

LIFE IN TECHNICOLOR PIXELS

by

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VIRGO 2017 PREDICTIONS, Romance: Good news for socially awkward loners, divorcees, ambitious workaholics, and other assorted distraught individuals. The planetary systems cluster, bringing Venus and Mars unusually close for the first time in a while, as both travel the Zodiacal circle rather fast. It may be your chance to finally make your move, and armed with Venus's charm and Mars's cataclysmic determination, the odds are with you in your effort to find a partner and fall madly in love. Finance: ...

“Interesting,” Nicolas murmured, as he dumped his magazine on the plastic table in front of him. He was literally the last person to believe in Zodiac signs, but his life had been so upside down that even a rational-minded individual like him would try to find solace in banalities. He turned on the coffee machine, and as he waited, his eyes settled on the multicolored Murano cat beside it. That porcelain cat had cost a small fortune. Annette had given it to him three years ago on New Year's Eve. They were visiting Venice, and the locals had told them that it was impossible to leave the region without visiting the Isole di Murano, where skilled craftsmen had been making glass since the 1200s.

Annette was the love of his life. She wasn't Parisian like Nicolas, she came from Alsace, and being fluent in German and French, she worked as a translator and interpreter at the same audit firm where Nicolas had decided to work for a few years after completing his studies in Paris. Their salaries at the firm were more than satisfying, and together they indulged in obscene luxuries that after their break were impossible to be divided. He poured the coffee into a clay mug and smelled it, closing his eyes. He opened the balcony door and went outside. His apartment overlooked the financial district of La Défense. Annette would have loved it here.

Their relationship had deteriorated after Annette's penchant for alcohol had started to affect her performance at work to the point that nobody could ignore it anymore. He had tried to reason with her, even threatened her, and after a business conference where she was found raging deliriously in her hotel room, he decided to call her family. Her alcoholism had reached a peak, and Nicolas thought that it was irreversible; she could barely hold a conversation anymore. The family had decided to take her home with them, and while he was away on a business trip, they had gone into the house he shared with Annette and took almost everything. *It's better this way, and you should be grateful*, he told himself. He had grown very tired of life in a small town, he was experiencing pangs of nostalgia for Paris, and during a visit there a few months back, he had the chance to meet some former colleagues who informed him that his job prospects there were more attractive than he cared to admit.

He paid one last visit to Annette to formally break things up. She took the news somberly, but Annette just like him was a realist and very calculating. Popular belief has it that opposites attract, but Nicolas knew from the first time he set his eyes on her that they were the same, and he adored her for this reason. They were both perfect. He still was.

His return to Paris was celebrated by family and friends, and networking turned out to be far easier than he had anticipated. One evening during a dinner at a friendly couple's house, he

had been informed that a rapidly growing start-up called Technicolor was in search of a Marketing Manager. Technicolor was one of those hyped-up places where engineers worked 18-hour long days in order to come up with the newest and hottest apps and photo filters that would eventually be sold to large corporations as parts of specific portfolios. Nicolas took a card and promised to give it a thought. He had to start somewhere.

He was about to finish his coffee, but he couldn't stop looking at the streets of Défense flooding with streams of people going to work. He could notice the different tribes of workers easily. People in cardigans and trench coats were most definitely working professionals, whereas he could spot air-hostesses having a cigarette and a quick coffee outside their hotels, their next departures imminent. Once in a while, he could see younger people dressed in brighter colors going to the Paris X Nanterre nearby. He had applied there once and failed. Nicolas went inside the house to get ready. He was going to formally present himself to the Director of Technicolor and the rest of the staff. His interview one week earlier had been successful, and it was the first positive thing that had happened to him in a good while.

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Daria had arrived at work earlier that morning. She was curious to meet the new Marketing Manager, and though she didn't admit it to Eloise, the chatty secretary, she too had searched for him online. Daria was ethnically Russian, and she had started to work at Technicolor two years earlier. In her late twenties, she was a skilled software engineer with an eye for detail and impeccable professional skills. She joined the team with only one reference letter from Caroline Morenau, her mentor at University, and within two years, she assumed the position of Senior Engineer. During her studies, she had achieved impressive fluency, and the only thing that gave her away as a foreigner was her heavy accent. And her high cheekbones. "Slavic..." her father voice crossed her mind as a melody.

"Daria, we need you here." Eloise's voice brought her back to her senses. "This new bunch of wannabees has been here for two weeks now, and this place seems like a kindergarten."

"I'll take it from here, thank you, Eloise," Daria said. She herself had suggested that she mentor the new interns and agreed to guide ten of them every two months. It was a tiring task, but she didn't mind it for two reasons. First, she knew that when the time came to fill the COO position, they would seriously consider her, since she would have had hands-on experience in every department at Technicolor by then. And second, the interns weren't much younger than her, and they were fun to be around. Occasionally they would go out for a quick lunch or a drink together, and these were the only instances when she would let her guard down and enjoy herself.

"What's the matter, show me," she told Jerome. She blew cigarette smoke as she approached. He was the brightest of this group, but he lacked discipline, and she thought of him as sloppy.

"My graphs don't work," he replied. "And I'm pretty sure my contract mentioned something about smoking in interior spaces, something about a French regulation?" His remark irritated her, but he was right. But it was this way, some people channeled their frustration into eating, and she was a compulsive smoker.

"What did you want to do initially?" Daria asked. She could feel her strength ebbing and her temperature rising.

“I tried to apply the Sepia filter in different shades, but the outcome is different than I thought,” Jerome responded. Daria looked towards the entrance hall and saw a guy in his forties walk into the plastic transparent wall that separated the entrance space from the foyer. She struggled to contain herself and not laugh in front of the interns.

“Leave the PC on, and I’ll have a look when I’m done,” she said.

“Are you alright, sir?” she asked the man with a polite smile.

“I am fine, thank you,” he responded cheerfully. “I am afraid that for the rest of the day, I will be seeing things in technicolor, though,” he told her, looking embarrassed. “Let me introduce myself and try to save as much dignity as I have left: Nicolas Grimaud.”

Of course you are, she thought.

“Daria Durova,” she said and shook his hand firmly. “I apologize for the plastic wall, we’ve been wanting to stick something on it, as this is hardly the first time someone has hurt himself against it. But to be fair, it was made by a team of former interns, and it changes color every thirty minutes. If you look carefully, you’ll see it is connected to a plug. Although the colors are not the way we initially wanted them, and it takes a certain brightness to notice them. In daylight, I mean,” Daria said and kept smiling.

There was something uncanny about her, and she gave a rather negative vibe to Nicolas who was observing her in doubt. “I see you two have met with each other,” Marc Chevalier, the Director, said from the top of the stairs. Nicolas hadn’t even noticed that there were stairs. This place was bizarre, the interior was almost exclusively painted in bright colors, and the decoration was repulsive at best. Circuit boards, posters of Modernist paintings, and several handwritten notes hung from the walls.

“We ask each intern to write something before they leave,” Daria said as she led him to the stairs. “I noticed that you were looking at them.” Nicolas struggled to conceal his indignation. The floor was atrocious and the tiles were too small, this made it almost impossible to walk on them without stepping on the cracks, a precursor of bad luck.

The Director’s office was in equally poor taste to his great disappointment. It wasn’t even a real office. He simply had a larger space for himself upstairs where it was quieter, and he had no assistant or secretary. “Yes, I know it sounds strange,” the Director responded after Nicolas had asked. “We used to have more administrative assistants, but at the moment, we only have Eloise who is based on the ground floor.”

“Isn’t she overwhelmed by the workload?” Nicolas asked as he sat down. “Not really,” the Director responded and opened a box with mints and other candies. “We have proceeded with some major changes over the years, and we owe it all to this bright lady over here.” He pointed to Daria, who was clearing out a nearby office.

“How come?” Nicolas asked, declining a treat offered by the Director.

“She showed up one day with statistics and our account details of the past year. She told me that we were overspending on administrative personnel and suggested that we start recruiting interns from a couple of Universities from the Faculties of Engineering and Economics to work on our products and to occupy the administrative positions respectively. All this on an unpaid basis, it is true, but before you accuse us of exploitation, let me clarify that we provide

for their transportation, and our name on their CVs is a guarantee. She supervises and mentors both teams.”

“I see,” Nicolas responded and was now looking her in the eyes. “Convenient for all, indeed,” he said, and he could swear that her eyes shone.

The meeting went on for forty-five minutes, with the Director talking about their share of the market and the need to set clear goals as soon as possible. Nicolas thought that this would be a temporary gig. He couldn’t relate to these people, these goals, this attitude, and this ambience at all. Only twelve or eighteen months, he thought. As soon as I’m back on my feet, I’ll find something else in finance. After the meeting, they took a brief tour, which Daria joined as well, to his great annoyance.

“What do you think of our space?” Daria asked him.

“I couldn’t tell the difference between this place and a school cafeteria, to be honest,” Nicolas replied. “Before leaving Paris I briefly contemplated working in the tech industry, and the place I visited was nothing like Technicolor.”

Daria stopped walking. “There’s no point in discussing predeceasing times, Mr. Grimaud.”

“Do you mean *preceding* by any chance?” he stared back.

“Are you familiar with Darwinian theory, Mr. Grimaud?” She seemed unaffected and cold as ice. “This is the most rapidly developing industry, innovation is applied everywhere. We wanted a functioning working space, and that’s why we ordered cubicles. In fact, I was the one to suggest it after a trip to the States. I travel there regularly in order to inform myself about new developments, and I noticed that this type of working space is efficient for them. Whereas you seem to have signed up for a job without bothering to have a look at the place where you’ll be spending twelve to fifteen hours each day. Good afternoon.”

He watched her as she walked up the stairs. There was something repulsive and mesmerizing about her. He left thinking that from tomorrow on, he would have to deal with her on a daily basis.

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Daria and Jerome sat at Les Deux Magots, her favorite cafe in the entire city. It was classy enough to see and be seen by the Parisian bourgeoisie who inhabited the nearby Quartier Latin, but it was also approachable enough to attract students and artists. The interior was painted a warm green, and the chairs and tables were dark brown with massive, comfortable pillows. A group of four friends sat to their right, giggling and playing with their mobiles and tablets. Across the room, two elderly ladies drank tea and chatted cheerfully. Every time Daria came to this café, those ladies were sitting in the exact same spot. She could feel her forehead burning. She had a fever.

“Would you like us to pay and leave?” asked Jerome.

“Yes, please,” she replied. “I’ll take a cab home.”

It was 18:30, an icy Parisian afternoon. Daria watched the people passing by. Some well dressed, content, others tired carrying their backpacks, a few couples window shopping, others hurrying to catch the next subway. She remembered her own Kafkaesque childhood in post-Soviet Russia. Her family faced crippling poverty. Her mother passed away when she

was an infant, and she was raised by her grandparents, as her father would leave them for several weeks at a time to work in construction sites on the outskirts of Moscow. Daria's only consolation was school and especially math and physics, in which she excelled. After her graduation, she was awarded the gold medal, the highest distinction in the country.

She had been offered a scholarship as expected, but Daria wanted to leave her country and pursue her dreams abroad. So Paris was her next station. This year marked her tenth year in France, a country that accommodated her and became her home. She had built a life for herself here, and she had set her goals a long time ago. The meeting with the Director and Nicolas had left her in a bad mood. Nobody mentioned the opening for the COO position next year, but it was possible that the team's newest addition would try to challenge her plans and go after it. From what she gathered during the meeting, his skills and knowledge were not impressive, and his personality was rather meek. He most definitely didn't have the necessary skill set to navigate the tech industry so his financial skills mattered little. But he was well connected; she couldn't explain otherwise how he learned about Technicolor after being absent from Paris for so long.

She hailed a cab and told the driver, "Rue de Belleville in the 19th, please." She looked at her reflection in the window. She looked older than her actual age and very tired. "*Look at yourself in the mirror and remember who you are, where you come from,*" she thought she heard her father say. Her mobile blipped. "Dinner 2night?" the text read. "Sorry, not tonight. Going home. Tired+sick. X" she replied. It was from Frederic, her former boyfriend of four years and one of her best friends in the entire world. Frederic was one of the first people she had met during her studies. He was a student of History and Ethnology, the childhood friend of a former classmate. They had broken up because the sparkle had gone away, but they were still fond of each other, and Daria associated him with her new beginnings and her first carefree days in her new homeland.

Daria entered her apartment, threw away her coat, purse, and shoes, and sank into the sofa. She remained there for a few moments without moving. She could hear laughter in the apartment next to hers. Her new neighbors had arrived a couple of months back to settle in Paris, they were from Senegal. This neighborhood was diverse, and Daria loved the tiny African and Asian restaurants nearby. She could hear the teenage daughter complaining about the noise as she was trying to study. *Do not complain, Daria thought, you'll miss those voices and noises a few years from now.* She closed her eyes and imagined her grandmother cooking at their rusty kitchen back in Moscow. They used to live on the twentieth floor of a tower block, four people squeezed into less than forty square meters. Her grandparents, her father when he was home, and herself. Her family... She opened her eyes. Her Parisian apartment wasn't large either, and she was renting of course. But it had personality. The walls were decorated with photos of her recent, happy past with friends and photos of her family. She had to look at them every day, and then she would take a good look in the mirror and remind herself why she was there. Her eyes set on a particular photo of Frederic and her. She smiled. It was taken on the night she had become a French citizen. She had gone a long road, and she wouldn't let Nicolas or anyone else take what was rightfully hers. The only thing that she hadn't contributed to Technicolor was its founding. The rest was all her.

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"Would you like company?" Nicolas asked. He had been observing the most impressive woman he had seen since his arrival in Paris, and he decided to talk to her. She was brunette in her mid-thirties, well dressed with rather expensive accessories.

“I’m afraid not, I am waiting for someone,” she responded. He was having a drink at La Blague, which according to his friends was the newest and most quirky addition to Parisian life. He could see why. The place was full of people working in fashion and publishing, and most of the women were eerie and dreamy. He was in the 8th district, the priciest in Paris.

“Are you sure?” he insisted. “Your company doesn’t seem to be coming.”

She barely laid her eyes on him. She paid, took her sweet time putting on her coat, and left in the most contemptuous manner she could.

It doesn’t matter he thought. *She was most likely an escort. No more women going after my money. And what a pretentious name,* he thought. *Blague... It literally means ‘stupid joke,’ but all I see is people taking themselves too seriously. Parisian snobbery was one thing he hadn’t missed one bit.*

Long gone were the days when he could have any woman he wanted. His looks were deteriorating fast, and the uncertainty about his future despite the job he had landed was affecting him. He paid for his drinks and left. The stars were barely visible. It was windy, and dark clouds had started to gather, a storm was imminent. He lit a cigarette and looked at his watch. It was 20:30, plenty of time until the last train.

“Can I talk to you?” He heard a voice behind him. A teenage boy, about eighteen.

“How can I help you?” Nicolas asked.

“Are you interested in something like this by any chance?” the boy asked, revealing a tiny plastic bag of white pills. Nicolas hesitated. Flashbacks of vacations with Annette in the Greek islands and Spain passed before his eyes. He didn’t say anything, just gave the boy two hundred euros. The boy gave him a bag and left.

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Three months had passed since Nicolas’s first day at work. He was doing well, but many things still bothered him about his workplace. The most serious was Daria’s arrogant attitude, her watchful eye, and her unofficial army of besotted, incompetent interns who looked at her the way newborn puppies look at their mother. Jerome, who would soon depart and had already started discussing entry-level positions after his graduation, was the worse. He intentionally hid important information from Nicolas, and he constantly had her back. Nicolas initially believed that there was something romantic going on between them, but during an evening out, Jerome had brought his girlfriend, and the two of them were overly familiar and friendly with Daria. *Idiotic lackey*, Nicolas thought. Today was an important day for Nicolas. He would give a presentation to Technicolor’s first foreign investors. If it went well, it would be his first big personal success at work.

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Daria was sitting at Les Deux Magots in no hurry. She was about to miss two rather important meetings at the office, but she didn’t care. The team-building meeting could start with or without her. As for the information-sharing meeting, Jerome would be there and so would Eloise, who had been asked to keep notes. She checked her face in the front camera of her mobile. She had lost weight recently, and her chain-smoking had started to show on her face. She threw her mobile into her purse. A few minutes later, Caroline crossed the street. Daria touched the thin golden chain under her shirt. On it hung the cross her grandma had

given to her with a tiny evil eye attached. She would get through this. Caroline entered the café, hugging Daria warmly.

Caroline was an important figure in Daria's Parisian life. She taught at the École Polytechnique where Daria studied, and she had been an extraordinary mentor. A few years ago, she launched a University publication to promote transparency in tech and finance. As Paris bloomed as a high-tech hub, her experiment had evolved into a respectable monthly publication which she ran alongside other academics. Caroline's unconditional help and care had inspired Daria to start the internship program at Technicolor. Having all those students under her supervision was a powerful advantage for a variety of reasons, but she enjoyed sharing her expertise with them and occasionally helped them with their assignments.

"How have you been, my darling?" Caroline asked her. "You look tired."

"It's been a difficult period," Daria said. "I wanted to ask a favor."

"Just name it," said Caroline, spooning sugar into her coffee.

"We have a new colleague whose moves are suspicious. I know you have an excellent team of journalists who specialize in financial news, and I trust that one of them could use their sources to help me check out a few things about him that don't sit well with me."

"Is that all? It sounds rather personal." Caroline loved Daria as a daughter, but she couldn't help but think that she sometimes crossed the line. "Asking a respectable reporter to violate his ethics and abuse his sources is serious business. I can't ask for something like that without concrete evidence, Daria, I am sure you know that."

Daria was pensive. "That means no...?" she asked without looking at Caroline.

"I'm afraid so," Caroline said, "I can't and won't jeopardize *Helvetica* because of a petty hunch. If something serious is going on that's worth our attention, then you should talk to me anew, but not like this." They remained silent and stirred their coffees. She had changed a lot, Caroline thought. She was always goal-driven, but now she was acting borderline paranoid, actively neglecting the people who cared about her. "When was the last time you visited your family?" Caroline asked as they prepared to leave.

"Easter" Daria said.

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"Thanks for meeting me, it means the world to me." Nicolas shook Laurence's hand.

"Anything for an old friend," said Laurence with a smile. They were having brunch at the cafeteria in the foyer of Laurence's workplace. "How do you like the building? You've been here before, right?" They were at Tour D2, one of the most impressive high-rise buildings in Paris.

"Yes, I have. It is magnificent," Nicolas said. "I was excited by your email."

"The moment I learned about the opening, I instantly thought of you. I think you'll fit in nicely here. You will be seriously considered for the General Manager position, and I believe that my endorsement will assist you. Tour D2 is home to multiple companies of the same conglomerate as well as to a bank that works closely with us. If everything goes well, you will be able to start effective immediately. The opportunities are endless. We can break your

contract with Technicolor, but it is going to take some time, which is why I don't want you to let them know yet."

"Thank God," whispered Nicolas and lit a cigarette. "I was desperate when I arrived, and I took the first job I found, but this job just pays the bills, you know? It's not *me*."

"I understand," Laurence said, "we've all been there."

They sat overlooking the large fountain in the square in front of them. The energy of the place was unreal, smartly dressed people wouldn't stop to catch a breath. Nicolas thought how many years of his life he had wasted away from Paris. This time, he would do it right.

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"So tell me what you got," Daria said. It was a Sunday morning, and she and Jerome were walking through the Catacombs of Paris.

"Why are we spending our Sunday at an underground burial site again?" Jerome asked. He loved Daria like a big sister; she had impressed him since her first visit to his University, and he was over the moon when she included him in her team of interns. But she was tough to deal with, and during periods of intense stress, she became paranoid and self-centered.

"I've never been here before," she said. "Have you?"

"I live here, remember? When I was a teen, it was cool to take your date to this mysterious place. Then you would meet everyone from school, but it didn't matter," Jerome said. "Listen, D. I'm not sure we want to go down this road. A friend of mine at La Blague confirmed that he is a user, but we have no idea whether it's worth ratting him out. He isn't satisfied with his work, everyone can see that. I don't think he wants to stay for long."

"And what if he does?" She gave Jerome a piercing look. "Does your friend have photos?" Daria rushed out of the Catacombs. She could hardly breathe and needed light.

"No, but he has the security camera footage of him using and buying during three different evenings," Jerome said.

"A person who buys drugs off the street shouldn't be let anywhere near a manager's office," Daria said. "Ask him how much he wants in order to do what he has to do."

Jerome wished that he had never told her that his girlfriend had seen Nicolas at La Blague. He himself often felt the need to let off steam, and a pill every now and then wouldn't make anyone an addict. With the stress at work and the pressure to stay on top, they were almost a necessity. Plus, he had come to like Nicolas. The guy was genuine, and his bizarre habits were funny. Jerome had initially thought he was OCD. He recalled how once before an important meeting, Nicolas had knocked on wood for good luck and everyone had burst out laughing. He didn't want to do it, but if he didn't, he could kiss Technicolor goodbye. Daria would never forgive him.

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"Parisian authorities in a coordinated effort have seized drugs, money, and other items worth almost twenty million euros from the upscale coffee-bar La Blague after an anonymous tip that drugs and illegal alcohol were being distributed at what many consider the most trendy, upscale bar in town.... Marc Chevalier watched the news in despair. The Chief of the Judicial

Police himself had called him earlier on to let him know that his Marketing Manager was about to be arrested, accused of buying, using, and perhaps distributing drugs, though the last accusation had yet to be confirmed. Technicolor had been his life since his divorce, and he had invested all his time, capital, and energy in the company. This publicity was the last thing he needed. He was angry with himself for not checking Grimaud's background more carefully. Now he was going to put a scarlet letter on them forever.

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"Mr Grimaud, how long has this been going on?" the police officer asked Nicolas. She couldn't have been over twenty-five, and she displayed remarkable professionalism.

"I can't say with certainty," he said. "It probably started a few months ago as an occasional thing, which is what it is."

"So you don't consider yourself an addict?"

"No."

"And you don't have the name or phone number of your supplier?"

"It was always the same kid, and last time there was another boy with him. But no names or contact details." He was in despair. His career was over. He couldn't wrap his mind around what had happened, how and why it happened. Technicolor was already in the past, so was the job offer at Tour D2. His name would be everywhere, and nobody would touch him now.

"You will need a lawyer regardless of the outcome and the final accusations. Legal representation is mandatory in these cases. We can find you one..." He couldn't hear or see her clearly. He felt as if the room was swirling around him. Everything seemed like tiny multicolored pixels. He couldn't get a clear picture of the police officers or the room. "This isn't the end, Mr. Grimaud. I know it seems this way, but it isn't. We see things like this every day. It may be your chance for a new beginning." *How many more beginnings? he thought. How unfair was that? How did this happen?*

* * *

Nine months had gone by since the incident with Nicolas Grimaud, and nobody recalled him or his name at Technicolor. Daria was throwing a goodbye party for the third group of interns they had during the year, and Jerome had settled into his own cubicle on the ground floor. Everyone seemed happy and content, there was music and plenty of drinks and food.

"Daria, the air company called to verify your reservation. What should I tell them?" Eloise asked.

"I totally forgot about it, tell them I want the tickets and will arrange the payment later. Thank you." She was going to spend some weeks in Moscow close to her family. Upon her return, she would have to give a new battle for the COO position opening in four months, and she had to recharge.

"There's also someone asking you in the foyer."

Caroline was there, elegant and gracious as always. Daria smiled. "I was going to call you. It's been an awfully busy period for me."

“I am not here to pay a social visit, Daria. Although I was curious to come to your workplace, since you never invited me, not even once.”

Caroline’s words shook her. “I’ve been meaning to…” Daria tried to explain, but Caroline stopped her.

“Listen, I want you to know that you will forever be one of my most cherished students. I’ve watched you grow up for the past decade, and your progress has been impressive. You embraced the growth mindset in ways few people do. I know what you did. I only had to put the dots together after our meeting. You were so distraught that you didn’t try to conceal your hatred for this man. And I have inside information that he was going to quit Technicolor in a matter of weeks if not days. He’s totally collapsed, but thank God he has loyal friends to care for him. You didn’t when you arrived, but you had me. You’ve transformed into someone I don’t recognize anymore, D. Your ethics and behavior have changed in ways I don’t condone. I am therefore returning the abstract you sent to *Helvetica* and letting you know that Technicolor’s study won’t be published. I don’t wish to see you anymore, but I wish you all the best in life.”

Daria took the envelope from Caroline unable to utter a word. She watched Caroline put on her coat and shades and leave the office, and she was unable to tell her to stop or to run after her. She stayed in the foyer for a few minutes and threw the envelope in the trash bin. *Everything has a price*, she thought. Then she reached for her mobile phone and typed in her credit card details to pay for her tickets.

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I chose to focus on the myth of Narcissus by creating two characters who display narcissistic traits but also fears. I hope that my story challenges my readers and makes them relate to, despise, or hopefully examine Daria and Nicolas with sympathy. I believe that we all behave narcissistically to some extent. My protagonists’ expectations and narcissism manifest through erratic behavior and immoral choices. I hope that readers will examine the characters critically and eventually rethink the myth from different angles.