

CECILE HEBELLE

**The Hexagram
of the
Shadow**

Excerpts

1 - The Keeper of Magic

The ship cut through the cobalt blue waters of the Aegean Sea. In the master suite, Claire stood before the full-length mirror. From her height of five foot ten, she contemplated her own curves, a silhouette sculpted by a will of iron. Her skin, already bronzed by the Greek sun, contrasted with the pristine white of the linen sheets. She wore nothing, savoring the sea breeze blowing through the open porthole.

Her thoughts drifted toward Léa. She had observed her for three days. Léa was not a prey; she was an invitation. That evening, Claire decided to go on the offensive. She invited Léa to her suite under the pretext of social pleasantries, but as soon as the door closed, the

setting changed. The blue of the sea became the witness to their first physical encounter. Claire, with that natural authority that already characterized her, invited Léa to approach the porthole. Under the pretext of showing her the moon's reflections on the foam, she placed her hands on the young woman's hips.

The contrast was striking: Claire's cold strength against Léa's shifting softness. They united with a wild freedom, exploring the taboos of a chance encounter. Claire used Léa to test her own power of seduction, while Léa gave of herself with a generosity that seemed to fuel Claire's ambition.

It was in this embrace, amid crumpled sheets and the scent of salt, that Claire confided her project to Léa: the upcoming auction. She sensed that this

journey was merely the prologue to a much vaster play. For Claire, every woman she chose possessed two souls, two distinct realities that she took pleasure in orchestrating. On one side, there was the woman of the dawn, the one stepping out of the shower.

Under the hot spray of the master suite, Léa became a primitive creature again, almost vulnerable. Without artifice, her skin flushed by the heat, her wet hair clinging to her temples and her gaze washed of all intent, she was the raw truth. Claire loved this "organic" version, this vulnerability that was not weakness, but a blank page. In those moments, the intimacy was silent, almost sacred.

Then came the metamorphosis. Claire watched Léa at the dressing table. Before her eyes, the ritual of makeup acted as a

rising tension. The stroke of eyeliner, the deep crimson lipstick, the powder that mattified the golden skin... it was the armor being put on. The woman who then stood up was no longer the creature from the shower; she was the woman of performance, the actress ready to step onto the studio set of social life.

"You see, Léa," Claire whispered, placing a hand on her transformed companion's shoulder, "most people only see the mask. But true power is being both at once. It's knowing that under the makeup, there is the beast, and under the beast, there is the god."

This obsession Claire had for transition, this passage from naked being to absolute appearance, foreshadowed what she would later do with the "ointment of light": creating a third personality, a

vibratory identity that would finally merge the truth of the shower and the radiance of the makeup. The stopover in Milos was the turning point. Under a blazing sun, they found themselves in a shaded alley where a local antique auction was being held. Claire was immediately drawn to a tiny object: a small, carved black wooden box of surgical finesse. The patterns evoked intertwined, almost organic shapes. She acquired it for a modest sum, captivated by the object's aesthetic.

However, once on board, it was impossible to open. Neither blade nor force could overcome the invisible lock. Claire, intrigued but occupied by the pleasures of the cruise and her games of seduction with Léa, eventually tucked it away in her luggage, almost forgetting it in the tumult of her hectic life.

Two years passed. The building on Rue de Grenelle was already in her mind, but a spark, a catalyst, was still missing. One stormy night, Claire found the box again. This time, under the pressure of a simple stylus, the lock gave way with a metallic click that echoed like a sigh. Inside, on a bed of velvet decomposed by time, lay three small metal pieces. They were tarnished, oxidized by the centuries, but a cold energy emanated from them. As she handled them, Claire felt a strange vibration. On each of them, a symbol was engraved:

The first piece represented an open eye at the center of a circle (the power to see the truth behind masks).

The second, two hands endlessly intertwined (the power to bind wills through desire).

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