

1. A Little Turbulence in 53A

Professor Anna Hill uttered a vow on the first day of autumn, in the wake of her claimed thirty-ninth birthday, twenty-six weeks plus one day before she finally freed herself and a cat from certain doom. She vowed to live an exotic romance, and appeared that night at a costume party dressed as a medieval nun.

Enter the Moor, ibn Rushd, Averroes. He smelled of new wine, his accent (if not his moustache) dripped butter and cream. A weathered face jutted from a scarf that brooded on his head. Anna hoped the moustache was part of the costume, but it didn't matter when it came to providence. His real name was Christophe and his real work was of troubadours and their disappearance. "*Le crépuscule des troubadours.*" He had a little place on the Seine in Paris, where unlike Montreal it never snowed. The natives here, he inevitably said, had a word for each kind of snow.

The Inuit, Anna informed him, used recursively addable derivational suffixes, so there was only one base word for snow. Perhaps he was instead thinking of the many curses Montrealers threw at the stuff.

She had to stop with the wine at these faculty parties, where choral music was the preferred dance floor hit. Somewhere the Allegri *Miserere*, the Vatican's once secret incantation, curled like

a rose vine above a stony chant. Her eyes closed and she saw herself and the French man Dr. Zhivago-ing through the kind of snow best suited for sleighs, shivered as she felt the ice palace, heard him whisper and shout her name.

Christophe backed away from the nun in front of him. Her closed eyes, lips parted, hands clasped at her breast. He was familiar with the varieties of religious experience, but had never been so close to their practice.

Pocahontas danced her way between them, unartfully clad in a few scraps of leather and a handful of feathers. She was not Status Indian, and had likely augmented other aspects of herself as well. Nevertheless, the talking points interested Christophe enough to divulge to Pocahontas that the week coming he would conduct a conference in Paris, and wouldn't it be agreeable to appreciate it together. *Challenges to Heteronormative Troubadours in Post-Intentional Phenomenology* the theme, how women were understood and misunderstood under attack, unpacked performativity inside the bedroom.

But Pocahontas, never impressed by schooling and at the party only by accident, had already retreated. Anna opened her eyes. In Paris, she breathed. Your Paris.

A man dressed as Jesus the carpenter appeared at the kitchen door, locked eyes with Anna. When she turned back, Christophe was gone.



Six days later on the way to check-in Anna waved away at least three proposals, one of which was rather handsome, to help her with her luggage. She kept at bay any impure thoughts as the security officer followed the contours of her body with his wand. She avoided a peek

into the cockpit to assess the pilot. As she squeezed down the aisle towards 53A she was ready, as she had been the few other times she boarded planes, to sit beside a man of grace, elegance and charm.

She checked the boarding pass again, but had memorized her seat number days ago. She had also chosen her outfit, test-driven a few perfumes, and researched the fuel capacity of the Boeing 777-300ER. Only the man in the seat next to hers was not the right man: she was a woman. In a suit. The woman held a precarious tower of loose pages on her lap, and sighed as Anna jostled by.

Anna ignored the sigh. Little bothered Anna now. She had not refused when her mother handed her an ornate pillbox with four magic pills inside. She'd sliced them into quarters and at the gate swallowed the first collection of Clonazepam snacks. Now in her seat she took two more quarters so that (in her mother's poetic version) she'd already be in the clouds the moment the plane left earth. As she slipped on her camouflage-print sleep mask, the one that brought out the highlights in her red hair, she felt prescriptively calm for almost anything that flight could bring.

"That mask work for you, honey?"

The plane left the ground.



Anna drew up a corner of her mask. The air was grey outside the windows. Grey inside too. Her window wept. The plane never left the potholed clouds. She shut her eyes again. One good air bump got a few laughs from the boys in front of her. Anna knew that in her reality she traveled on a bus down an ill-maintained gravel road, a defrocked priest accompanying her to a cliffside *hacienda*. She let out a feigned snort that would match her insouciance on that bus.

Beside her, the businesswoman took the sound as an answer

to her question.

“Couldn’t do that. Feel too trapped.”

Anna said nothing.

“Specially with all this chop.”

This was the thing with travel: the complete absence of control. You could prepare for weeks, organize and coordinate schedules, glean from blogs and guidebooks and knowledge of friends, and in the end be left with a handful of chaff. But Anna wouldn’t let it affect her, because she was on her way to a spontaneous rendezvous, unlike anything she’d done before. Inside her mask Anna stared at the ceiling of her mind and wished it as featureless as a prairie sky. She inhaled deeply, one time. She folded her hands together, a saint in earshot of temptation. She would not lift the mask.

“Block things out,” the woman said, “but it won’t get you far. I should know. Tried it for years. Blocked out my therapist for fifty-two thousand eight hundred dollars of sessions. Which is what freed me up, you know: budget constraints. Husband said: go well, or go homeless. Which is some sports cliché. And then he went.”

Normally, at home, Anna could correct papers while she watched television, talk to her mother on the phone while she scrubbed burned pots. In her classroom she uncovered Spanish priests and bishops in the throes of twelfth-century celibacy while the insistent siren of a snowplow outside the window seduced three hundred and forty-three restless freshmen. But this—this stentorian voice that chipped away at the foundation of Anna’s synaptic peace—it brought everything to the verge of collapse. But she had the solution: Paris still needed a plan.

The conference, for one.

At that moment one of Anna’s shoes hid beneath the seat. The potholes on the way up through the clouds sent it out of reach. She

jiggled the other shoe from her toe. She felt her pulse, and breathed a few deep inhales.

The most appropriate place to dazzle Christophe, multiple choice:

a) In the Sorbonne’s *Grand amphithéâtre*, with its statues of Descartes and Pascal and Richelieu under the golden domes, where, during an otherwise interminable debate among international historians, she stands up in the balcony and with one profound but surprisingly simple conclusion, obliterates all other research and opinion, and the scholars are left babbling about Christophe’s fortune to be with this intellectual Amazon;

b) During a tour of a *château* half-submerged in a river, when he, without warning, presses her against a wall that clicks open to reveal a secret and close stairway, and as the tour guide’s voice echoes away, Christophe leads her through that murky passage into the sun-drenched boudoir of a king’s mistress, and slides a massive bolt to lock the door as she resists only long enough to let her gaze take in the erotic tapestries and candelabras and a four-poster bed of astounding proportions;

c) On a hidden street deep in the history of the city on a café terrace, over *cafés crèmes*, as everything else fades away and it’s the two of them, in *their* Paris, illuminating embodied qualities of gender. Hands brush when they reach for the sugar substitute at the same time. Their eyes flash to each other’s faces. A shock of recognition mutates into passion. A tourist couple walks by, marvels at their perfect tableau of love, envy in their voices... “And such gorgeous shoes,” the woman says...

“You’re not asleep, are you?”

Anna said nothing, but didn’t jiggle her shoe.

"The way you fidget. Maybe you should have a glass of wine."

Anna sighed. Her hand rose from beneath the flimsy blanket. She lifted a corner of her mask.

"Peek-a-boo," the woman said. She held two small bottles of red wine. "We *are* headed for France." She folded down Anna's tray and placed a plastic glass and one of the bottles in front of her. She'd already twisted them open. "*Bon voyage.*"

Anna brought the mask up to her forehead and sprouted corkscrews of red hair. She was glad her seatmate wasn't a man after all.

"You know how I could tell you weren't asleep? Your fingers were rigid on the armrest. Look at the dents you left."

Anna looked, but there were none.

Had the woman given her name? Anna recognized the dream quality of the Clonazepam her mother said she might feel. So little to worry about in the world. When you thought about it. Or didn't.

It was now black outside her tiny window. Anna tried to worry. Was it early morning? Late evening? The video screen in front of her showed a map. Ocean predominated. The screen claimed they were thirty-six thousand feet in the air, and boasted of five hundred and fifty-three miles an hour. She tried to worry: there was only cold above and beneath her. And then Anna smiled, and watched her hand swim towards the tray table and the plastic glass of wine.

"Atta girl," the woman said.

They clinked glasses, a dull bump. The wine smelled foreign on the plane.

"You'll stay in Paris?"

Paris. The word brought her closer to consciousness. She was on her way to Paris.

"Yes."

"Me too."

Anna nodded. Christophe would be there. She may stay in Paris the rest of her life.

"I may stay there the rest of my life."

The woman raised her eyebrows. "First time, huh?"

Anna's head bobbed.

The hostesses came by with plastic trays of plastic food.

"My name's Julia," said her seatmate. Julia waited a few beats. "You?"

"Oh. Professor Anna Hill." Anna could not explain why she had called herself *Professor*.

"A prof," Julia said, as if academics were a rare sight thirty thousand feet above the Atlantic. "Let me guess: Literature."

"Medieval history."

"Whew. Close one. So, Professor Anna Hill: you going to teach in Paris?"

"Oh no. A conference."

"What on?"

Julia left her tray of food sealed, and instead stopped the hostess. "A couple more bottles of the house red," she said.

"The Siege on the Castle of Love," Anna said while she tore apart the sandwich wrap with her teeth.

"Huh."

"An interdisciplinary conference on the religion, culture, work, cuisine and ceremony of a castle under siege."

"Wow," said Julia, "a real potboiler."

The woman spoke like she'd come out of the 1940s. But she wasn't much older than Anna. She let her grey hair show, in a girl-ish ponytail.

"These things lasted years, you know," Anna said.

"The conferences?"

Anna turned to look at Julia, but her eyes closed as she sipped wine.

"I need to research a paper. The culture part. *Re-Gendering Liminal Exoticization*."

"You've all got such cute titles."

"It's where historians get to kick out the jams."

"I'll say. I bet things get crazy at these conferences."

"Absolutely historical," Anna said.

Anna knew the conference would be Medieval Studies as she'd always known it. Tribal pow-wows she'd joined before. New theories, the same biases. The one-upmanship of knowledge: three hundred scholars, one hundred and fifty papers, a shipment of rubber chickens as bad as the airline's. Except not. This time it was the Latin Quarter, the Sorbonne. This time it was Paris. The chickens would not be rubbery: they would be exquisite, bathed in butter and cream, tended by hands that nightly plucked mushrooms from hidden woods, that freed the chicks to play in fields of wild rosemary bushes and thyme and... and... there was another herb, what was it? Whatever. The invitation was official: this time it was Paris, and this time it came from an urbane and wealthy Frenchman who probably had a *garçonnière* that hung over the Seine. One of those cute little European convertibles too, steered with those kid leather gloves he sported, to whisk her away from the drones of the conference and on to his own vineyard, where at the ancestral manse they would be welcomed by three inquisitive wolfhounds and an ancient but kindly caretaker named Gustave. That was the thing with travel: the world was open and infinite.



Fifteen minutes after the turbulence Anna still giggled, even though

the shirt she'd chosen in which to greet Christophe (an off-white blouse with festive sleeves and collar) was now spotted with pink Rorschach tests. From her breast rose the musty smell of rustic French villages at the end of a September's day.

"You're all right, though?" Julia asked.

"My paper," Anna continued, a new wine glass in hand, "was called *Lie Still and Think of Spain: Homosocially Segregated Environments among Early Visigoth Settlers in Iberia, 450-600 AD*."

Julia gazed into the empty video screen. Now every time the plane bumped, she grabbed the armrest. "Sounds like a ringer. You got some mayo there. On your chin."

"My book, though. Maybe you've heard of it? It's called *Love in the Material-Semiotic Realm: Gender, Death, and Medieval Courtship*. But you know what?"

Anna was in a confessional mood. She wasn't sure, was Clonazepam the truth drug? Or was that Champagne?

"The book had nothing to do with love. In the courts, daughters and sons were exchanged for political maneuvers. So little source material exists on the commoners. And because of that it was cold, and hard, and footnoted to death."

"The love?"

"It sold two hundred and thirty-eight copies."

"Well then."

Anna put her hand over her mouth. All this talk made her too open to the world. Now, she wouldn't say any more until asked.

"Did you..." the woman started.

"It sold well because the cover had a graphic fourteenth-century woodcut that featured fellatio."

Julia stopped drinking long enough to look at Anna. A man across the aisle was attentive too.

"The first reviewer called the book a 'Huge achievement.' There was a promise of more illustrations inside."

The man cleared his throat, and Julia collapsed in laughter on Anna's shoulder. They spilled wine over each other and pointed at the man with his face now buried in a magazine. They were school-girls. They were drunk. They didn't care.

The hostesses brought more wine, although Anna waved away Julia's hand. Julia ignored her. Somewhere over the white darkness of Greenland, Anna rallied to use the toilet again. She looked over the seats from the rear of the plane, tried to focus her eyes. Every woman's video screen was tuned to the same romantic comedy. As one they all threw back their heads in laughter at the kooky heroine's antics, then sniffed and wiped tears away with choreographed precision. When her eyes focused most screens showed only the interminable progress of the plane across the Atlantic.

"I'm on my way to meet a French man and fall in love," Anna confessed to Julia while she searched for her seatbelt.

"Anyone, or a particular one you got in mind?"

"Oh, particular."

"How lovely for you," Julia said. "I fell out of love and I'm on my way to divorce a French man."

"Oh no," said Anna.

"No sympathy, please. Should've known."

"Known what?"

"Not to marry a playwright."

"I didn't know."

"See? I tell my clients: CEO, rancher, spy, policeman, fighter pilot." Julia enumerated as she held up five fingers. The ring was still on the fourth finger, but the stone had fallen out.

"Your clients?" Anna asked.

"Worst is, you see yourself on stage later. If you go to the theatre. I don't. That's the only good thing. Hardly anybody does."

Julia stared straight into the screen in front of her and touched the ring on her finger.

"And your Frenchman?" Julia said, not able to bear self-pity and silence for longer than fifteen seconds. "What's he do?"

"Um," Anna said. "He's a professor too."

"Yikes. Not your boss?"

"No no."

"You're not pregnant?"

"Not in the least."

"Suffer from amnesia spells?"

"Not that I recall."

The woman seemed relieved. "Don't mean to pry," she said. "A little quiz I give."

"So you're a teacher too?"

"Could say that. I wouldn't. More of a babysitter."

"Can I pry?"

"You Canadians, so polite. Where I come from we call it conversation. Fire away."

"You're American?" It was a surprise to no one.

"Philly. Had a little meeting in Montreal. Can you say 'out and about' for me?"

"Out and about?"

"That's cute. The accent's not as punchy as some parts of your country though. I always got my French husband to say 'The thing.' Tray sexy. 'Ze sing.' Try it sometime on your man. Make sure there's a bedroom nearby."

Anna chortled, blushed, looked up at the plastic ceiling. "So let me guess," she said, her hand on Julia's arm, "a dating agency

for lonely rich women? And your clients chase spies and cowboys?"

"They'd better. Or we drop them."

"That is so so dreamy. The spies I mean. And it all works out in the end?"

"I hope so. Or *I'd* be dropped."

"It isn't your dating agency?"

"It ain't no dating agency, honey. I'm an editor with Harlequin Romance."

Anna let out a bark. She wasn't sure if Julia knew it was a laugh, so she coughed a bit, then interspersed it with a few more barks, then drank some wine out of the flimsy plastic cup too quickly and began to cough for real.

"Sorry," she said. "Your clients. They're authors."

"Thank you. I'm sorry too."

"No, I meant. A Canadian thing. We're sorry. We apologize." Anna reached for her cup of wine again. The stuff parched her mouth.

"We accept. People have ideas about romance novels, you know. Even women. And especially *professors*."

"Oh," Anna said, only it came out as more of a squeak than she had intended, "not me. Not me." She'd written a quickie paper on supermarket romances when she was an undergrad. Couldn't miss with a feminist target the size of a loading dock. Something about passive women and an insistence on sexual violence. She straightened out her ruffled blouse, pulled back her hair. "Then that pile of paper, that was someone's potential novel?"

"No. That was someone's potential divorce."

"Oh. Right. But you know what's too funny? I research romance too."

Julia didn't look convinced.

"Well see *romance*, you know... it doesn't mean love."

"Damn straight."

"Well no. Romance was a heroic narrative. *Medieval*. Like the King Arthur stories. Magic and adventures, no need for princesses in towers. Told or sung in the languages that stemmed from the Romans, so they began to be called *Romances*. The Birth of Romance. You see?"

"Okay Professor. So you write poems about knights in buffed armour."

"I never write poetry. Poetry is self-indulgent and tasteless. Like gruel."

"Gruel is self-indulgent?"

"Yes. It wants everything to be gruel."

Anna wanted to be witty, but it so rarely worked. "I don't write. I mean, not that way. And then you can't confuse it with Romanticism, the intellectual movement. You know: Blake and Coleridge, Byron and the Shelleys."

"Attorneys at law."

"I always tell my students, 'Listen to Chopin and read *Frankenstein* under a canvas by Turner. That's Romanticism.'"

"Or overkill. But you wrote a new book?"

"It's a collapse," Anna began on autopilot, until the soft pop of the cabin bell sounded, enough to let the pills in and fade her voice and it took her a few seconds to remember, "a re-construct of interrupted gender correctives," until another pilot's mumbled version of chatter came over the tin speaker, the oral equivalent of a doctor's written prescription: authoritative, indecipherable, prone to understatement. The pilot didn't advise the passengers about turbulence, but instead narrated the antics of a heroine on the seatback screens, currently embarrassed at a party. And then the voice became her

father, kind but unequivocal about her seatbelt. Told her she was too deep into the details again, and couldn't see the sky for the clouds. In front of Anna the little plane on her screen loop-de-looped over the North Atlantic Ridge.



"Wait a minute," Julia said while she poured them another glass, "you mean you'd make the hero of your romance novel a *poet*?"

"Nineteen shentury," said Anna. "Century. I wish I could read poetry."

"Oh that'll sell. The lovers die of consumption, do they?"

"I haven't outlined it that far."

"Not far at all. You got a year to spare? You know that mystery writer Dorothy Sayers?"

"I don't think she..."

"It looks simple, she said, but so do some little frocks. Not the kind of thing any fool can run up in half an hour with a machine. Listen, I'll give you one word that'll save you a bunch of trouble: Damaged Alpha Male."

"Three words."

"Wanted to make sure you're awake. Ya see? Strong. Irresistible. Poets are not strong. Poets are resistible."

"Not what you'd expect from an editor."

"*Au contraire*." She spoke French with an accent flat as the Great Plains. "Honey: the guy I want to divorce wrote poetry. I know of what I speak. All wonderful till they have to *do* something."

"At the start, he's alone among the cliffs and heather, calls her name..." Anna saw Christophe peer through his tousled hair into the distance, look for her ship, her plane. Torn apart by this prolonged absence, but keeping it all inside. Whatever century it is. As

he walks towards the cliffs something tugs on his long-tailed coat, and he turns to pull it from the rose-bush thorns, but he's caught, he's trapped, he needs to be rescued by her but where is she? He kicks at the bush with his riding boots, now scarred and saddened. His perfect exterior comes apart, his ascot, askew, takes wing with the wind, flies towards the white cliffs and he watches it leap off the lip, nothing he can do, where *is* she? He pulls at his coat and it comes free, but not before a thousand rose petals are loosed in the wind and their scent whirlwinds around him with the memory of...

"My favorite place for poets," said Julia, "on a cliff. Often they jump. Or if we're all lucky there'll be a good stiff wind."

Anna was still in the heather, eyes half-closed. How did one tie an ascot? Maybe he had a scarf, tossed about his neck. That would have to be looked up. And were there roses among heather, and heather among cliffs, and where were these cliffs? And when was then? She'd have an advantage at this, that was sure. Research, and documents, and footnotes. Although editors like Julia couldn't allow footnotes in historical romances. But they should. She could begin a trend.

"You're at a disadvantage, you know. A history prof. You'll use footnotes like little tortures, then bury your readers alive with boredom."

"But historical romance," Anna said. "Love and history, I've got it covered."

"You've got to keep it on a leash. The strong hero, and your ten plots. *Marriage of Convenience*."

"I've never even dated for convenience," said Anna. "Unless you count the history department chair from Rostov-on-Don. Dmitri. The date at his convenience."

He'd wandered the halls, asked after a tie he'd lost. Dmitri

Bushnov was so pitiable when she found it (in his office) that she accepted dinner at a Chinese restaurant. He had tried to kiss her but she couldn't do it, not after he'd ordered litchis in syrup. He already had a permanent aroma of pepper vodka about him. But he was still in her camp at the University.

"Two: *Stranded with a Stranger*."

Another reason she avoided travel whenever possible. Friends turned out to be strangers.

"Then, *Runaway Bride, Secret Baby, Reunion Romance...*"

There had been so many dates. So little romance. The reunion—she'd tried to hook up with that whitewater raft guide in Maine, the one who'd rescued her. So what if it had been a twelve-year-old kid who'd pulled her out of the rapids, the guide had supervised. She'd tried to rekindle that campfire for a good six years now.

"...*Back From the Dead, Mistaken Identity...*"

Deadbeats, mistakes about identity. As Julia ticked off titles on both hands, Anna looked out the window into the stars where some glimmer of sunrise wished itself on the curved horizon. The editor enumerated her plots, but by now Anna only heard a rosary of romantic *Hail Marys*. The woman counted off the catastrophes and fiascos of Anna's life. Please stop, Anna said, although she wasn't sure if she said it out loud. The plane's drone blended with Julia's list.

"...and of course, *Woman in Jeopardy*, without whom we'd all be lost, and *The Dad Next Door*. That's nine."

It seemed like Julia had called up all of Anna's delinquent dates, because the line-up in front of the airplane bathroom was all men, and included The Dad Next Door with what looked like a Secret Baby in his arms. She blinked, wished them away. One by one they disappeared through the tiny door. They left an empty space. The definition of her love life. Her head rested against the cold of the

plastic window, and beads of moisture gathered there, and ran into her eyes.

"Ten, though: ten is a collective, a grab bag. They're my favourites. So: *Boss-Secretary; Amnesia; Virgin Heroine* (as if); *Pregnant Heroine* (more like it); *On the Run*; and our winner ladies and gentlewomen..."

Julia's voice echoed through Anna's head with the hum of the plane.

"...*The Rancher and the City Girl*. That's it. Love is all about tension, you know. Can't miss. That, and happily ever after. Not too much to ask?"

When Julia did turn to Anna, she only saw Anna's shoulders shaking, and the blanket up to her face, and heard the unmistakable melody of a woman sobbing, for her life.

There were moments on the six-hour flight when Julia didn't speak, didn't try to fill emptiness with chatter, with professional revelations about her romance, with acid-dipped memories of her French ex, and this moment, however brief, was one of those. For almost fifty-six seconds she waited for the tears of Anna to ebb.

"Oh look," Julia said, "I think we're over England."

The sky glowed brighter beyond the channel.

"Jane Austen and all that," Julia said in an execrable English accent.

England for Anna only meant Paris was that much closer. If Paris was closer, so was her rendezvous with Christophe, although now she couldn't recall how they had agreed to meet, or where, or, come to think of it, that mysterious scamp, if he had even said he'd meet her at the airport, although it couldn't have been otherwise. That was the thing about travel. You can stay up all night atop the ocean, float on medication and cheap red wine, smell of a vineyard, your eyes with their own luggage, and then

someone mentions *Woman in Jeopardy* and you see your empty shell for what it is, no tissues in sight. That's why one didn't travel.

Over the channel in a panic over today, Anna escaped again to yesterday. Above the beaches of Normandy she became her father, searched for emergency landings by moonlight. And it seemed clear to her that the romantic fault line lay with her father. For taking off like that. The idea seemed clear until the gravity of the past pulled the plane down, and the sky lightened. This was a new day. Things would be different in Paris. Everything. If she could find her other shoe. She'd need that shoe. In Paris. She could buy some. Shoes.

Anna succumbed to fatigue in that so-desired Elysian Field, and the side of her head stuck to the plastic window. The camouflage sleep mask caught in the tangle of her hair to create a loopy topknot. Her eyes were kohled from tears. She immediately dreamed of French cathedral bells. She could not tell if they were for a wedding or funeral.

The bells tolled and softly popped.

And through it all, a voice rose, sometimes of her father, or the priest, from this day forward, to have and to hold, "...Paris out the left window," the pilot said over the speakers. The plane made an abrupt shift toward earth, and Anna's ears popped open. Morning came to France. Anna saw the plane's interior pulsate with a virginal glow, as if she and all the other passengers had drawn out expectations from the City of Light, and faith and dreams haloed their heads, hope burst from their breasts, a Medieval manuscript of *très riches heures* come to life. She squinted out the window into the golden haze below in a search for the twin towers of Notre Dame.

"Good morning," Julia said cheerily. "You were out for a good

fifteen minutes. Isn't it awful?"

"Paris?"

"The air. Pollution makes it yellow. Glows like Chernobyl."

Anna stepped into Charles de Gaulle airport and began to cough. She had persevered until then, had maneuvered down the plane aisle and into the airport with only one high-heeled shoe. The other had disappeared, another of her father's magic tricks. Repeated inquiries and a search by the aircrew had done nothing to bring it back. And by the time she was off the plane, the only help Anna had from Julia was a crumpled business card in her palm, which when smoothed out revealed a diamond as its logo. She remembered a "goodbye" somewhere, although it seemed Julia had stepped off the airplane in midflight, and trusted her own wings to take her away.

At the luggage carousel Anna hauled off the first of her two suitcases, the smaller vintage one, with no gallant offers of help. She would have refused anyway. She had to open the suitcase right there to get a pair of shoes, and would not want strange men to catch sight of any flimsy underwear, or what she believed was an even flimsier research paper. But there were no shoes in that suitcase, they were all in the one that still hadn't appeared. Anna stood up from her search. The airport swayed and pixilated around the edges. She checked her watch, which for some reason was now faceless. The *vin d'honneur* for the opening session of the conference was this "afternoon" at the Sorbonne, that much she remembered. She wondered if her fingers would make air quotes around "afternoon" when she told Christophe this story. She wondered if the French used air quotes. Anna steadied herself on a luggage cart. She would have to close her eyes in the hotel room for a while. She would have to. She would.

She didn't have to wait that long. As she watched the slow motion arrival of her second suitcase Anna lunged toward it in stuttered phases. The bag proved to be made of lead, and magnetic, so that her arm followed the suitcase, and her body thereafter, until she found herself on a carousel of horses in a medieval fair, like the merry-go-round she wanted to see at the base of the *Sacre Cœur*, while she fluttered her hand at her loyal subjects on the sides. Her fingers came up to her forehead to sweep away what she believed was stray hair, and then the other passengers watched her one shoe dangle on her heel, until she disappeared through the rubber curtains.

2. Social Networking in the Early Middle Ages

"This is you," the man said. He held the book in his hands like a weapon.

In a room with fogged windows Anna's pills wore down. She forgot how she got into this room, or why. A French man with suspect motives. He took her pillbox and its discontents. He struggled to open it but could not.

At her elbow, four copies of *Love Gets Medieval: Torture as Processual Language*. The back cover called her "a meticulous scholar, with a rebel's heart."

Why hadn't Christophe come to get her at the airport? Anna had only one question, but the unsmiling man in front of her echoed questions. What is the destination? How long do you stay? What do you carry besides these pills? She heard them as Zen koans. She breathed in, held it, exhaled. The agent didn't want practical answers. He wanted her to look within. Did she hide contraband? What kind of rebel was she? What is the sound of one heart beating?

Anna understood it was no time for meditation. Righteous indignation was more appropriate. Romance heroines, for example, would not tolerate this mistreatment. They would not meditate on