julien said to me, who had just appeared near me, bursting out of nowhere, like an apparition.

– Damn car! I promised my mother I'd be there for dinner...

He put an arm around my waist and said in a soothing voice:

- We'll tell Thomas to call the garage tomorrow. And for tonight, I'll drop you off.

– Thank you, I murmured, a little surprised.

Julien drove in silence for the few kilometers that separated us from the village where my mother lived. I guided him through the streets of the small town and pointed out the family house. He parked right in front. I thanked him again for bringing me back and got out of the car. When I heard his door slam, a cold sweat ran up my spine. I straightened up and asked him:

- What are you doing here?

– Since I'm here, we'll take the opportunity to make introductions.

- This is a joke!

– Not at all. In fact, it's an order.

He had crossed his arms on the roof of the car and was looking at me over the bodywork, smiling calmly. That smile so sure of himself and perfectly irresistible. I grumbled as I took my bag out of the trunk, came to stand in front of him and said:

– And how do I introduce you? As my boss? As my boyfriend? As my feared and revered master?

His smile widened.

- As you wish. I'll let you choose, I'll fall in line.

[Concerning the erotic works of the mezzanine, which roughly cover the second half of the twentieth century (from 1940), the difficulty of proceeding with a thematic classification is much more clearly felt than for the previous period. In particular, it is no longer really relevant to separate texts relating to SM from other erotic or pornographic texts, on the one hand because of the trivialization of relations of domination and sadomasochism in current erotic literature, on the other hand because of the diversity of genres and trends within this type of literature itself.

More interestingly, we can isolate subgenres that partly cover the SM dimension. Namely:

- fabulous / fantastic: erotic works whose characters or action are situated outside the sphere of reality, for example in the realm of tales for Anne Rice and her submissive *Sleeping Beauty*;

- realistic and hyperrealistic: on the contrary, a genre which is part of the transcription of erotic or pornographic scenes in an environment justified by its plausibility; I include in this category *Le Lien* or *Le Blindfold* ;

- poetic: the heirs of Bataille, Apollinaire... where pornography becomes a song, the music of words prevailing over any desire to be part of any story; I think we can admit *Histoire d'O* into this category;

- historical/exotic: which plays on the place or the era to generate picturesque situations;

- documentary/didactic: everything that is not a novel, but is situated in the sphere of the essay or the practical work, as with *Serguine*, or right inside it, like the works in the *Osez* collection (including “ *Tout savoir sur le SM* ” and “ *Osez les jeux de soumission et domination* ”);

- etc.

In any case, when it comes to the SM trend, I could not bring myself to classify the reissues of *Sade* by Pauvert in the same category as W. 's *Little Guide to Safe BDSM* .

D... Under these conditions, one of the most satisfactory solutions remains classification in alphabetical order by author.]

I pulled into the driveway of the house, Julien on my heels. Opening the door, I called out in a loud voice:

- Mom? I want to introduce you to someone!

Just before she came around the corner, I turned and grabbed Julien's hand. He smiled at me, and true to his promise, laced his fingers with mine. My mother gave him a haughty, icy look. Raising me alone had only reinforced her tendency toward sometimes excessive maternal protection.

– Mom, let me introduce you to Julien. This is my mother, Béatrice.

"I suspected there was a boy behind all this," my mother said simply.

– Nice to meet you, Julien replied politely, shaking his hand.

It didn't promise to be easy, and I was furious, because if Julien hadn't decided to put us in this situation on a whim, I could have prepared the ground, smoothed out the rough edges. But he seemed to find it quite amusing.

I watched Julien settle down on the couch in the living room while my mother poured us ice-cold beers. It was a completely surreal and disturbing sight. She sat down right across from him and said:

– So, what do you do for a living?

And there it was, hostilities were launched, and I already wanted to melt into the couch and disappear. Why did this question always have to come first?

– I work in the hotel business, Julien replied. My parents have a small castle, I manage the part that is open to the public.

My mother opened her bulging eyes and turned to me, stuttering:

– But... but... Julien... Andringer, is that it? Pauline, is he your employer!?

Without answering, I opened my hands in a helpless gesture, as if I really had nothing to do with what was happening. In fact, that was the case. My companion was still smiling, imperturbable. My mother sighed:

– I think I'm going to need a cigarette.

Julien put an arm around my shoulders and, leaning towards me, he kissed me just below the ear, before whispering:

– Stop worrying.

I gritted my teeth and washed down this new boast with a swig of beer. As my mother had taken to smoking,

Julien took out his own package.

- Do you mind?

– Sure, go ahead, at this point, she replied.

He lit his cigarette, took a deep breath and there I witnessed an extraordinary phenomenon.

Julien has a gift for exerting an extremely powerful hold on people he meets for the first time.

Usually he plays the part of the dark prince, with his blood-curdling gaze, and he inspires in his interlocutor the respectful terror of the prey hypnotized by the predator. That day I discovered that he was also perfectly capable, and with the same efficiency, of taming his victim with gentleness and charm. After a quarter of an hour, my mother had invited him to dinner. An hour later, she was completely spellbound and had forgotten all the grievances she could have against him, his age, the fact that I worked for him, and I don't know what else. When he had left us after a last coffee, she told me:

– I understand why you fell for him, he's really charming!

Oh yes! I philosophized to myself, you have to see him with a riding crop in his hand, charming is really the word that suits him.

I think I was still angry with him when I arrived at the Manor the following Monday. But not enough to drive my main concern of the moment from my mind. I had almost finished processing the archives of the two periods, and finalizing the classification plan would not take me much longer. After that, I would still have to compile my notes to write my final report, and my work would be done. In fact, strictly speaking, my six-month employment contract had already ended and I dreaded what Julien would decide. He was careful not to broach the subject in the days that followed. For my part, to save time, I began more seriously to tackle the works on the mezzanine. They were filed haphazardly, and defining a classification that held up could well take me a few more weeks.

So I went back to work in the mezzanine, not without a certain nostalgia for my beginnings at the Manor. When Julien came to see me, I felt the excitement of the first times rise up in me, and that only amplified my anxiety at the idea that he could, from one day to the next, simply ask me to leave for good.

It was probably this mixture of contradictory feelings that led me to behave so stupidly.

It was the first day the Manor was back open after the fall break. As I was returning from lunch, preparing to dive back into my filing, I felt a presence in the library. It was plunged into darkness, and it took me several seconds to make out a human form, near the eighth pillar. I turned on the ceiling light and approached to find Arnaud, kneeling, naked, chained to the pillar by his wrists and ankles. I hadn't

seen him since May's villa. His situation didn't seem to have improved, and he still looked as tired as ever.

"What did you do to end up in this state?" I asked him, sitting down opposite him.

He made a snarling move in my direction, and I cautiously stepped back to get out of range.

"You're still on their side, aren't you?" he growled aggressively.

Fucking sick! We can never do enough for them, fuck. I hate him. I swear, I fucking hate him.

I made a doubtful pout. Well, it happens to all of us when we are angry to want to hate our masters, but generally speaking, we never really succeed.

– Uh, calm down, I tried awkwardly.

This only triggered a new fit of rage. He writhed in his bonds and the chains made an ominous clinking sound.

- How the fuck do you expect me to calm down? Look at me.

I can't take it anymore, I'm going to die.

I frowned and finally realized that what he was showing me was his cock, which was hard and tense as if it were going to explode. Suddenly, he softened, and tried to coax me.

– Please, I can't take it anymore, it's been going on for hours, could you caress me a little, jerk me off just a little, please...

- Let go.

I stood up and made him understand with my eyes that what he was asking of me was not possible. He reacted violently, struggling and roaring in his chains.

– Bitch! he yelled. Tease! When I'm in charge, I'll make you pay for it.

"You're not going to be a master until you can come out with such crap," I retorted.

I went back up to the mezzanine, shaking with anger and almost unable to concentrate on my work. I don't know how much time passed before I heard the library door slam and footsteps approaching. Pierre's voice rang out in the library, deep and serene.

- Well, can I hope that you will obey me now?

I jumped at Arnaud's reaction, who began to struggle in his chains again, while throwing a volley of insults back at his master.

"Little prick!" replied Pierre, and I heard the sharp crack of the whip that settled their dispute violently, in Pierre's favor.

When he came out, I was worried when I couldn't hear Arnaud anymore. I went down from the mezzanine and approached him. He was motionless, broken, his head nodding forward, his shoulders streaked with scarlet marks, all fresh. I put a hand on him and he jumped, then looked up at me. His look was desperate, and he had a red mark across his cheek.

– Shit, I think I hit rock bottom here.

Like an idiot, I let myself be moved to pity. I stroked his cheek, and he became even more pleading, he had tears in his eyes, and my hand went down, went down almost in spite of myself and went to rest on his sex, which I massaged gently, tearing a moan of pleasure and relief from him. Pierre was really inhuman with him, and I had a hard time putting up with it. Suddenly, it was as if it was my responsibility, out of solidarity between submissives, to do something for him. I jerked him off, and once I had started, stopping would have been even more ignoble. I knelt down next to him and took him in my mouth. He reacted to my caresses with such sensitivity that I felt like I was saving his life. I licked him, sucked him greedily, jerked him off at the same time, until he unloaded violently in my mouth. After placing a kiss on his hair, I went back up to the mezzanine.

My lips were still warm from his cum when the door opened again to reveal Pierre, who this time was accompanied by Julien.

- You see, don't despair, declared the latter, he seems a little calmer.

– Yeah, even a little too much if you ask me. I would like to know how he did that.

There was silence, then my master's voice rang out, powerful, chilling my blood.

– Pauline! Pauline, come down right away.

I obeyed and presented myself before him, my eyes lowered. Without a word, he grabbed me by the hair with an iron hand, pressed his mouth to mine and slid his tongue between my teeth. His kiss was violent, burning, and it instantly reawakened in me the excitement that had germinated when I had taken care of Arnaud.

When he let go of me, he exclaimed:

- Bitch!

And he slapped me. Not very hard, but enough to humiliate me and make me look down.

"She sucked him?" Pierre asked incredulously.

I saw Arnaud give his master a very mean smile of triumph, for which I promised myself I would hold a grudge against him for a long time.

"What the hell got into you?" Julien asked me.

I didn't really know myself, and I didn't try to answer him or justify myself.

– Julien, things are not going well with her at all, Pierre observed. You really have to do something.

My master looked at me gravely for a moment, then he said:

– I think I'll call Sebastian Sauber.

Julien arranged the meeting with Sebastian Sauber that same evening, in the small living room. I didn't know him, but I had two good reasons to dread this moment. The first was that when his name was mentioned, Pierre had seemed satisfied, apparently considering that the punishment would be commensurate with my fault. The second was the only warning Julien had given me:

– Don't think I enjoy inflicting this type of punishment on you. I would be content to beat you, if I had any hope that it would influence your behavior.

I wondered what could be worse than the whip, and my imagination was far too fertile.

Taking advantage of a moment when Julien wasn't keeping a close eye on me, I looked for information on Sauber in the archives. They can be so frustrating sometimes! I didn't learn anything interesting about him, apart from the fact that he was thirty-nine years old and that he had been visiting the Manor sporadically for quite a few years. On his "specialty", nothing; I would have had to go through Patrice's files, but I didn't have the time.

"Make a name index for Patrice's files," I made a mental note for later.

Early in the evening, Julien summoned me to the small living room, where he was waiting for me with Sebastian Sauber. He was a very tall man, probably over six feet tall, slender, with platinum blond, almost white hair and blue eyes as sharp as razor blades.

My master asked me to undress, and when I was naked in front of the stranger, he began to scrutinize me from every angle, coldly, manipulating me with

gestures of surgical precision. I was terrified; in fact I had only one fear, it was that Julien had decided to mark my body permanently, because I was not at all sure that I was ready for that. I observed him furtively: he was sitting, his legs stretched out in front of him, in an ochre canvas armchair, his arms crossed on his chest, his gaze dark, lost in himself. What was happening did not seem to amuse him much, and that did nothing to reassure me.

Sauber looked at my sex carefully, as if it were a gynecological exam, without touching it, then he placed his long fingers around my hips as if to measure them.

"You're a size thirty-eight, right?" he asked.

It took me a few seconds to realize he was talking to me. I jumped and nodded, growing more and more worried.

"I have two models that might suit him," he continued, this time to Julien. "A more traditional one, in leather, and one in latex.

It all depends on how long you want her to wear it.

Julien straightened up, abruptly pulled from his reverie.

"I haven't made a decision about that yet," he said.

Sauber opened his satchel, which was lying on the floor next to him, and pulled out a leather object. My heart leapt, then I squinted to identify the thing, incredulous; I looked closer, and there was no doubt, it was a chastity belt. I looked up at the ceiling, wondering if I should be relieved or appalled. It was such a... medieval method.

The man showed it to Julien.

– You see, this one is quite appreciated for its classic design, but you shouldn't wear it for more than... let's say, four or five hours. The other one is designed to avoid hygiene problems, but its main flaw is that it must be worn under supervision, because it can easily be opened with a blade or strong scissors... Now, if you're looking for a tamper-proof model, it exists, I have a friend who has had his wife wear one permanently for several months, but in these cases, it's better to have it custom-made, it can take a few weeks.

– No way, Julien said, shaking his head. I'm in a hurry.

I need it right away.

Sauber rummaged through his bag again and found another model, made of soft, black plastic.

– Well, this one can easily be kept for several days, even weeks, you just have to remove it from time to time to clean.

– And is it effective?

– Totally guaranteed, you'll see. Spread your legs, miss.

He had spoken to me almost affectionately. He slipped the latex belt between my thighs, made a few adjustments and fastened it on both sides with an ominous click.

– Not too tight? he asked me.

I shook my head, paralyzed, unable to utter a syllable. He turned me back to Julien and proceeded with the guided tour of the object.

– You see, it fits well, you can't slip your fingers in. There's a grid there, for the urine to flow, and behind (he turned me around) a not too big orifice. I like this model, because it clears the buttocks well, if you want to whip her.

(He turned me around again.) And at the clitoris, it's well reinforced, there's a plate there, which guarantees the absence of any contact, by friction or otherwise. From what I've seen, your little girl must really like masturbating, but there it's really impossible.

On the sides, you see, it's very discreet, but you need a key to open it.

Julien reached out his fingers and brushed the domed plate that protected my vulva. He tested the fit of the belt, trying to slide his fingers in to see if he could reach my sex or my clitoris, but Sebastian Sauber was serious when he said it was impossible.

– OK, I'll take it, said Julien.

He gave Sauber a wad of bills, and received in exchange a small silver key, which he slipped into his pocket.

– I advise you to clean it once in twenty-four hours, then every seven days. You tie it up and do it with cold water, to avoid it being too sensitive and for her to take advantage of it.

And then Sauber came out, and I found myself alone facing Julien, naked except for my belt, sweating profusely.

- How long... ?

I couldn't even finish my sentence because I was so confused. Julien looked me in the eye and said:

– You will keep it as long as necessary so that you remember that you are only allowed to take or give pleasure with my permission. Get dressed.

– Yes, master, I murmured, lowering my eyes.

And already I felt the excitement building and becoming unbearable.

He made me wear it for six days. They were the longest six days of my life. I quickly discovered that Julien's primary goal was not so much to prevent me from having pleasure as to torture me. He made me participate in all the sessions, I had to suck whoever he asked me to suck, I was whipped as much as he liked, without receiving anything in return. He also made me sleep next to him at night, covering me with caresses and kisses, and when he demanded that I give him pleasure, he always took care to remind me that I would not receive any in return and that I had to ensure that the intensity of his pleasure was equal to my frustration. I worked at it, prolonging his pleasure during endless blowjobs, where my tongue played with his glans, where my lips eroded from going back and forth on his cock, and each time I felt him jump under my caresses, I had the impression that my own sex, swollen to the extreme and agitated by spasms below the belt, was going to end up exploding. The relief never came, and Julien thanked me and congratulated me with words and kisses, before asking me mischievously how I felt, which put me into a mad rage.

The first time he took the belt off me, the day after Sauber came, he made it clear that it was just to check that everything was okay, and that he would put it back on me right after. He made me kneel in the bathtub, and tied my hands behind my back before taking it off. He showered me with ice-cold water, and almost anaesthetised by the cold, I barely realised what was happening to me.

The second time, two days later, he was cruel enough to let me believe that he was ending the ordeal, which had the effect of increasing my excitement tenfold. We were in his room, I was standing in front of him, he had made me spread my legs and cross my hands over my head. He removed the belt and asked me to stay still for about ten minutes. He circled me, thoughtful, observed me, watched the desire that was rising and making me tremble. And then he shook his head, declared between his teeth "too soon", and put the thing back in place. I burst into tears of rage and frustration. He tried to calm me down by taking me in his arms and stroking my hair, and I finally overcame my distress. It was extremely destabilizing, because while imposing this long-term punishment on me that I had great difficulty in bearing, he behaved with the tenderness of a lover, and not with the severity of a master.

I wrote Alicia at length, detailing in detail what I felt, the painful and obsessive frustration that never stopped, because Julien made sure to revive her

whenever he saw me a little too calm. My friend's response surprised and upset me. She had spoken to her master about it, asking him to make her experience the same ordeal. She thus found herself in turn locked up and deprived, and promised me that she would remain so for as long as I did. Strangely, knowing that I was not alone brought me a little comfort.

[Archives of the Manoir de la Charmoie. Oral archives, October 2009.

Story by Patrice Andringer. Restitution based on note-taking.

Patrice says that SM entered his life at the age of sixteen, in particularly unpleasant circumstances. He was a boarder at the international high school in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Their group of barely pubescent boys sometimes circulated pornographic magazines under the counter. He was the laughing stock of his classmates the day they discovered an article that talked about his grandfather,

Philippe Andringer. "At first I was terribly angry with him for sullyng our name with his sordid perversions. Then I wanted to talk to my parents about it, and there I hit a wall."

His teenage blood boiled. He began to read up on SM, to spy, to try to find out more.

This quickly excited him. He discovered that his grandfather was someone important in the milieu. He ran away from his parents, and asked Philippe Andringer to take him with him.

"You have to imagine the man my grandfather was. A force of nature: tall, impressively built, a thick mop of blond hair like a lion's mane, cold, piercing blue eyes. Not the kind of man you talk to, but someone who is good to have as an ally."

Patrice describes how Philippe then took him under his wing, entrusting him for his initiation to his dearest friend, Hubert Certon [who was then administrator of the Manoir, but also in a relationship with Esther Driss, with whom he had a daughter, editor's note], declaring to him that he was "the hope of his descendants, his spiritual son, the one who would reconcile the two parts of the Manoir that he had been forced to separate". According to Patrice, he was associated from the time he came of age with the administration of the Manoir, through Hubert Certon who taught him management methods at the same time as the rules of SM. Patrice's initiation only lasted a few months. From 1968, he led the sessions alongside his grandfather, of whom he was increasingly the pride. To complete his education, the latter required him to go and study abroad for several years. He spent a little over six months in Germany (in Berlin) and then left for the USA where he lived in the Chicago area.

He returned in a hurry in 1972 when he learned of Philippe Andringer's death, and decided not to leave. "Someone had to ensure continuity at the Manoir. Of course, there was Hubert Certon, but he wasn't an Andringer, it wasn't the same thing." He moved into the large suite on the first floor, where his grandfather had previously lived [currently occupied by Julien].

That same year, he met a mistress of "breathtaking beauty", Sonia de la Marterie, with whom he immediately bonded. After having tried several times to build lasting relationships with submissives, he ended up convincing himself that the imbalance inherent in any sadomasochistic relationship was unsuitable for establishing sufficiently stable bases. His bond with Sonia reinforced his idea that the continuation of the Andringer "dynasty" could only be done in two ways: either by completely separating a "normal" life from SM activities, or with a mistress. [I understood that the message was addressed more to me,

Pauline, as a person, as well as to the archives and to posterity.

But once again, he forgets to say that his grandfather had his strongest relationship with a submissive, and that the child born of this union played a very special role in his life. Editor's note.] Patrice Andringer and Sonia de la Marterie married in 1975 [Reminder: their three children were born respectively in 1976 (Olivier), 1979 (Julien) and 1983

(Caroline).]

Patrice being Léon's only son, he inherited the East when he died in 1976. In 1979, according to Patrice, Hubert Certon left the Manor of his own accord by selling him his shares, "for no particular reason, he wanted to hang up, that's all." This is what allowed Patrice to reunite the entire family heritage in his hands.]

Additional note from the archivist: Patrice made me listen to him silently, without intervening, and only by taking notes (he did not want to be recorded), so I was not able to ask the questions that this story raised in my eyes.

His bad faith is notorious, he never mentions Esther (he must have thought that I did not know of her existence!) and some passages of his story are in fact implausible: for example, I cannot imagine Philippe presenting Patrice as his only heir, given his ties with Esther which were, if we are to believe Édouard, very close. To be completely complete, it must be added that Patrice only agreed to tell me his story on condition that I receive (again) seven strokes of the cane in exchange. I agreed because that was the instruction Julien had given me. All this is quite revealing of Patrice's character, and emblematic of the sometimes devious methods of the Andringers. I would therefore say that this story should be taken with caution and cross-referenced if possible with other sources.

Because of the belt and the frustration in which my master kept me, I slept very badly. One night around three in the morning, as I was tossing and turning in bed, unable to find rest, Julien jumped up beside me and exclaimed:

– Pauline! It’s unbearable!

"I don't need to tell you that," I retorted angrily.

He looked at me seriously, turned on the light, pulled on a pair of jeans over his bare skin and sat cross-legged on the bed, facing me.

My heart was beating fast, witnessing the endless excitement that was shaking my body to the point of breaking it.

“Listen,” he said in his calm voice. “You have to learn to control yourself. You’re letting your body dominate your mind, that’s not good. This is just another test, and I have no intention of ending it. So you have to take back control.”

"You have no right to treat me like that!" I protested.

– Pauline. Let me be clear. I am your master, I treat you exactly as I want.

I wrinkled my nose and shook my head, forbidding myself from answering him for fear of coming across as more aggressive and insolent than I intended. He softened a little.

– I'll teach you a yoga trick or two, he said.

It will help you.

I didn't hide my surprise. It was the first time since the beginning of this ordeal that he had done something that didn't go in the direction of making the situation worse.

He had me sit across from him, cross-legged on the bed, and had me do breathing and stretching exercises for almost three-quarters of an hour, in fact until my heartbeat had returned to normal, and my mind had some semblance of serenity. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I felt well, but I felt like I was able to think and reason again, and that the center of gravity of my body was not between my legs.

Julien congratulated me and said:

– Try to maintain that feeling of control over your body. I'm going to keep pestering you and making it as painful as possible for you, so you mustn't give in.

You have to manage to keep a sufficient distance, at all times. Understood?

I nodded, impressed by the way he coldly announced that he knew he was vile, and that he intended to continue. It was almost as if he had given me a

glimpse of the machinery behind the scenery, but only for a brief second, before the play resumed its course. The truce was over. He undressed and took me in his arms. I snuggled against him, watching the rhythm of my breathing, and I fell asleep.

When Julien finally removed the belt, he had taken care to tie me up, lying on my back on his bed, my arms stretched above my head, my legs spread. As soon as my sex was freed from its latex straitjacket, I moved, looking for a little relief, then controlling myself, I took a breath and tried to ignore Julien's heavy gaze, which rested not on my breasts, on my face, or on any other part of my body, but on my sex, and even, at the precise place where the hollow of the flesh hides the source of all pleasures, and where I wanted his fingers and his mouth. Fortunately, this situation did not last too long. He reached out and stroked the curly fur of my intimacy, and then he dived, greedily, his head between my legs and delicately licked the button swollen with desire. The pleasure rose so quickly and so strongly that I felt dizzy, writhing in jerky jerks under the surge of the long-awaited orgasm. And then he lay down on me, and penetrating his hardened penis inside me, he pounded me hard, biting my neck and whispering obscenities in my ear. For my part, I screamed my pleasure without restraint.

I came so hard, and I had been so frustrated, that it was almost painful. Once relieved, I realized how much he had missed it too, and yet he threw me with determination:

– I hope you learned your lesson. And to prove to me that you did, the next time you feel even a hint of desire while looking at Arnaud, I expect you to come tell me and ask to wear the belt yourself.

I didn't answer him and showed myself obedient and submissive, but deep inside my soul was boiling with a latent rage that was just waiting to regain control. This experience left a bitter taste in my mouth, which was not about to go away and announced more difficult times.

I didn't like autumn, that cold, grey season that seemed to suck up all the energy we put into trying to feel good, or at least behave normally, as if the sword of Damocles of the end of my work on the Manor archives wasn't hanging over our heads, forcing us to make a decision about what would happen next. Ultimately, the exercise in self-denial and self-control that the belt episode had been had allowed me to focus on something else; but as soon as Julien and I settled back into a more measured rhythm of life, structured around the highlights of the Manor, the darkest thoughts began to reign over my unconscious again. The weather was humid, and this humidity seemed to seep through the walls and windows and into the pores of my skin and the neurons of my agitated brain. The malaise I felt was

completely consuming me, manifesting itself erratically, through moments of intense despair where I would cry all alone on my bed, my head in my arms, for no particular reason, or through extremely violent mood swings that left Julien destabilized. He was sensitive to my dismay, which caused him concern. When he saw me in this state, he would examine me with his eyes and tell me bluntly:

– Pauline, you need to be whipped.

It was so true that I did not protest, and he beat me, in an extremely sensitive and measured way, just the amount that was necessary to prevent me from feeling sorry for myself, and to replace the unexplained and incoherent pain of the soul with a physical pain that, skillfully dosed, brought me intense comfort. However, by the first days of November, I was so ill that even this therapy in which he excelled could no longer pull me out of my periods of consternation, and I came more and more often to take refuge in places where I knew he would not come to touch me, simply because I was wallowing in my pain, and I did not want him to bring his energetic remedy to it.

Really, I hated this season, I would have liked it to pass in a sigh, a frown, to give way to the real dry and biting cold of winter, from which one can so easily protect oneself with a pair of woolen socks, a hot tea and a good fire in the fireplace. And yet there was fire, because Thomas, the gardener of the Manor, who spent part of his days cutting logs in a remote corner of the park, brought back the fruit of his labor as soon as night fell to make great blazes in the three lounges, and even in the library where Julien insisted to warm up the sessions by transforming the fireplace into a real brazier worthy of the flames of hell.

This habit drove me into a black fury. One evening when Thomas had just filled the fireplace in the library, and had gone out in search of a box of matches, I ran into Julien there and stopped him to ask him to put an end to this dangerous and harmful practice. When he refused outright, I declaimed to him with an aggressiveness that had nothing rhetorical about it that making a fire in the library was a complete heresy, and that without even mentioning the risks of fire, when the bindings of his books were so covered in soot that he would hardly dare touch them, and the pages of the works so blackened with smoke that one could read the satanic verses between the lines, he might wonder what was the point of hiring me to take care of a heritage that he held in such low esteem.

– Pauline, he answered me without raising his voice, I know that it is very important to you, but for me the library is above all the place where I receive my guests, and my priority is their comfort.

– So, I continued, still angry, why do this to your books? Why a library, damn it! At least take the most precious books and put them somewhere else.

– I don't move my books.

He had crossed his arms over his chest and was walling himself up in opposition. In his hardened face, his eyes flashed, and revealed that he was about to lose his composure.

Yet I was well on my way, and I continued, more and more vindictive.

– You know, there are very good people who heat their living rooms with more traditional means, say radiators...

– Pauline, that's enough, shut up.

– ... and I won't even mention the temperature changes! Differences of almost ten degrees from one evening to the next! For the books to remain in good condition, you would at least have to...

– That's enough! he finally exploded. Very well! Since I apparently can't live in peace with my fire, my books, and my archivist, you're the one who's out. You're going to give me back the report you've owed me for a month, then you pack your bags.

He had blown my nose so well that it took me a few seconds to pull myself together before I said to him, still aggressive:

- Master, you are not serious!

His hands were clenched in the sleeves of his shirt, his jaw clenched as if he were going to bite.

– I'm always serious. Always. I'll give you a week.

And he left the library, slamming the door.

Petrified with astonishment and anger, I stood there frozen like a pillar of salt in the middle of the library. Blood pounded in my temples and I clenched my fists so tightly that my nails bruised the flesh of my palms. My mind was completely blank, beyond any capacity for reasoning. Suddenly, as if the sap of a volcano ready to erupt had only bubbled impatiently in my veins, as if this moment were the signal I had in fact been waiting for for weeks, I felt an urgent need to get moving and move on. I rushed to my office, slamming the door behind me, and began to take down from the shelves all my notes, my notebooks, the drafts of the files given to Julien, the copies of excerpts, the bookmarks covered in spiderwebs that I used to mark interesting documents, the transcriptions of the oral archives, everything. I spread them everywhere, on the desk, on the chairs, on the shelves, and even on the floor; seven months of intensive work spread around me like a

documentary tide, then I opened the laptop, created a new document and started writing the report.

For a week, I compiled, synthesized, summarized, and perfected a text that came out of me like the flow of a nightmare, whose sentences seemed to write themselves on the keyboard. I was as if possessed, I worked more than ten hours a day, writing, again and again, pages and pages. All day long the printer spat out sheets with the faint smell of ink that I crossed out with a pen before entering them into my delirious stratigraphic device, in which each sheet, each note, each table had to be within reach of my gaze. I barely realized that a few good souls, among whom were Édouard and Sarah, came from time to time to visit me with a tray loaded with a sandwich, a bowl of soup, a cup of tea or some other snack. I barely thanked them, I gulped down the food without thinking, and I threw myself back into my great work. It was the whole history of the Andringer dynasty that spread out around me, from its founder to its last descendant, the one who had hurt me so deeply by rejecting me that I was incapable of even thinking of him as anything other than a subject of study.

In reality, it seemed insane to me that a man as thoughtful as Julien could remain in such a fit of anger and throw me out over a trifle, but deep down, it was this brutal and unexplained breakup that I yearned for, because it seemed to me, despite everything, more logical and more bearable than continuing to live this unhealthy and all-consuming relationship with him.

However, he kept away from the office where I was feverishly formulating my conclusions, and nothing was to raise the slightest hope that he would reverse his decision, however abrupt and precipitate the manner in which he had arrived at it.

He had given me a week to finish my report; it took me exactly six and a half days. It was over sixty pages long, and it was particularly complete, each element of my various discoveries fitting perfectly with the others, like Lego, with the possible exception of a small dissonance, a residual corner of shadow, but which seemed to me at the time quite negligible. In fact I was quite pleased with myself, for this aspect of things at least, which allowed me to present myself to Julien with my pride reinflated to the max.

My confidence flew away like a straw when I saw him. He might have been as closed as an oyster, his face stern, but all I saw was the quiver at the corner of his lips where he had stuck his cigarette, the slightly prominent veins on his hands that betrayed his nervousness, and the purple circles that descended under his eyes, revealing sleepless nights, too much coffee, and the exhaustion of having sought oblivion in sex and violence. And I was moved. Moved to tears, to the point of

wanting to kneel before him and beg him to keep me, to talk to me, to touch me, to fight me.

Obviously I didn't do anything about it. I had my pride. I handed him my report and simply said:

- So.

Giving me an icy look, he picked it up and leafed through it for a few minutes, without stopping at any particular passage.

Then he said:

– Thank you. Go away.

I had surely hoped for something more, even if it was stupid, and my mouth filled with a bitter taste, while tears welled up in my eyes. Not wanting to show it to him, I turned around and left without a word. Driven by a raging and determined despair, as soon as I was out of his office, I pell-mell stuffed all my things into my suitcases, emptying my room down to the last trinket. On the other hand, I abandoned all my work notes in the office next to the library.

Crossing the great corridor of the Manor with my suitcases, I had the impression of a final crossing on the corridor of death. I had walked it every day for more than six months, I knew every corner, every detail. Yet, I suddenly saw them with heightened clarity, as if through a microscope: this spider web hanging from a wall light, a crack in the wood of the library door, a bit of wall where the slightly damp paint was beginning to flake. The sinister sound of my suitcases rolling on the black and white flagstones composed the funeral march that pushed me forward, almost in spite of myself, like a sleepwalker.

I was loading my luggage into the trunk of my car when Julien suddenly materialized next to me. I wondered how he always knew exactly where I was, and appeared like that, almost by magic. He had softened, letting a little of the raw sensitivity he had tried to hide from me in his office surface on his features.

Assuming he had something to tell me, I stood in front of him and waited, my eyes lowered, resigned. He studied me silently for a moment. I wished this moment could last forever; I had learned to love these latency times, these buffer spaces that preceded storms.

How can we say goodbye after everything we have experienced, after everything we have shared?

"I'm not going to call you," he said in an almost extinguished voice.

"I understood that," I retorted bitterly.

– But you can do it, he added. If you still want to.

I felt an intense vibration arise deep in my guts and rise within me, a tremor, a surge of hope and desire. I hoped he would order something, anything, just because unlike most people, his orders are desires. But he said nothing more and continued to scrutinize me silently, with a kind of heat in his gaze, or rather a burning, one of those burns that leave atrocious scars that we nevertheless cherish like trophies.

“I don’t know,” I told him, even though my whole body was screaming at me otherwise.

And then, unable to hold it any longer, I threw myself into his arms. He held me tight, gripping my hair as he kissed them desperately, fervently. Our mutual abandon was intense and delicious. He placed his lips on my ear and whispered:

–I miss you already.

For my part, I was completely unable to speak.

When my mother saw me arrive with my suitcases and my eyes red from crying the whole way, she asked me if I had a problem with Julien. I told her that I still had a problem with Julien, that Julien himself was a problem just by the fact of existing, and that I didn't want to talk about it. I locked myself in my room to think, a reflection that lasted several days and went through different phases.

At first, the little glimmer, the improbable possibility that Julien had half-opened at the moment of our separation, left me feverish and tender. Tender, well, not in the intellectual sense of the term, rather tender in the way a scallop is after the butcher has given it three or four good blows with his powerful arm. In any case, I wanted to call him back, and I even picked up my phone several times, but hung up immediately, not knowing what I wanted to tell him or ask him, and even less what he would be prepared to hear. This state lasted about forty-eight hours. Then suddenly, disgusted to the point of nausea by my own sentimentality, I entered into a black fury. Anger devoured me from the inside and, from time to time, manifested itself in a demonstration of gratuitous violence, where I threw my pillows across the room, where I threw all my books, my clothes and my belongings on the floor. The first two or three times, my mother, alarmed by the noise, came to ask me if I was all right. She was so insulted through the door that she left me to my fits of rage, making sure only that I came out of my room from time to time to eat. I then inflicted on her, but as rarely as possible, the torture of my silent, opaque, tortured presence.

After a few days, maybe five or seven, the anger gave way to a deep feeling of dejection. I missed Julien. I missed the Manor, the archives and the Andringers'

fantastical stories too, but above all, I was dying to see Julien appear next to me, watching me silently while smoking a cigarette, with his eyes that told the whole story of his desire, his sometimes contradictory feelings and the delicious threats that tore me apart. I wanted the smell of his skin after lovemaking, his suave voice that ordered me to submit, his cock inside me, his tongue in my mouth, and even, yes, I wanted the leather of the riding crop on my ass, and to feel it burn with pain, and for tears to come to me without any hope of remission.

When I got to that point, I called Alicia. I just needed to hear her voice. I explained that I had left the Manor and that I wasn't sure I would ever return. She stood there speechless, and not knowing what to say, she quickly hung up. But she called me back right away to tell me that she was going up to Paris for the weekend, and to give me the arrival time of her train.

On Friday evenings, the Montparnasse train station is black with a teeming crowd hurrying along, pulling bags and suitcases, mothers pushing their way through with a child in their arms and one or two others hanging on to their coattails, soldiers and sailors, couples meeting up or separating, each following their own path in something that is anything but a crowd movement, more of a disorderly hustle and bustle, punctuated by the disembodied announcements of the SNCF voice.

I stood completely still in the middle of this human tide, trying to resist the ebb and flow, petrified by the anguish and dismay of being there. I watched the blue and gray metallic silhouettes of the TGVs line up like a herd of large transhumance marine mammals, moving their heavy carcasses with infinite slowness before disappearing into a small red dot at the end of the platform. Alicia's train was twenty minutes late. In twenty minutes, and without moving my feet outside an imaginary circle with a radius of twenty centimeters, I fixed my hair seven times, counted nine train arrivals and departures, counted five dogs including two Labradors, bit three of my nails and mentally formulated twelve different ways of asking Julien to see me again, none of which seemed satisfactory to me.

The arrival of the train from Bordeaux generated a new human flow that came straight at me, like an infantry charge, and split in two to avoid me at the critical moment. Alicia wore black jeans, leather boots and a jacket lined with cream fur that made her look like a little Eskimo. She swung her big red backpack at my feet and, taking me warmly in her arms, she murmured:

– It looks serious.

I shrugged, and without answering, took her hand to guide her toward the parking lot. At the top of the escalator, a guy in a fluorescent plastic vest thrust a free health magazine into her hand. She glanced at the cover and commented:

– “Adolescence: learning to manage them...” “Staying in shape during the holidays...” “I have two loves: a reader testifies...” That’s crazy, why don’t they ever write an article “I’m living a crazy sadomasochistic relationship with a madman, how do I get out of it”?!

She managed to get a smile out of me, but I still hadn't said a word.

– Listen, she said again. First of all, we're going to have a drink, and you're going to tell me about it.

I found myself seated at a brasserie on the Rue de Rennes in front of a glass of white Martini, Alicia in front of me who invited me to confide in her with her lively gaze. My companion was dressed all in black with a suggestive leather necklace on a plunging neckline, and I wondered what people could think of us, close as lovers, beautiful as overly sweet pastries, and as out of place in this neighborhood brasserie as wildflowers in the desert.

I spoke like an automaton, without taking my eyes off her, on the other side of the street, the blue neon of the real estate agency opposite that hypnotized me. I told her everything with a profusion of details, without neglecting the slightest frown from Julien. When I had finished, she twisted her lips into an adorable pout, and declared:

- Do you want me to tell you what I think?

"That's why you came, right?" I replied acidly.

- I think you two make two real idiots.

Honestly. Your master is so afraid that one day you'll leave and slam the door that he prefers to throw you out himself. And you, you feel so obliged to screw everything up, even though you don't want to, that you prefer to let him do it.

I jumped as if she had just slapped me. I opened my mouth to protest, but she stopped me with a gesture.

– No! You know very well that I am right.

- But what do you want me to do?

– Call him.

– And what do I tell him?

- Whatever you want.

- I don't know what I want.

- It's more annoying. But here, I can help you.

Alas, it wasn't that simple. Even after encouraging me to talk for hours about my relationship with Julien, which certainly relieved me of some of my pain, but not of my doubts, Alicia was unable to convince me to take a firm stand, even if it meant simply picking up the phone and calling Julien. I would have liked to know how to sort out the raw, carnal, and ambiguous desire to be both fucked and submissive, from what was real feelings that bound me to him in a much deeper and more unique, if no less instinctive, way. Finally, my friend took the brilliant initiative of dragging me to the only other person who knew me well enough and had a powerful enough influence over me to channel my dying thoughts and my wasting energy, and help me extract answers to my questions.

We both showed up at Pierre's on Sunday evening, and we were lucky enough to find him there, for once he hadn't extended his weekend at the Manor. It was Arnaud who welcomed us, resplendent like a supernatural creature despite his everyday clothes, his curly hair crowning a serene and peaceful face with light. He bore no sign of submission, and so, naturally, he looked like a somewhat fragile teenager whose only resigned eyes betrayed that he had been made to grow up too quickly, by force.

– Arnaud, would you like to accompany Alicia to the living room, his master asked him. I would like to speak to Pauline in private.

Peter took me to his room and asked me what I was doing at his place. I answered him with another question.

– Have you spoken to Julien recently?

– Well, no, in truth. I went to the Manor, and I saw clearly that you were not there, but Julien does not speak, he says nothing to anyone, and at this moment one must be very bold to dare ask him the cause of his bad humor.

I told him how my master had dismissed me, the trouble I was in, and my quest for explanations more about myself than about the person who caused it.

- What do you want from me, exactly? He asked me, obviously ready to help me.

I hesitated for a blink of an eye, then launched into it with conviction.

– Master, I thought you could whip me.

He frowned, a little surprised.

- What, you want me to take you?

– Oh no, please. I wouldn't want to do something that might displease Julien. I'm not asking you to dispose of me... sexually. Just to whip me. To help me find... sensations again.

- And you think Julien would be willing to tolerate me whipping you, but not doing what I want with you?

I shrugged, not very sure of myself. Pierre continued:

– Well, the easiest thing is to ask him.

He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, and before I could protest, he had dialed the number, giving me a firm look that reminded me that he was the master and that I had no choice but to obey.

– Hello, Julien? It's Pierre. I have a question to ask you...

Well, imagine I have Pauline here in front of me, would you be okay with me fucking her, or just whipping her?

There was a silence during which I could only try to guess Julien's answer, from the smile that was playing on the lips of his interlocutor. Then suddenly, Pierre handed me the receiver.

– He wants to talk to you.

I put it to my ear, trembling as if it had the power to bite me. I heard my master's voice on the other end of the line, sharp as a well-sharpened knife.

– Pauline. I can find out what you're doing at Pierre's.

– Um... I was just looking for answers to some questions...

– The kind of answers you give with a whip, is that it? Little pest, you're going to be served. Pass it back to me.

As they negotiated my punishment, my ears began to ring so loudly that I could no longer hear the part of the dialogue that was happening right in front of me.

The adrenaline was pumping and was already making me numb, leaving me panting when Pierre grabbed me and took me back to the living room, confirming that I would be whipped, and only that.

Seeing us arrive, Arnaud jumped up from the chair where he was sitting next to Alicia, and turning to his master, he lowered his eyes and crossed his hands behind his back in a posture of respectful waiting. I was amazed by this impeccable behavior, worthy of the perfect submissive, which didn't even seem to cost him much.

– Arnaud, go get my whip.

The boy slipped away, and in the meantime, Pierre sat me down on my knees on the sofa, facing the backrest on which I crossed my arms before resting my forehead on it, my pants and panties lowered.

I heard Arnaud coming back, and spying on him surreptitiously, I saw him hand the requested instrument to his master, who, to my great surprise, motioned for him to keep it.

– We have here an ideal subject for an educational session, declared Pierre as he settled down next to me on the couch. You're the one who's going to whip her. Pauline, you're going to be lenient with Arnaud, it's his first time. You're going to stay put, okay?

I fidgeted a little, worried, and guessing what was troubling me,

Pierre grabbed me by the hair to keep me still and whispered in my ear:

– Yes, my dear, Julien agrees with that too.

Arnaud positioned himself behind me, a little intimidated, his gestures awkward. He seemed to be waiting for instructions from his master, but they did not come, and our host was content to encourage him:

– Come on, go ahead. Hit.

The first blows tore me apart. I had been weaned for several weeks, and my buttocks, which had become tender and sensitive again like those of a young virgin, were barely absorbing the bite of the leather. Arnaud struck with jerky, hesitant, and sometimes approximate movements, which reached me in places where my body's resistance was total and manifested itself by a taste of iron that filled my mouth before making me scream. Pierre still held me by the hair, and I made an effort not to shirk, but seeing that I was struggling, he finally intervened and gave some advice to his young novice.

– Arnaud, stop holding back your blows. It looks like you're trying not to hurt her. You're giving her the whip. You're going to hurt her, that's the goal. She's just waiting for that, come on.

The young man loosened his movements a little, hitting harder and more frankly, and surprisingly, the sharper pain that resulted seemed more familiar and bearable to me.

Obedying Peter's instructions, he conscientiously streaked my posterior, between an imaginary horizontal line that ran down the middle of my buttocks, and the top of my thighs. Then I heard him sigh as he stopped, out of breath.

"It's tiring, isn't it?" his master asked mischievously.

Come on, give me that whip. I'll whip her a little myself, so that no one can say it wasn't done seriously.

I jumped at such arrogance, because if one were to judge by the waves of pain that were shooting at me relentlessly, I found that in terms of seriousness, there was nothing to criticize about Arnaud's work. But of course, it was futile to protest. Pierre's expert hand finished me off, finally tearing from me the screams and tears that testified that I had gone as far as I could. Then Pierre seemed to remember Alicia's presence, and he asked her:

- And you, does your master allow us to fuck you? Because Arnaud and I are going to need a little tenderness now.

- Of course, Master Pierre, she accepted complacently.

- Then let's go to the bedroom.

He took me by the shoulder to turn me around, and after a satisfied look at my tear-stained face, he threw me his phone, ordering:

- Call him back.

And all three of them slipped away to the bedroom.

Feverishly, I dialed the Manor's number, trying not to think. I got through to Édouard, who seemed both pleased and disturbed to have me on the line, and told me that he was sorry to have to refuse to put me through to Julien, who was already in session. I insisted in a thin, tense voice. Finally, the butler gave in, and against all expectations, a few seconds later I had Julien on the line.

- Pauline, what do you want? he asked me.

- I don't know... It was Pierre who told me to call you.

Julien paused in perplexity, then continued in a caressing, comforting voice:

- So, he beat you?

- Yes.

- A lot ?

- Not bad.

- How much ?

- I don't know, I didn't count.

- Pauline, he reprimanded me gently, how many times have I told you, in the absence of your master, you must count.

– Oh! come on, I retorted, he’s not a stranger, after all. It’s Pierre.

Immediately after formulating this aggressive response, I scolded myself inwardly, biting my lips to hold back the tears of spite that were welling up in my eyes. Even on the phone, even for five minutes, I was unable to behave properly with my master. He remained silent again for a few seconds, and sighed, still in a sweet and indulgent tone that filled me with shame:

- What do you feel?

The lump in my throat swelled and my eyes began to sting before being overwhelmed by a rush of moisture.

“I miss you,” I breathed, wiping the wet streaks from my face with the palm of my left hand.

He fell silent again, then I heard his voice start again, in a barely audible whisper:

– Listen, here's what you're going to do.

I conscientiously followed the firm and gentle instructions he gave me on the phone, like a puppet articulated by invisible wires. The sheer force of his will made me move, move my legs and arms, settle into an indecent position on the couch, my thighs open, my fingers nimbly digging into my flesh, in search of the pleasure he ordered me to grant myself. He accompanied me to the point of enjoyment, in a breath, in a continuous murmur like the song of a spring or the magic incantation of an ancient grimoire, in the finally granted abandonment of my soul wounded by his absence.

I woke with a start; it was dark. The clock said nearly one in the morning. I had fallen asleep on the sofa in Pierre's living room, and in the dim light of the room, he stared at me silently, his slightly drawn face glowing in the glow of his cigarette.

“Are you hungry?” he asked, pointing to a cheese platter and a loaf of country bread on the table in front of me, along with a carafe of red wine.

Without answering, I sat up and frantically threw myself on the food, as if I hadn't eaten anything for a week. He watched me do this for a moment, before saying:

– So, did you find answers to your questions?

"I don't think so," I replied, my mouth full. "When I see Alicia... and even Arnaud - by the way, you did a remarkable job with Arnaud - I tell myself that I'll never get there."

He looked at me gravely and said:

– Pauline, you have to stop trying to use Alicia as a model. She is a real submissive, she takes pleasure in it. This is not a life for you. As for Arnaud, you know as well as I do that this docile attitude reflects nothing other than an increasingly pressing desire to move on.

“That’s right,” I murmured, resigned. “That’s why Julien rejected me. I’ll never make a submissive worthy of the name.”

He shook his head slowly in denial.

– I already told you, Julien doesn't need that kind of submissive. He can have all the ones he wants. It's something else he's looking for.

- It's what ?

“I don’t know,” he shrugged. “The same as you, hopefully. It’s up to you to figure it out, to invent it. But try not to screw it up, because I wouldn’t want to have made all this effort for nothing.”

Of course, Pierre was right, and I knew it. It had taken him only four words to make me understand it, while Alicia had exhausted herself for two days in long speeches and endless circumlocutions, without success. That evening, I realized that I was truly of their race, that of Pierre, that of Julien and even of Arnaud, the race of the powerful, the strong and the rebellious. All the rest could only be a game, which I was capable of lending myself to, more or less complacently, but never with the conviction of mind and body as Alicia did.

What I had understood that evening, in Pierre's living room, while Alicia and Arnaud slept the sleep of the just in the bedroom at the end of the corridor, was much more than that. I had the right to free will and to rebel, because it was in my nature. If by chance I submitted to Julien again, it would be through my desire, not his. As a corollary to that, he was not the only one who could demand from me what he wanted; what I expected from him, I felt entitled to demand from him, to lay claim to him, and even, if necessary, to extort from him. Armed with this resolution which was the *carte blanche* that I had sought in vain for days, I could go on the offensive: I simply waited for the right moment, that is to say the following week.

It had snowed and the grounds of the Manor were covered in a thin, shiny white film, which dressed the twisted arms of the tall, bare trees in lace. I had driven carefully on the wet roads of the Rambouillet forest, which had not yet been cleared of snow, the bottom of my corduroy pants were soaked, and I wondered if I would even be able to drive on. Large white flakes continued to fall lazily on the

gravel of the courtyard, making the Manor look like a haunted castle in a bad black-and-white movie.

I entered the Manor through the main door. It was Edward who opened the door for me, and upon seeing me, he displayed a smile like I had never seen on him.

– Pauline! It's nice to see you.

“Did you miss me that much?” I asked, shaking myself off the white stars that dotted my coat.

– It was Monsieur Julien who missed you the most, if you know what I mean.

I could see perfectly well. He must have given them a hard time. Edward showed me into the hall, where I could put down my snow-soaked overcoat, and suggested that I go and warn the master of the house of my presence. I accepted; he came back five minutes later and announced:

– Sir asks you to join him in the small living room.

Shall I accompany you?

– It'll be fine, Edward, I know the way.

Julien was waiting for me standing in front of the window, watching the snowflakes that were gradually covering the cars in the courtyard. He jumped when I closed the door to the small living room behind me, and turned to me. I could read on his drawn features feelings close to those I myself had felt, of loss, fear, anger and heartbreak. He slipped a cigarette between his lips, lit it, and threw:

- What do you want?

I gathered my strength, crossed my arms to look determined, and said clearly:

– I want to be with you. I want you to take me back. I want to come back and live here.

– Non.

He didn't hesitate for a second, but it wasn't a violent or angry no. Just a no. Simple, precise, categorical.

The kind of no you don't usually argue with. Of course, that night, I wasn't about to let myself be stopped so easily.

- For what ?

He shrugged.

– It's unhealthy to sleep with your employer. Didn't your mother tell you that?

“Who cares,” I retorted, working on myself to stay calm. “I can find another job, that’s not what this is about. Why don’t you tell me the real reason?”

He sighed, seemed to hesitate a little, then murmured without looking at me:

– I have too much power over you. There is no way we can continue like this. I need proof that you realize what you are doing.

I rolled my eyes, a little annoyed.

– I remind you that I am committed to you. Unconditionally.

- You know as well as I do that this contract was bullshit. You didn't even know what you were getting yourself into.

– Let’s admit it. But now I know. I’m ready to do it again if you want. In the same terms.

He grimaced, a little tense.

– That’s not enough for me. I want more.

– But what the hell do you want? I got angry. I'm not going to get "To Julien for life" tattooed on my ass, am I?!

He gave me a heated look and finally smiled.

– That would be fun. But I don't think it would be enough for me.

– Okay. What do you want as proof? I asked gravely, determined and serious again.

He was silent for a moment, long enough to finish his cigarette, then after crushing it in a large Dutch porcelain ashtray, he turned back to the window and sighed:

– To tell you the truth, I don't know. Not the slightest idea. I just feel like it's not enough, that's all.

I ran a hand through my hair to compose myself, and set off on another track.

- Then fuck me, at least.

– Pardon ?!

- Now I'm here, they haven't cleared the road, I'm not going to be able to leave. So take me, just for tonight, fuck me, submit me. Just for tonight.

- Stop, I'm going to be tempted.

He looked at me again, and I saw in his eyes the spark of desire that shone with intensity. I tilted my head and gave him a charming smile:

- Give it a try. You shouldn't have many people in this weather. It will liven up your session.

He was already convinced, but he continued to negotiate, just for form's sake.

- Just for tonight, and tomorrow you'll leave without making a fuss?

- I promise.

- Mmh, you're not really dressed appropriately.

- You have everything you need here. Come on, make up your mind!

He gave me a sideways glance, devouring with desire, and without taking his eyes off me, he went to pick up the phone that was on his left. He dialed two numbers and said into the receiver:

- Edward? I have a submissive here, I want her for the session.

Would you mind preparing it for me? Thank you.

Two seconds later, Edward entered the room where we had both been standing, motionless and silent.

Julien grabbed me by the hair and pushed me towards the old butler. As if all this were perfectly natural, he said to me:

- Follow me, Miss.

I turned one last time to Julien; his lips stretched into a half-smile, his eyes were bright and carnivorous, and I knew he was already hard at the thought of what he was about to do to me.

When Édouard brought me back to Julien, I was wearing a pair of fishnet stockings held up by a garter belt, and a black dress covered in rhinestones with chains for straps, short enough not to hide the rounded line between the bottom of my buttocks and the top of my thighs. I was perched on four-inch platform heels, and the rings of the leather bracelets that encircled my wrists were connected by a metal chain, which the old butler gave to my master. I had pulled my hair up into a high bun on my head, and it exposed my neck and the two silver pendants that jangled in my ears. I looked like a luxury whore, one of those femme fatales that

men hang on their arm with macho pride, and I must say that the way Julien dragged me everywhere behind him, holding me by the chain that tied my hands, testified precisely to a male satisfaction that I liked to flatter by showing myself submissive and superb.

As I had imagined, there was no crowd at the Manor on this Saturday in December. I knew only one of the guests, a master with a shaggy beard and owlish eyes, who came regularly with his submissive. There was also a couple in their fifties who were clearly there as tourists, and a shy, slender mistress with a submissive older than her.

Of course, it wasn't very difficult to shine like a star in the middle of such an audience. Julien didn't turn his nose up at the fact and invited everyone to the library.

When we entered the room where I had spent so many hours, and had so many experiences of all kinds, I was overexcited by the smell of old leather, dust, and the taste of memory. Julien placed a possessive hand on my bare buttocks and whispered in my ear:

- My princess, tonight I'm going to make you suffer.

I answered him with a hint of cheekiness:

- Master, I am all yours.

He settled into his favorite chair, untied me, asked me to undress completely, then made me kneel between his legs. In this outfit, I had to admit that the intense heat coming from the fireplace was delicious, and indispensable. With one hand on the back of my neck, Julien pressed my face against his sex, which I could feel swelling and throbbing through the fabric of his jeans, just under my lips. The session began, and although I couldn't watch, it seemed to me that it must be bland and conventional. Indeed, after a few minutes, Julien began to get bored. He showed it discreetly by drawing spiral figures with the tip of his index finger between the base of my neck and the hollow of my shoulder blades. His hand was more than delicate, it made me vibrate with shivers, and if I had been a cat, I would have started to purr. After a while, he gently pushed me away and ordered in a low voice:

–Turn around. Stay on your knees, hold your ankles with your hands.

At the same time he accompanied me with the gesture, gently pushing my head forward to the ground. Then he got up and walked away for a few seconds. Curled up on my knees, my back arched, I waited for him, breathing deeply to control the tension that was rising. When he came back, I was ready, serene. I

heard him set something up behind me, then he resumed his caresses on my back, slowly, methodically, with his fingertips. Their contact was strange, a little damp and cold, as if they were covered in a thick substance with a synthetic smell, perhaps a smell of plastic or... acrylic.

I suddenly realized that his gestures had become more emphatic, more precise: he was painting on my back, with his bare hands. I concentrated on trying to guess the letters, the colors, the figures that he was tracing on my skin with sure gestures. Each of these arabesques that unraveled lazily along my muscles diffused waves of pleasure that radiated shivers through me. My whole body was communing with his hands, with his mind, I was his thing, in his possession, paralyzed by the vision that he was concretizing in an image along my spine, in the hollow of my ribs, under the arch of my hips. The erotic power of this moment was inestimable. When he reached the level of my kidneys, he gave me a little affectionate slap on the thigh and said:

– Lift your butt.

I crossed my elbows in front of me, rested my forehead on my forearms, looking for a more or less stable position, and raised my rump towards him. He continued his work, covering every part of my anatomy with pictorial caresses, going down to my buttocks, along my thighs, to the hollow of my knees.

– Wow, that's beautiful! exclaimed the owl-headed man. Can we take a picture?

– No! cried Julien. Absolutely not. It is an ephemeral work. I will destroy it presently.

He finished his graphic interpretation of my curves, then ordering me not to move, he got up, walked around me and went to sit right in front of me on the floor. I couldn't see him, but I could feel his movements. The other participants came in turn to stand around me and complimented him again. It was doubly frustrating, because I would have liked to see the result, but perhaps even more to see him, in the process of achieving it, concentrated, his mind awake and open, his brow furrowed with inspiration.

- What are you going to do now, Julien? someone else asked him.

He answered, taking his time, in a drawling voice, dwelling on each word, savoring each syllable with indescribable pleasure.

- Now I'm going to whip him until not one of those lines is clear.

We all respected his silence while he contemplated his work, then he stood up, and in the same movement, he took me by the wrist and dragged me with him.

He placed me standing in front of one of the pillars and tied me to it, my arms raised. He held in his right hand a whip made of a dozen soft leather straps. With such an instrument, he did not risk hurting me, he could strike for a long time, and everywhere. This is what he did, starting at the shoulders, and going down to the hollow of my knees. He used the outline of his drawing to make sure not to neglect any square centimeter of my skin; the ordeal was painful, burning, interminable.

I wanted the pain to make me lose control, but despite myself I resisted. My senses were on alert, heightened, sharpened by the excitement of having been his canvas, and his fingers the paintbrushes. My eyes were desperately dry despite the pain. When he finally stopped, I was burning like a torch, all over my body. He slowly circled me, observed me, then caressing my cheek with his paint-stained hand, he whispered:

- And you offend me by not even shedding a tear.

Having untied me again, he gently pressed on my shoulder, which was the sign that he wanted me to kneel in front of him. I obeyed and found myself sucking him, his cock filling me up to the limit, stretched to the limit, swollen with pleasure. He let me do it for a little, but not for long, then he pushed me away, got dressed and declared:

- Since the whip leaves you cold, we'll finish you off with the riding crop, maybe that will have more effect on you. Who wants to beat her?

The three guest masters were volunteers. Julien decreed that they would limit themselves to twelve moves each, which still made thirty-six.

A number he was particularly fond of.

He made me kneel in the center of the room, in front of a rectangular pouffe with lion paw feet; I rested my upper body on the pouffe, exposing my buttocks to the first of the three executioners who held the riding crop. Julien untied my bun, so that he could slide his left hand into my hair, and thus hold me firmly in position. His right hand wandered over my body; it explored my breasts then went down to my stomach, to my sex. He settled himself so that he could jerk me off at his ease, in turn lying his torso on the pouffe, right against me. I let out a moan of pleasure when he began to caress my clitoris, with the tip of his index finger, in a circular motion.

"Go on," he said at the same time to one of his accomplices; and the whip fell with a sharp whistle on my ass.

After all the caresses and blows I had already received, I felt like my skin was as thin as cigarette paper, and infinitely sensitive. The whip hurt like hell,

which immediately brought tears to my eyes. Fortunately, the first master was not too heavy-handed. It was different with the second. My body was shaking with spasms, which Julien controlled to prevent me from shirking.

At the same time, he continued to concentrate on my pleasure, and my jumps were at least as much due to pleasure as to pain. He carefully measured his caresses, so that I would not experience orgasm until the last moment, while the third thief gave me the last blows of the series. I was overcome by a demented, luminous ecstasy. I was vibrating from head to toe, and my master had to grab me with both hands to keep me from falling to the ground.

Right after, he adjourned the session, leaving me in position while the guests left the library. I cried hot tears, a bubbling and liberating flood of sobs that allowed my body to exult all the contradictory sensations that had been inflicted on it. When we were alone,

Julien came back to me.

– Pauline, don't you think you're exaggerating?

I wiped my face, swallowed a wet lump in my throat, and answered him:

- What, I thought you wanted to see me cry.

– That's true. But there's no need to make a big deal out of it either.

As I heard him moving around behind me, I turned around to see what he was doing. He had stripped down and was kneeling behind me. He pushed me back towards the ottoman, and placing his hands on my hips, he whispered:

- Now I want your ass.

I arched my back to offer it to him, docile. He used my own moisture to lubricate my anus, and introduced his tail, slowly, so as not to hurt me. I had to relax to let him take his ease, and each of his comings and goings radiated through all my muscles like an electric shock.

He took me for a moment in this way, and when we were both perfectly soothed and prepared, he introduced himself into the orifice of pleasure, where he released the full intensity of his enjoyment.

I woke up the next morning alone in his bed, wrapped in the sheets whose whiteness was highlighted by the sun, streaming in through the window. I hadn't even heard Julien get up; it must be said that we hadn't slept much, maybe three or four hours, since we had spent the night making love, in his room, in every way imaginable. I was exhausted and crushed with pain, from the top of my shoulders to the hollow of my knees, and also in my intimacy which was irritated by having

been honored with such insistence. However, I felt such a sense of physical and psychological satiety that I would have liked the pain to never go away, and that it would continue to remind me by the vividness of its burning of all the pleasure and happiness I had experienced.

Keeping my promise, as soon as I got up and showered, I left the Manor. This crazy night had only strengthened my determination to achieve my goals, by any means necessary.

But as I wanted to have all the elements in hand, I still had a few steps to take, and above all, a person to meet.

[I walk down a street bathed in cold winter sunshine in the southern suburbs of Paris. The street winds between opulent houses that seem to thrive like big mushrooms in the shade of the apartment blocks that close off the landscape a little further on. My destination is a house that dates from the sixties, with rendered walls and slate paving that runs around the small garden. Following the instructions I have been given, I push open the wooden gate and go around the house on the left. At the back, there is a terrace that has been closed off to form a loggia, a veritable greenhouse where exotic plants, orchids and bonsai trees gorge themselves with oxygen in a carefully maintained humidity. That is where he is waiting for me, sitting in his wheelchair, exactly as Édouard described him to me: round and smooth, dressed in an old-fashioned checked suit. His completely bald head shines like a billiard ball.

– Thank you for agreeing to receive me,

Mr. Certon, I said, shaking his hand.

– It's a pleasure, miss... Pauline, is that it?

A steaming tea awaits me on the coffee table. I quench my thirst and ask him if he agrees to our interview being recorded.

With his agreement, I set up my equipment and lean over him to attach the microphone to the collar of his jacket.

"You look lovely, Pauline," he whispers to me in a slightly hoarse voice, "Philippe must be in awe of you."

– Um, you mean Julien, I guess.

– Yes, that's it, of course. Julien.

I'm a little embarrassed. I wonder if it was a slip of his failing memory, or just a test. He charms me, with his toothless old man smile.

– So tell me, young lady. What do you want us to talk about?

– I am gathering information about the Andringer family. Anything you can tell me will be valuable, especially about Philippe. I would also like to know more about Esther.

At the mention of his wife's first name, his face closes.

– Esther was not an Andringer.

– She was Philippe's daughter. For me she is part of the family.

- You're kidding yourself. They never treated her like one. She wasn't one of them.

I understand that it is better to avoid antagonizing him, and I change the subject.

– You knew Philippe when you were very young, didn't you?

– I met him during the war. I joined the Resistance when I was still a teenager, with my brother who wanted to escape the STO. We were based in Morvan. I served as a liaison agent to collect information from undercover agents, of which Philippe was one. The Manor housed a hideout of German officers.

Philip had learned their language just so he could spy on them.

– You mean that Philippe played an active role in the Resistance?

– Of course, and even a key role. But he never boasted about it. After the war, he was completely devastated by the death of his wife.

Again, I wonder if Hubert Certon is getting his dates mixed up, or if he is being deliberately ambiguous.

This time I decide to provoke him a little.

– I thought his wife died in the sixties.

– I'm talking to you about his real wife, his woman of heart. (He changes the subject, as if it were nothing.) He had gotten me out of situations that could have cost me my life on several occasions, and I owed him a debt. I decided to pay it back by helping him rebuild himself, to reconnect with what really mattered to him, his Manor, his reason for living. It took investing in the shack so that it would be able to receive guests again.

Above all, it was necessary to help Philippe to find the desire again, to rebuild his network to organize the sessions again.

There was no shortage of candidates. It was the Liberation, everyone wanted new experiences and thrills, and to forget all the shit we had been through. I knew nothing about this world of erotic perversions. I didn't even know it existed, before

Philippe told me about his father, and what the Manoir had been like, in the good old days. I was just a kid. He didn't think I was going to push him, support him, help him, for him but also out of curiosity about all these things about sex. It was the sessions that gave him back his taste for life, that and the little girl.

This new evocation of Esther plunges him into silence. I wait a few seconds and bring him back to a slightly different subject.

– How did you come to become administrator of the Manor?

– After the war, I resumed my studies and studied law.

I divided my time between the Place du Panthéon and the Manoir. I specialized in business and corporate law. Quite naturally, I began to give Philippe some advice on the best way to run his business. I spent every Sunday at the Manoir working on my law books in the library.

Philippe involved me more and more regularly, then when he decided he was too old, he handed me the reins for good.

– It was the first time that the Manor was managed by someone who was not a member of the family. Did that cause you any difficulties?

– Ah! I suspected you would ask that question. It must be seen that it was not an easy time for the Manor.

Philippe had gone to great lengths to ensure that there were as few ties as possible between his secret activities and his family, and this had ultimately led to a split. He and his wife were practically separated. She lived in the East with the children, and he in the West in the large suite on the first floor, and this had already been the case before the war. When I became manager, I occupied the apartments next to his, and Esther the small suite on the second floor. The three of us formed the foundation of the Manor. We made decisions together. I remember the day we decided to split the Manor for good... It was in 1963. Philippe kept telling Esther and me that we were his only children, that he wanted us to perpetuate his work and that of his father, to ensure that the Manor retained its former glory. He had only one fear, that his legitimate children would tear each other apart over his assets and sell the Manor. So one day, I came up with a scenario that would protect everyone. Léon had the East, the other two had real estate in Paris and Rouen, of equivalent value. As for the West, Philippe, Esther and I became partners. Everything would have gone perfectly well if Patrice had not come and turned everything upside down.

– Listening to you, one would think that Patrice arrived overnight...

– It’s almost the case. One day, he must have been sixteen or seventeen, he stormed out of his parents’ house. Not to go far. He crossed the Manor, stood in front of his grandfather and told him he wanted to live with him, learn to discover his way of life. Philippe asked him what he was prepared to do for that, and he answered, anything. “Come back when you’re eighteen,” is what he told him. And the kid did. The second time he came, Philippe brought him to me and asked me to educate him, “the hard way” if you know what I mean. And that’s what I did.

– It didn't last very long...

– Ah ah! Indeed, Patrice was a model student... To tell you the truth, I would have liked to keep him in my service a little longer, but he behaved in such an exemplary manner that it quickly became difficult to justify. And then, there were his ties to his grandfather. The prodigal son, you see. Finally, a boy from his lineage who was worth something in Philippe’s eyes. It hadn’t even been a year since Patrice had been initiated that he already had the right to preside over the sessions alongside his grandfather. From then on, he took up more and more space. I tried to keep my role as educator, to preserve a certain hold over him. But when Philippe realized this, he opened an unlimited credit to the kid so that he could go and discover the world. That finished giving him his independence.

– Actually, Patrice didn't see his grandfather alive again, did he?

– Indeed. Philippe left us in 1972. The boy came home for the funeral, but he never left. He moved into his grandfather's apartment, and we had to make do.

– I don't want to stir up bad memories, but... no one wanted to tell me what caused your final break-up in 1979.

Hubert Certon remains silent for a moment, his eyebrows furrowed. He seems to hesitate, then finally he speaks again.

– That little prick, he wanted everything. He took Philippe from me. He took the Manor from me. He also took Esther. They had been sleeping together in secret for months when I realized it, blind as I was. The little girl... the poor thing, it wasn’t her fault. She was looking for the image of her father in him... He manipulated her, he... That little piece of shit... And you know how I realized it? She was fat...

She was pregnant with that little bastard...

He falls back into total silence. I am impressed. I had not imagined this, and I do not know how to land on my feet.

– But... how can you be sure that the child was his?

– Just look at him, the little bastard. He was handsome, handsome like his mother, but with the same pig-headed nature as all the males in his furious line.

– What did you do? What did you do... with the child?

- I didn't want that bastard. Patrice kept him.

This time I am the one who is silent, stunned, wondering if I have understood correctly, confronting the dates in my memory again. I no longer feel like asking anything. I get up, thank Certon, and leave, even more troubled than I was when I arrived.]

Five weeks had passed since my previous visit when I returned to the Manor. I had held firm during all this time: I had not called Julien, I had not set foot in the Manor or even near it, I had avoided confiding in anyone who might have reported it to him through indiscretion.

I presented myself at his office; as on the previous occasion, he received me immediately, and as on the previous occasion, he began by addressing me sharply:

- What do you want?

– I want to be yours. I want to come back and live here with you.

He sighed and rolled his eyes, looking exhausted. The sharp ridges of his eyebrows were even sharper than usual, bringing out the hardness in his features, the angular tension in his tense muscles. I could tell from the weariness on his face that he must have thrown himself headlong into the sessions, to the point of stupefaction.

– We've had this conversation before.

– Yes, but... I have better arguments than last time.

He made an evasive gesture, as if he didn't care.

- I'm listening to you.

“There you go,” I mumbled, confused. “I’ve thought about what you said, and I think that... you know very well that I’m aware of what I’m getting into with you. In fact, what you want is proof that I’m reckless enough to want to go anyway, and that I won’t change my mind.”

Well, here it is. I'm here to give you this proof.

I handed him a white envelope, from which he pulled out a single sheet of printed paper. He looked through it once, frowning, then paled, read it a second time, a third, and gave me an absent look.

"Do you know what that means?" I asked, shifting from one foot to the other.

- I'm not stupid! It says so on it.

After an anguished silence, he continued:

- And you're sure it's me we're talking about?

– No doubt about it.

He read the paper one last time and whispered:

– Pauline, you really have a talent for stirring up trouble.

I answered him with a slightly worried smile, while he handed me back the document. It was the results of my last blood test, requested by my gynecologist.

- What are you going to do? Julien asked.

I had prepared my answer. I had rehearsed it a million times in my head. It was perfect, the right balance of independence, submission, and pure madness.

– Actually, it depends on you. My wish is to keep it, of course. But if you decide to forbid me, there is still time to terminate the pregnancy.

My little sentence had the desired effect. He stared at me again, taken aback, but I could almost see, in the blue of his eyes, the color of the wind changing direction. I asked him again:

- So? What do you decide?

He narrowed his eyes as if he were going to shoot me on the spot. Then his lower lip quivered imperceptibly, dimples formed at the edges of his cheeks, and a cold smile slowly spread across his face.

– Pauline, do you realize what you're getting yourself into?

I think I saw the five generations of the Andringer family pass before my eyes, with their madness, their improbable adventures and all that they had built that was disturbed and magnificent. Yes, I realized very well, I was perfectly aware that I was going to be part of their story, to write the sequel, with my body, my blood, my tears, my fears and my passions. And with Julien. And yes, that was exactly what I wanted.

I looked him straight in the eye and, just to make him understand that I was not ready to negotiate, I threw at him with affectionate contempt:

– Julien, go fuck yourself.

He stood up and walked around his desk. A shiver ran up my spine, telling me to run away at full speed, and only training and an iron will allowed me to control it. Once standing in front of me, he slid a hand to the back of my neck, gripping it firmly. He placed the other on my hip, and I felt it drift slowly down to my stomach. His lips were close enough to my forehead that I could feel his breath at the base of my hair.

– Okay, he murmured. Okay.

I leaned against him, numb to the warmth of his body and the brute strength he exuded. I wondered one last time if I could really hide from him what I had learned about him. But in the end, I had no proof that Certon had told me the truth: as far as civil status goes, Julien was the son of Sonia de la Marterie. Of course, the Andringers are powerful people, and I had no doubt that they had the power to twist the truth a little, to suit themselves. But at that moment, as Julien sought my lips to kiss them, and tangled his fingers in the curls of my hair, none of that really mattered.

The traces I had deciphered, the lies and doubts of this story belonged to the realm of accumulated dust and archives, and the best thing was that they remained there.

“You’re mine,” he whispered in my ear.

“Only because that’s what I want,” I replied.