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The title of this book is dedicated to a horse named

MARQUÊS

FOR NOW

FOREVER

AND TO

NEVER

BE FORGOTTEN

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I'm driving home in my brand-new Ferrari home along a self-imposed detour. There is hardly any traffic. Accompanied by the classical music playing, I'm trying to restore my inner calm/peace after a busy day at work. A tear is rolling down my cheek ...I attended the funeral of a close friend yesterday. I have sufficient financial means... but money can't buy the things that really matter. Like true friendship and true love, the kind that would catch a bullet for you. Not even my banknotes could restore my friend's health. The tear is making its way across my lips towards my chin, where it lands on my black T-shirt. The words: "I will never forget you..." are echoing in my mind....' My driveway is lined with robust and gnarled old oak trees. It's time for me to park my favorite car in the secured underground car park. It used to be the parking lot of an old factory which has been transformed into my loft, my home, my sanctuary. It's embedded in a lot of history with a lot of light and a lot of space. I tried to preserve the authentic features as much as possible, like the rattling elevator with cast-iron forgings which carries me upstairs. I don't mind the rattling that much; it adds character and kind of appeals to me. As long as it functions safely. In my mind I'm selecting the film I'm going to watch with some crisps and a cold beer and then have an early night. I'll celebrate my birthday tomorrow, I'm a bit tired now. But my thoughts are disrupted by the noises I'm hearing as I'm approaching the floor I live on. You normally only hear the sounds of the rattling elevator. I reach for my smartphone in a silent panic. As I am typing in the emergency number, I notice the banner: 'Surprise, it's your 27th birthday!' That was scary. So, no early night for me ... Has my girlfriend Djamilla catered for a party?

She's the only one who knows the daily changing codes of this building. There are a lot of visitors, too many to my liking. But I have no choice. ... I greet my friends with the biggest smile I can give them, although I'm actually too tired for this. How did they get here? I didn't see any parked cars in the neighborhood. Did they use the company coach? Hmm...possibly. I have known some of them my entire life. We grew up together in a poor working-class area. There were fights and a lot of situations where you needed to be careful. Those who were my friends back then, still remain my friends today. The only difference is that I am no longer poor but rather filthy rich. I'm what you could call a millionaire. But inside I'm still the same person I was back then.

The party theme is 007 – James Bond.

They also brought a sound system you can sing along to, karaoke or something like that. A lot of my business partners would find this ridiculous, but actually it is quite amusing and funny. The mood is quickly set; acting a little crazy, be it off key or fantastic, everybody is up for a song.

Two eagerly posted bodyguards in the hallway are to keep the paparazzi and uninvited guests at bay. You can only enter this party by saying your own personal code, showing your VIP pass and a check of your ID. You just can't miss them once you get out of the elevator, they are so broad-chested. Luckily, they thought of this. I really don't like being plastered all over the frontpage in the next edition of a tabloid. Elly, a friend of mine, just can't help herself flirting with one of them: "hey, handsome, care to dance with me? Getting so up and close that she is really asking for more than just a dance. Unfortunately for her, the answer of the

nameless bodyguard is quite clear: 'dear lady, how good-looking and how persuasive you may be.... sorry, I'm working. "Oh, and what about after ...?' she asks while flashing her eyelashes. But he doesn't even answer.

Neither her full, bright-red lips and blond hair nor her very short skirt with tigerprint and feline like hairband have any effect on him. He only glances briefly at the stiletto heels of her blue pumps, to see which direction they are going. Hurt in her pride, she returns to my living room, pouting her lips and swaying her hips, on the look-out for her next victim. The bodyguard rubs over his muscular arms in a slightly annoying manner. He appears relieved that she decided to walk away, even somewhat happy. Now he can concentrate on his job again. Her friend tries to console her by saying: 'he's probably gay anyway' 'Yes, definitely, replies Elly, without knowing for sure. But hey ... she prefers them believing this. Looking around, I notice two friends I haven't seen for nine years. Are they really Bart and Gert? I spill my beer while trying not to laugh. Ah, you know, Bart was always the joker of the gang and you could say Gert was always his accomplice.

They stuck their thick calves in tight, white fishnet stockings with their masculine black body hair trying to escape through the small holes. Glancing upwards you can see that they are both wearing a short and quite tight little black dress showing of their well-formed belly, 'Ah well, I didn't have a costume ...', says Bart. And the show doesn't stop there. He attempts a pirouette in my direction and asks: 'Would you like to dance with me?' before bursting out in laughter. He puts another beer in my hands. 'Hey pal, you seem to earn a decent living', while he gives me a friendly hug. 'Haven't seen you for quite some time, except for an article in the newspaper!' 'Yeah, sorry pal, been very busy lately, I reply. 'Too

busy, actually, a lot of them I haven't seen for ages...' I look around me ...

As the clock strikes twelve, they roll a giant birthday cake in my direction, decorated with colourful little sparkling torches!

The start singing their own version of how a birthday song should be. Then it's my turn. They hold their breath as I blow out all 27 candles to end with a peaceful boom of their applause. Some of them come and congratulate me again. Their gaiety is quite catchy and gives me a sense of happiness.

Most of the guests are dressed in a cheap version of gala attire. A lot of women have chosen shiny glittery clothes, really not my cup of thee. Why not go for an elegantly black dress? Ah well, that's just my personal opinion....

My eyes are scanning the room for Djamilla. She knows I'm looking at her. She takes some whipped cream from the cake with her finger. Then licks it provocatively from her finger all the while her eyes are inviting me in a playful way to invite me to have sex with her. She comes closer and whispers in my ear: 'Later.' Hm, has the alcohol awakened the playbunny in her? I smile at her and think: let's wait and see...'

Five O' Clock

Five o'clock in the morning. My last friends have just left the party. It really was a night to remember! 'I left you a small present under your pillow', Djamilla says while giving me a final kiss goodbye. She has a real hard time saying goodbye, one final hug, another kiss and half an hour later she still hasn't left. 'Why don't you stay?', I ask her. 'No no, I can't.' That's what she usually replies and eventually she does leave. A real flirt, but not when push comes to shove.,. The alcohol has worn out and the playbunny is gone as well.

Ah well, under my pillow? I quickly make my way upstairs, eager to find out what she has hidden. I remove the black satin head pillow from the bed and discover a small packet with the logo of a lingerie shop. Okay, aren't my boxers to her liking?

Then I discover the hand-written note.:

I love you ...

and

give you a thousand hearts

each heart holds an imaginary kiss

and while you sleep ...

they will keep you warm.

Can you guess what it is?

You can look now!

Lots of love

Djamilla Xxx

I rip open the fluorescent wrapping paper and am amazed to find not new underwear but a pair of velvet red pajamas covered in maybe a thousand hearts! How sweet! My face starts to smile and I wish I could just hold her.

I send her a text with my smartphone:

'Oh darling, it's going to be a hot night what with all those hearts of yours on my pajamas XXX, See you tomorrow, lots of love and a big hug.'

I take a closer look at the garment and realize, quite honestly, that I would never buy such a thing. It's really not very masculine, but I will wear this one to do her a favor. Time for a quick selfie so I can prove tomorrow that I really slept with my thousand hearts pajamas. My friends all chipped in for my present: a gift card from a local travel agency. Sadly, enough I won't be able to use it. Of course, I'm not going to throw it away either. But I worked, more like slaved, really hard to achieve what I have today. I own a thriving business that is still growing in size. I'm not ready to hand over management to someone else. Not yet anyway.

Some day? Hmmm ... maybe. I put the gift card on my nightstand next to the small antique box; a little something extra from my best friend. 'For good luck, he said.

An antique box

He told me that he had bought the box at a local market in Portugal. An old, grey-haired lady was selling antique trinkets. Three cats were keeping her company, All three, black as night from head to bottom. Their blue eyes following his every move.

He had been so mesmerized by one of them that he had tripped over another one. That one started to cry so horribly that he dropped this antique box out of fear. Which resulted in a serious scratch on the back of the box. The cat licked its bruised paw, but the old lady, dressed in rags, looked at him very annoyed.

So much so that her pointy nose started to curl up and the purulent pustule on it just spat open. She quickly started looking for a handkerchief but couldn't find one. So he gave her his, along with an apologetic smile. But she kept staring angrily at him and the cat kept licking her bruised paw. He felt so guilty that he finally bought this so-called 'antique' box from her. Her asking price was almost a hundred times what it was really worth, but he didn't dare haggle after what had happened.

Just hoping it would work in a consoling manner, like a healing ointment on the wound. And yes ... a smile appeared on her lips and he saw a glimpse of hope in her eyes when he handed over the money into her wrinkled hands.

She quickly put two nicely gold-wrapped, spherical sweets in the box with the words: 'Give this to your best friend, they hold positive magic.' And now this is my little something extra for my twenty-seventh birthday, sweets in a black antique box. They look quite delicious, so I'm going to try one. Well, hmmm ... tasty! They taste of heavenly milk chocolate! But luckily for me, they don't give me a special feeling. I glance at the black, sparkling box with carved Indian figurines. My