
CryptoEurope

Gabriel Véliz

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CHAPTER I - THE MAN ON THE OTHER SIDE

Madrid. Tuesday. 8:17 a.m. *The day began without permission.*

Julián Herrera began his mornings in complete silence. Not out of mysticism, nor out of habit: simply to prevent noise from confirming his decline.

The coffee, cold before the first sip. His laptop, turned on since 6:50. His inbox: nothing urgent, but full of reminders of his irrelevance—automatic legal newsletters, invitations to webinars that no one would open, two offers of collaboration "without a budget, but with visibility."

The September light filtered through the blinds as if it too were hesitating to enter.

He lived in a rented apartment in Chamberí. Neutral. Temporary. Like everything in his life since he was fired. Gray sofa. Glass table. A bookshelf with barely two survivors: an old edition of *the Treaty on European Commercial Law and a decorative katana*, a gift from a Japanese client from another era. When he was still someone who was given gifts.

He was reading a useless contract for the third time: an Estonian-based company wanted to open a subsidiary in Zaragoza with no employees, no physical address, and no apparent purpose.

Then the email arrived.

Subject: Confidential inquiry – open fees Sender: Echelon Strategy Group – Private Inquiry Division

Unrecognizable name. Swiss domain. Message encrypted with PGP.

Julian raised an eyebrow. He put on his glasses. Not because of tired eyes. Because of protocol. One of the few gestures that still gave him a sense of control.

He decrypted the message. He read it. He read it again.

"Your profile has been recommended to us as an independent professional with experience in corporate real estate transactions and limited visibility. We are seeking local representation for a discreet acquisition in Brussels. Clean operation. Immediate payment. Interested in moving forward before Friday. We will pay you a commission of €25,000 upon receiving your agreement. Are you available for a video call today?" Signed: V.S.

There was no contact number. Just a link to a virtual room.

Julian closed his laptop. He walked to the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator. He stared at an expired yogurt.

He didn't need to know any more.

That wasn't an operation. It was a question.

And what disturbed him most... was that it didn't sound like a trap. It sounded like an invitation.

CHAPTER 2 - TRANSFER

Madrid – Brussels. Tuesday. 1:00 p.m. *It wasn't a meeting. It was a selection process.*

The virtual room was empty when Julian logged in. He was expecting an assistant, an accountant. Perhaps a Swiss lawyer with a spreadsheet voice.

What appeared on the screen was something else.

An older man. Well into his sixties. Not aged, but bent toward solemnity. White hair, combed with geometry. Dark suit, no tie. A gold pin on his lapel.

The kind of person who speaks slowly. Not because he is slow. Because he can.

"Mr. Herrera," he said, in neutral English. "Thank you for your time."

Julian nodded.

"I'm here out of curiosity. Not out of commitment."

"Curiosity, if well remunerated, often outweighs commitment."

Pause. Brief smiles. As if they were sharing expensive wine, not 1,500 km apart and military-grade encryption.

"My name is Viktor Sorokin," he said. "I represent an international organization dedicated to the design of new financial infrastructures. We operate under several names. None of them important.

What matters," he added, "is that we are discreet, and we pay on time.

Julian raised an eyebrow.

"And what does that have to do with a semi-retired lawyer in Chamberi?"

"Precisely that. You are no longer part of the system. But you still understand it. And no one owes you any favors.

That makes you useful.

"It also makes me expendable."

"Sometimes it's the same thing."

Viktor pressed something off-camera. A PDF appeared on the screen. Swiss letterhead. Financial language. Confidentiality agreement included.

"The assignment is simple," he said. "Acquisition of a property in Brussels. Direct deal. Basic legal representation. All the details are there. We also sent it to you by email.

Julian didn't open the file.

"What kind of property?"

"A building on Rue de la Loi. Formerly the headquarters of a European Commission delegation. Now: empty. Legal. Clean.

"And what do they want to set up there?"

—An office.

—What kind?

Sorokin smiled slightly.

"A quiet one."

A gust of wind blew the curtain behind Julian. He didn't move. He just measured.

"You haven't given me a single reason to trust any of this."

"I don't expect you to."

A new email arrived. Subject: *Bank transfer confirmation* Amount: EUR 25,000 Destination: your personal account at Triodos Bank, Madrid.

It had already been credited.

—What if I say no?

—Then you've been well compensated for a courtesy call. And you won't hear from us again.

—What if I say yes?

"Then, later on, we'll ask you for something else."

The screen went blank.

CHAPTER 3 - LENTILS AND DUBIOUS CONTRACTS

Madrid. Tuesday. 6:42 p.m. *Money up front, questions later.*

"Have you signed something again without reading the fine print?"

Teresa Lafuente was standing by the window, wearing a plaid jacket, a steaming Tupperware container in her hand as if it were a homemade bomb. She couldn't understand why anyone would turn down lentils with chorizo on a rainy day. Much less to check an email.

"I haven't signed anything," said Julián, opening a beer.

"So the money that just went into your account is... a Norwegian inheritance?"

"An advance. A one-off consultation."

"And you still believe in that?" He put the Tupperware on the table. It sounded louder than necessary. "You know what this looks like? Money laundering. But the subtle kind."

"You're exaggerating."

"I'm applying logic. Someone with a Bond villain name sends you money in advance, asks you to buy a building in Brussels, and doesn't want any questions. What could go wrong?"

Julian didn't answer. He was checking the property deed in the Belgian land registry. Everything added up. The building existed. Clean title. Price... low.

And that was what bothered him the most.

"Have you heard of a consulting firm called *Echelon Strategy Group*?"

Teresa raised her eyebrows as if he had asked her about a dating app for notaries.

"Echelon what?"

"They operate out of Switzerland. Nothing official. They don't have a website. Just a half-dead LinkedIn profile with a logo straight out of *Gattaca*.

"And the guy who talked to you?"

"Viktor Sorokin."

Now we're talking. Silence. Teresa sat down. The chair creaked.

"Wait. The Russian?"

"Do you know him?"

"No. But that name came up in a report that went through the National Court. They linked him to 'rapid financial transition' operations in African countries." Suspicious movements. Digital platforms that appeared and disappeared. Nothing was ever proven, of course. The guy doesn't exist in any records... But his shadow appears whenever money moves faster than normal.

Julian drank as if he had discovered gas in the kitchen.

"So he's not just rich.

"No. He's dangerous. And he knows how to appear to be something else."

He got up. He grabbed his bag.

"I'm going to see what I can find. But you, please, don't do anything else today. Don't answer. Don't sign. Don't transfer. Don't take calls from millionaires with dictator names.

"What about the lentils?"

"In the fridge. You deserve them. For being an idiot."

She left. Slammed the door discreetly. Not another word.

Julían was left alone. With the beer, the lentils... and the rain beating against the windows.

He opened the PDF.

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Name of the building: Résidence Athenaeum Location: Rue de la Loi, two blocks from the European Council.

It had once been his. During Barroso's term, it housed a special projects unit of the ECB.

Now: empty. Abandoned. Forgotten.

Or so they said.

CHAPTER 4 - INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE SHADOWS

Madrid. Wednesday. 9:12 a.m. *Unsigned instructions, destinations without a map.*

The address Sorokin had sent was not in central Brussels, but in Uccle. A residential neighborhood. Discreet embassies, retired diplomats, financiers with double surnames and accounts in ambiguous latitudes. The kind of place where dogs have last names and contracts don't go through a notary.

The email arrived at 3:17 a.m. No subject line. No greeting. Just one line:

"Check the property yourself. It'll be open on Thursday at 6:00 p.m. No cameras. Use the back entrance. Let me know if you'll handle the whole contract. V.S."

Not even a legal signature. No exit clause.

Julián poured himself some reheated coffee and sat down in front of his laptop. He stared at the message as if it might delete itself. It didn't.

He dialed a number he hadn't used in almost two years. Four rings. Enough to pretend he was hesitating.

"Julián."

Amélie Chevalier's voice sounded exactly the same as always: clear, precise, unadorned. She could recite an ECB report with the tone of someone reading Rimbaud.

"Your number is still active.

"And you only call when you get into trouble.

—Do you have five minutes?

"Two. Talk."

"Does Viktor Sorokin ring a bell?"

Silence. Not technical. Heavy.

"Are you asking as a consultant... or as an idiot?"

—I don't know yet.

—Then don't decide anything until we talk. Are you in Madrid?

—Yes.

—Flight SN3721, this afternoon. It's in your name. I booked it an hour ago.

Don't make me lose my money.

"Are you quoting me?

"I'm saving your neck. That's different."

He hung up.

Julian stood there with the phone in his hand. The black screen seemed to be telling him what he didn't want to read: *You're already in.*

He walked to the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator. The lentils were still there, untouched. He closed it. He went to pack his suitcase.

Outside, Madrid hadn't noticed anything. But he had.

Meanwhile, in another corner of the city, Teresa Lafuente leaned over her laptop as if she were conducting an interrogation.

She had contacted an old friend from her days in the judiciary, now with Interpol. She asked him a single question:

"What do you know about Viktor Sorokin?"

The answer was long.

Multiple identities. Indirect involvement in financial movements in Africa, the Balkans, Estonia. Sudden collapses. Transfers to tax havens. Temporary disappearances. Nothing was ever proven. But the name always reappeared. In whispers.

"Son of a bitch," Teresa muttered, turning up the volume on the coffee maker as if it were a siren.

At 5:46 p.m., Julian crossed the Barajas airport with a backpack, his passport, and an envelope with Sorokin's documents.

He had chosen the window seat. He always did. He liked to watch the cities recede as the plane took off.

On a silent screen, the headlines scrolled by:

"European Parliament debates sovereign cryptocurrencies." "Lagarde rules out digital euro without state supervision." "Massive hack of the European Banking Authority—no comment."

Julián paid no attention.

But someone else did.

From the VIP lounge, Amélie Chevalier watched the same headlines. A glass of white wine in her hand. A file stamped *CONFIDENTIEL – B.C.E.* on her lap.

When she saw Julián walk by, she smiled. Her first smile in weeks.

CHAPTER 5 - THE BUILDING

Brussels. Thursday. 5:53 p.m. *Structural silence.*

The Rue du Coq narrowed as if Brussels wanted to hide the building between folds of cobblestones and retired diplomats. The sky was leaden. The air smelled of wet earth and diesel. Brussels in its purest form: damp, gray, discreet.

Julián got out of the taxi a block early. Instinct. No one was on the street except for a guy walking a dog who seemed more concerned about the weather than the stranger with the functional backpack.

He walked to the indicated number. No sign. No doorbell. A metal mailbox with no name. A back door with an old, half-rusty lock. It gave way at the first turn of the key. The one that came in the envelope.

He went inside.

Total silence.

Not the clean hum of a new building. Stone silence. Waiting silence.

The hallway was dark, but not completely. Light filtered through half-closed blinds. It smelled of dampness, old paper... and copper. A metallic note in the air.

He climbed a worn marble staircase. The elevator had a handwritten sign:

Out of order. Thank you for your patience. There wasn't even a corporate logo. No sign of use.

On the first floor, a door stood ajar.

The room was spacious. High ceilings. Moldings. Empty shelves. On the floor, clean rectangles where heavy furniture once stood. A desk. Filing cabinets. Perhaps a safe.

Almost everything had disappeared. But not everything.

In the back, behind a curtain, a windowless room. Metal table. Electrical panel dismantled. To one side, a box of modern connections. Visible labels:

NODE-2 CORE-UPS SIG.REDUND

Julián touched a cable. Cold. But the dust had been cleaned off. A clean line in the grime of the panel. Someone had been there. Not long ago.

He climbed higher. Two floors. Selective emptiness. Not abandonment. Planned absence.

On the fourth floor, he found a room overlooking the street. Blinds open. From there, you could see the European Parliament. Two blocks away. Hidden behind its own concrete bureaucracy.

Julián fell silent.

And then he saw it.

A thin notebook, resting on the windowsill. Not covered in dust. Not hidden. Placed there.

He opened it.

Just one sentence, in French:

Ce que nous construisons ne sera visible que quand tout aura disparu. What we are building will only be visible when everything else has disappeared.

There was no signature. No further text.

He closed the notebook. He put it away.

He walked downstairs slowly. He left the building without closing the door. The lock wasn't worth it.

Outside, the city remained indifferent.

But he was not.

He knew that building wasn't abandoned. It was waiting.

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And the silence was part of the countdown.

CHAPTER 6 - PLAN B

Brussels. Thursday. 9:17 p.m.

The café was in a nondescript corner of the European quarter. French name, Scandinavian decor. Minimalist, expensive, harmless. Like modern diplomacy.

Amélie was already there. Sitting by the window, coatless, her hair tied back, a glass of red wine in front of her. She looked like she had stepped out of a postcard designed by the ECB's press department.

Julian greeted her with a curt wave. She didn't get up.

"I didn't think you'd come," she said bluntly. "I didn't think you'd book a flight in my name," he replied, hanging up his jacket.

"You've always responded better to decisions than suggestions."

He sat down across from her. He ordered a coffee with no intention of drinking it. He just wanted something to hold in his hands.

"Sorokin," he said. "What do you know?"

Amélie set the glass down on the table with a soft *clack*.

"Enough not to talk about him on the phone."

"Talk now, then."

She looked at him. She sized him up.

"He's not a banker. Not a politician. Not a spy. He's an operator. An architect of parallel systems. He appears when traditional financial power shows a crack..."

and offers himself as the solution. When he leaves, the crack is a fissure. And someone has lost control of their currency.

"And what do I have to do with that?"

—You're useful because you're not tied to anything. Legally operational. Institutionally invisible.

Julian didn't respond.

She continued.

"For years, the Uccle building was an auxiliary facility of the ECB. Backup systems. Encryption hardware. It was officially closed in 2016. But part of the infrastructure remained active.

"I saw it. It didn't look abandoned.

—It wasn't abandoned. It was being prepared.

Pause. All you could hear was the mechanical noise of the coffee machine. Jazz in the background. Bland. Inevitable.

"What are they setting up there?" he asked. "A server? A data center?"

"A financial system."

He frowned.

"Excuse me?"

Amélie leaned toward him. Her voice dropped a notch.

"They're creating a currency. Cryptographic. Autonomous. Designed to replace the euro... in case of collapse.

Julián laughed. Briefly. Dryly.

"And the ECB allows something like that?"

"The ECB doesn't know it's already started. Or prefers not to know.

"Name of the project?"

"EurΩn."

—Like "Europe" with the omega symbol?

—Like "last resort." The name is no coincidence.

Julian swallowed hard. Not out of fear. Out of memory. Something about that word sounded familiar to him.

"And Sorokin?"

—He has the money. The time. And most dangerously, the narrative. He presents this as inevitable. In the face of inflation, debt, political discredit... A currency as redemption. And if no one stops him, he'll be right.

—And you?

—I'm not authorized to intervene. I shouldn't even be here. But I don't intend to live on a continent where money is decided in private meetings with men with unverifiable names.

Silence.

"Why me?"

Amélie held his gaze.

"Because you're the kind of man who, when everything falls apart, stays where he needs to be."

Julian looked down.

"And you?"

She smiled slightly.

"I'm the one who helps that man get there on time."

CHAPTER 7 - NETWORK OF SILENCES

Brussels. Friday. 6:38 a.m.

The city awoke with bureaucratic slowness. A whitish sky, air thick with humidity and diesel fumes, and the first flocks of Commission employees crossing avenues without looking. Briefcases, headphones, cardboard coffee cups. Routine like European choreography.

Julián hadn't slept well since Madrid. Nor had he tried.

He was in a last-minute rental apartment, just outside the institutional ring. A small table, a decent mattress, and enough Wi-Fi to dig deep without leaving a trace. He had set up a VPN navigation system and was using two browsers simultaneously: one for the surface, the other for the basements.

He was looking for something that shouldn't exist. *EurΩn*.

It didn't appear in any press releases. No articles, not even among the digital think tanks that used to chew over rumors before they became real. On Google, "Euron" redirected to a Norwegian ferry and an old Romanian currency.

In the hidden browser, things were different.

There were fragmented references. Abandoned forums with coded posts. Screenshots with fragments of obscure interfaces, probably apocryphal. An IP

address that was repeated too often: registered in Zurich, on the servers of a front company for banking technology.

But there was no manifesto, no white paper. Only whispers. And one of them made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

A thread in a closed forum, dated three weeks ago. Signed by an anonymous user with the name "NODA-X." The text, in English:

"When central banks lose control of perception, the market will require a new oracle. EurΩn is not a threat. It is the firewall."

That word. *Oracle*. Julián knew enough about financial systems to understand the double meaning. In crypto, an "oracle" was an external source of information that fed a closed system. In politics, it was something else: **the one who defines the truth when reality no longer matters.**

He closed the window. He wrote down the IP address in his notebook.

And then he noticed it.

A vibration on the table. Not his phone. His laptop.

Someone had activated his webcam.

The tiny red light flashed for two seconds. Then it disappeared.

He unplugged the device with a jerk. He closed it, wrapped it in a towel, and put it in the microwave, which was turned off. An old trick, learned at a paranoid law firm.

He took a deep breath. Then, with feigned calm, he took his coat and went down to the street.

Brussels was the same as always: neutral, dull, indifferent. But now he knew **they had seen him.**

They were waiting for him.

CHAPTER 8 - FACELESS NAMES

Brussels. Friday. 1:02 p.m.

Amélie welcomed him into her makeshift office, three floors above a closed bookstore in Ixelles. No official seals or gold plaques. Just a desk lamp, an Italian coffee maker, and a filing cabinet full of documents with fake labels.

She was still dressed as if she were about to be called to an emergency ECB summit: white shirt, gray blazer, minimal earrings. Unfazed. Unperturbed. Completely oblivious to Julian's inner turmoil.

He entered without greeting her. Without irony. Without pretense.

"They activated my webcam this morning."

Amélie didn't bat an eyelid.

"Were you using an encrypted system?"

"Yes."

"Then you did well. But they do it better."

"Who are they?"

She shrugged with the elegance of someone who knows more than she is about to say.

"It could be Sorokin. It could be someone watching him. This isn't linear, Julian. We're no longer in the realm of good guys and bad guys."

He slumped into a wooden chair without a backrest.

"How can you sleep peacefully knowing this?

"I don't sleep peacefully."

"Then why do you keep going?"

"Because someone has to stay and turn on the light when everything goes dark."

There was a heavy silence. Coffee grew cold in the pot, untouched by anyone.

Julian rested his elbows on his knees. "I don't know if this is about money, ideology, or control. But I don't want to be the useful variable in a plan I don't understand."

"I know."

"Then tell me, in no uncertain terms. What's going on?"

Amélie stood up. She took a file from the filing cabinet and tossed it to him unceremoniously.

Inside: screenshots, network analysis, capital flow maps, and something more disturbing... fragments of internal documents from two European central banks that spoke, in very vague terms, of a "contingency plan for a decentralized alternative currency unit."

One of the fragments was dated eight months ago. Signed by someone who had died three weeks earlier.

"Is this what killed the ECB guy in June?" asked Julian.

"We have no proof. Only consistency."

"And is this going to happen?"

"It's already happening."

The door rang.

Two sharp knocks.

Amélie tensed. Julian turned instinctively, but she raised her hand to stop him. She walked toward the entrance. She opened the door just a few inches.

A white letter, without an envelope, was slipped through the crack. Then footsteps. No voices.

She closed the door.

She handed the note to Julian without opening it.

He unfolded it. Just one line, printed in generic typeface, like a doctor's report or an invoice:

"There are lines that cannot be blurred without fiscal consequences."

Absurd. Ridiculous. And, precisely because of that, terrifying.

A message disguised as a technicality. A private joke. A warning.

Julián looked at Amélie.

"Is this a threat?"

"No. It's worse. It's a reminder."

"Of what?"

"That you're already in."

She looked at him with something resembling compassion. Or resignation. Or both.

"They offered you money. You accepted. They offered you access. You accepted. And now they're offering you fear. It's the chain. It's the price."

Julian didn't answer. He got up. He looked out the window.

Brussels was still there, gray and normal. The perfect city for a silent war.

And he had just chosen sides.

CHAPTER 9 - THE IMPOSSIBLE LIST

Madrid. Friday. 3:27 p.m.

Teresa had no contacts at the ECB. But she did have **Luis**, a former official at the Ministry of Economy, now a hypochondriac retiree, lover of crossword puzzles and stories he shouldn't tell. And, above all, she had the old Nokia phone she used when she worked in the courts, which still had the numbers of half of Spain saved in it for when she needed something urgent outside of office hours.

Luis answered on the second ring. As always.

"Tere, honey, is something wrong, or do you just want to gossip?"

"Can't it be both?"

"Tell me."

She was direct, without beating around the bush.

"Have you heard of a project called Eurón? With a Greek symbol. Like the euro, but with an omega at the end."

Silence. A long sigh. The kind of pause that indicates either fear or memory.

"Where did you hear that?"

"It's none of your business. Tell me what you know."

"I don't know anything. But I know who was investigating that name in Luxembourg last month. A gray bureaucrat, the kind who doesn't make the headlines but signs things that end up in history books."

"Name?"

"Artur von Hees. Deputy Technical Advisor to the European Financial Stability Committee. German, but one of those who feel more European than human. Two weeks ago, he requested a leave of absence for 'health reasons'. And yesterday I saw his name in an internal report... linked to a Swiss shell company licensed to operate in cryptographic products.

"And how do you see all this?"

"The same as always. A scandal about to break, but still no bodies."

"Give me everything you have on von Hees."

"I'll send it to you by email. But don't open it at home. Don't use your laptop. Use something clean."

"What if I don't have anything clean?"

"Go to a phone booth like in the old days. And if you can, forget about this. I'll do it as soon as I hang up."

"I don't believe you, Luis, not even if I'm drunk."

"Well, go buy some whiskey."

He hung up.

Teresa stared at the phone as if she could get more information out of it just by squeezing it. Then she opened her browser and searched: "*Artur von Hees + EurΩn.*"

Nothing.

But when she typed in "*Artur von Hees + Sorokin,*" something came up. Not on the open web, but in a forgotten academic index published by a Slovenian think tank on "decentralized monetary futures in the Union."

There were the two names. On the same panel. At the same conference. Dated April. Berlin.

The photograph was blurry, but clear: Sorokin, smiling, in a dark suit. Von Hees, leaning toward him, as if listening to the oracle.

Teresa closed her laptop. She got up.

She went to the kitchen. She took a bottle of whiskey from the cupboard where she usually kept the bleach. She poured a finger. Then another.

"We're in this now," she said, to no one in particular. "And now there's no choice but to see it through to the end."

CHAPTER 10 - EURΩN

Brussels. Saturday. 10:14 a.m.

The European Financial Stability Committee building did not appear on official maps. It did not have a sign either. Just a discreet coat of arms above a black door on a side street in the European quarter, next to an optician's and a florist's.

Julian wore a jacket, glasses, and carried an institutional-looking folder. Nothing too formal. Nothing that would attract attention. The preferred camouflage of those who are not invited.

Thanks to a network of favors accumulated over years in gray law firms, he had obtained temporary accreditation to access the Committee's technical library. Officially, he was consulting historical documents on post-Basel II regulation.

In reality, he was looking for a name: Artur von Hees.

And he found it.

Not in the documents, but in a photo hanging in the main hallway: portraits of distinguished technical staff from the last ten years. There he was. Smiling. Slim. Double-breasted suit, thick-rimmed glasses. A face that seemed designed to disappear in high-level meetings.

Under the photo, a plaque:

"Deputy Technical Advisor (2014–2025). Excellence in Systemic Risk Review."

It's curious that someone with "excellence at risk" would disappear without a trace.

Julian noted the date of his retirement: just three weeks ago. Too recent. Too convenient.

He continued exploring. He entered the digital archive room. He requested access to unclassified internal reports. He began reviewing them. Keywords: *alternative currency, parallel system, fiscal contingency*.

Nothing direct. But one note caught his attention.

An internal email forwarded between technicians. The note read:

"A.V.H. requested an informal meeting with the ECB group linked to new decentralized mechanisms. Requests total confidentiality."

And at the bottom, an acronym: "OP-DELPHI."

That name. It wasn't technical. It was symbolic.

Delphi: the oracle. Again.

He was copying that reference into his notebook when he noticed something. Someone was watching him.

From the back of the room, between shelves and LED panels, a figure was standing. Dark jacket. No folder. Didn't seem to be consulting anything.

Just watching him.

Julián held his gaze. He didn't flinch. The guy—young, Caucasian, short hair, neutral expression—turned on his heel and left.

Too controlled to be a worker. Too disinterested to be casual.

Julián followed him, leaving the folder on the table.

He crossed the hallway. He turned a corner. Nothing. Silence.

Only one thing remained: a sheet of paper on the floor. White. Folded in four.

He picked it up.

He opened it.

Inside, written by hand in small, precise letters:

"Stop following names. Start following what isn't signed. They're not looking for you. They're watching her."

GABRIEL VÉLIZ

No signature. No date.

Amélie.

The message wasn't a threat. It was a warning.

Julian put it away without folding it. He left the building through the side door.

He was no longer looking for clues.

He was looking for whoever was hunting his only ally.

CHAPTER II - THE PROTOCOL

Brussels. Saturday. 6:02 p.m.

He found her in the same makeshift apartment in Ixelles, sitting on the windowsill, smoking with a calmness that couldn't be real. There was an open folder on the table, full of documents with official letterheads and pencil notes that seemed more nervous than usual.

Julian didn't say hello. He handed her the sheet of paper he had found.

She read it without surprise. Without a flicker of emotion. She just let the ash from her cigarette fall onto the wooden floor.

"You knew they were watching you," he said, without accusation, but without gentleness.

"Of course," Amélie replied. "If I were them, I'd be watching me too."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you were already getting yourself into enough trouble."

Julian looked at her, trying to calculate the exact cost of her silence.

"Who are they?"

"Part of the ECB. Part of the digital transition group. Part of nobody. People who believe the euro won't last the next decade and prefer to build their own parachute."

"And you?"

"I'm here to find out who's folding the parachute. And with what intention."

He approached the table and opened the folder. Technical documents, security reports, transcripts. Among them, one file stood out: "INTERNAL MOVEMENTS – RESTRICTED."

He leafed through it.

There it was.

A list of recorded accesses to the ECB server in the last six months. One of the names marked in red:

Delvaux, Henri. Deputy Advisor, Digital Systems Security. Three unauthorized accesses. Two contacts with a Swiss IP address linked to Echelon Strategy Group.

"Is this the mole?"

"He's one of them. Or a pawn. I don't know yet. But he's already compromised.

"And Sorokin?"

"He's moving pieces without touching the board. He uses third parties. Unsigned contracts. Anonymous decisions. All he leaves behind are echoes."

Julian put down the document and looked at her.

"And why did he use me?"

"Because you're not institutional. Because you know how to read contracts without wasting time on semantics. Because you have nothing to lose... and that makes you dangerous.

"Or manipulable."

"We all are. The difference is what you do when you realize it."

There was a heavy silence. Outside, it began to rain with the measured calm of Brussels: unhurried, but constant.

"Julián," Amélie said, finally looking at him. "I'll ask you this only once. Do you want to continue?"

He didn't answer right away. He knew there would be no turning back. That the next decision would put him on the direct line between Sorokin and the ECB. Between money and the truth.

He nodded.

"Yes."

"Good," she said, stubbing out her cigarette in an empty coffee cup. "Then get dressed. Tonight we're going to meet someone who thinks he can stop him. Or die trying."

CHAPTER 12 - VALIDATIONS

Brussels. Saturday. 10:41 p.m.

The chosen location wasn't a basement. But it was close.

A forgotten office inside the headquarters of a cultural NGO that served as a cover for unofficial economic seminars. Outside, posters about the preservation of French-speaking dialects; inside, a high-frequency router, three open laptops, and a projector that shouldn't exist outside a military laboratory.

The man was waiting for them, standing. Thin, thick-rimmed glasses, tweed jacket, and an expression that oscillated between guilt and resignation.

"My name is Yves Morel," he said, extending his hand to Julian. "And if you're here, it means it's too late to stop the project from within."

Amélie didn't respond. She just nodded. Julian didn't say anything either. He knew how to read the tension in presentations without rhetoric.

Yves turned to the projector and turned on the screen.

"This," he said, pointing to a technical diagram, "is the skeleton of *EurΩn*."

A complex architecture appeared on the wall: decentralized nodes, layers of encryption, gateways with private banks. A hybrid system. Not just cryptocurrency. Not just fiat money.

It was something new.

"They're calling it a 'survival network currency.' It's not meant to replace the euro in broad daylight. It's designed to activate when the official system collapses. Whether due to a real or provoked crisis."

Julian leaned forward.

"Is it operational?"

"In the testing phase. They've run simulations using satellite banks in Estonia and Bulgaria. Internal transactions, not public. All under the radar of the ECB. Officially, they're digital interoperability tests."

"And Sorokin?"

"He's the external financial architect. He doesn't sign anything. He doesn't appear in any contracts. But he moves the capital. He buys silence. And, more importantly, he has convinced several governments that this is inevitable."

Amélie interjected:

"What exactly are they trying to achieve?"

Yves looked at her with a mixture of sadness and admiration.

"They want something that can't be voted on. Or audited. Or revoked by slow democratic mechanisms. A monetary system that works *even if the state doesn't*.

"An induced collapse," said Julián, more to himself than to them.

"Exactly."

"And what would trigger it?"

Yves hesitated. Then he walked over to a metal filing cabinet and took out an envelope. Inside was a printed sheet with an illegible header, no official letterhead.

Just two sentences, marked with a marker:

"Simulation of coordinated withdrawal of deposits." "Objective: to cause controlled panic in three banking centers."

"Is this real?" Julian asked, lowering his voice.

"It is. And the tentative date is closer than you think."

Amélie leaned in.

"When?"

"Thirteen days."

Silence.

Yves turned off the projector. The screen went black.

"You have two options," he said, "leave here and never talk about this again. Or try to stop it, knowing that you will most likely fail. I have already failed. You still have a choice.

Amélie looked at him, without blinking.

"We didn't come here to choose."

Julián nodded.

"We came to cause trouble."

Yves smiled, as if he were feeling something like hope again.

"Then start with this," he said, handing them a USB drive. "It contains the internal logs of the *EurΩn* system. With that, you can prove that it's not an idea. It's a fact."

"And you?"

"I'll disappear. Because if I don't, they'll make me disappear.

CHAPTER 13 - CRITICAL NODE

Brussels. Sunday. 7:46 a.m.

The hotel was nondescript, the kind of place politicians and technicians use for discreet meetings when the agenda must not appear in any records. Small rooms, gray carpet, soulless cafeteria. No one looked at anyone else.

Amélie was sitting on the bed with her laptop open. Julián stared at the USB stick as if he could guess its contents without connecting it.

"Are you sure it doesn't contain any trackers?" he asked.

"Yves is no amateur." Amélie typed a series of commands. "But we'll check it before making any copies. If this information is real... it could bring down half the ECB council.

"What if it's been tampered with?"

"Then they'll have used us as catalysts for a controlled leak. But in either case, something's going to blow up."

The screen filled with lines of code. Network logs, digital certificates, node records. Julian didn't understand everything, but he grasped the general meaning.

A transfer system. Simulated in a closed environment. With volumes greater than those of any cryptocurrency. And with passive participation from recognizable entities.

"Who signed this?" Julián asked.

"No one. That's the brilliant part. The accesses are masked. But IP addresses don't lie. Look at this one."

She enlarged a fragment of the log. A connection established from a proxy server located in... Madrid.

Julián narrowed his eyes.

"What does that mean?"

Amélie was already dialing something on her phone. "That we're not alone in this part of the map. And that there's someone in your city working with them."

"Teresa?"

She looked at him, without answering.

Julián stood up abruptly.

"No. Not her. Teresa has been helping me from the beginning."

"And that guarantees you something?"

"Yes. That she's not stupid. And that she knows what's at stake."

"Or she knows too much."

The phone rang.

Amélie answered. "Oui?"

Pause.

Her expression changed.

"Understood. Send me the copy immediately. And stay out of the building. Understood?"

She hung up.

"What happened?" asked Julian.

"They intercepted a copy of the logs. Someone tried to access the system from an internal ECB account. And it wasn't Delvaux."

"So...?"

"We have another traitor. And they're closer than we thought."

Julian felt a knot in his stomach.

"Who?"

She didn't answer.

He stood up. He took the USB drive. He closed the laptop.

"There's no time. This information has to get to one person. Just one. Someone who can't be bought.

"Who?"

"My former boss. Sébastien Thillieux. Director of the Financial Emergency Oversight Committee. He's the closest thing the European Union has left to a conscience. But if they're going to silence him, it will be now.

"And what do we do?"

—We'll take it to him. Personally. Tonight. In Frankfurt.

"What if they've already located him?"

Amélie looked at him with more than just seriousness.

"Then it will be our last chance to stop this before it activates."

Julian followed her to the door. He said nothing.

But as he left, he had that feeling that only comes when everything that was solid begins to shake: that someone who knows his name has already decided what to do with him.

CHAPTER 14 - ECHOES

Frankfurt. Sunday. 10:33 p.m.

The Financial Emergency Oversight Committee building did not have an imposing facade. It was tucked away on the side of the financial district, camouflaged among glass and concrete structures like an uncomfortable thought at a meeting of bankers.

Julián and Amélie passed through security with a temporary badge and faces that were not up for games. They carried the USB stick in a plain, unlabeled kraft envelope. Everything was ready. Everything except the outcome.

Sébastien Thillieux welcomed them into his personal office: a modern cubicle with windows without a view, an Italian coffee maker on the windowsill, and five screens lit up without sound.

"Amélie," he said, in dry French. "You always show up when the building is already on fire."

She didn't smile. "And you always seem comfortable among the ashes."

Thillieux was a robust man with a well-groomed gray beard and the eyes of someone who has spent a decade reading between the lines and no longer trusts what he sees. He shook Julian's hand with a brief but firm look.

"Do you have any evidence?"

Amélie nodded. She handed him the envelope. Thillieux opened it. He took out the USB drive. He plugged it into a hidden port in an armored case.

The screen flickered. The analysis began.

"*EurΩn* system logs, internal nodes, operating architectures..." he murmured. "Quite comprehensive. Who leaked it?"

"A technician who worked on simulations. He's gone now," said Amélie.

"And has this reached the ECB?"

"Not yet. And if it does, it won't last long before disappearing due to 'internal maintenance.'"

Thillieux didn't respond. His eyes remained fixed on the screen.

"This is serious. Very serious," he said after a minute. "Serious enough that we are fourteen hours away from a crisis of legitimacy. But there's a problem.

"What is it?"

Thillieux turned the monitor around. He showed a real-time graph. It was a map of operational nodes. Active. Up and running.

Julian stared at it.

"What is that?"

"*EurΩn*," said the director. "It's already turned on."

Silence. The air in the room grew thick.

"Since when?" asked Amélie.

"We don't know. But the nodes have been active for at least 36 hours. They operate at low frequency to avoid immediate detection. Internal transfers, deposit simulations. Everything legal, on the surface. Everything... outside the control of the ECB."

Julian slumped into a chair.

"Then we're too late."

"Not entirely," replied Thillieux. "They haven't triggered *the catalyst* yet. The system is alive, but dormant. If we deactivate it before it becomes the emergency refuge, we can stop it.

"How?" asked Amélie.

Thillieux looked at them with a stern expression.

"By finding the master node. The point from which everything is coordinated.

"Where is it?"

"If we knew, we would have shut it down already. But there is a hypothesis."

He opened another file. An image. A building.

Julian recognized it immediately.

"Rue de la Loi," he said. "Brussels."

Thillieux nodded.

"The master node could be hidden there. Hidden... or be the building itself."

Amélie crossed her arms. "And what do you want us to do?"

"Go back. Get inside. Extract the internal records from the physical system. If we get the root protocol, we can force its neutralization in the satellite nodes."

Julian took a deep breath.

"What if they're waiting for us?"

Thillieux looked at him as if he had already calculated that possibility and accepted the cost.

"Then... make sure you extract the information before they stop you."

CHAPTER 15 - THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Brussels. Monday. 1:17 a.m.

The Rue de la Loi slept with an artificial calm. No patrols, no pedestrians, no traffic. Only streetlights that seemed to be lit more to feign vigilance than to illuminate.

Julian and Amélie got out two streets earlier. No car. No electronic devices. Just a backpack with basic supplies, a low-spectrum flashlight, and a master key replicated from the original lock.

The building awaited them. Just like last time.

The door gave way effortlessly.

Inside, the same silence. But different. Not the emptiness of abandonment. But the emptiness that someone had left behind.

They climbed the side staircase. Nothing had moved. The marks on the floor were still there, like traces of a vanished office.

Amélie opened the door to the technical room on the third floor. The junction box was still there. But this time... it was active.

A blue light flashed on the panel.

"It's on," she whispered.

"Can you access it?"

"I'll try."

He sat down next to the panel and connected a USB device with an isolated reading environment. Lines of code began to flow across the screen.

"There's an operating kernel. It's not a test. It's real."

"Can you extract it?"

"Not from here. The master node doesn't transmit. It receives. It's a blind server. It only responds to physical keys.

"And where is that key?"

Amélie looked up.

"Inside the building. And it has to be close by."

They got up. They searched every corner. Empty cupboards. Drawers lined with gray fabric. Finally, in a small room hidden behind a door without a knob, Julián forced his way in with a tool.

There it was.

An armored server, with no visible connection, sealed.

And on the wall, a slot.

"Is this it?" asked Julián.

"This is it. The physical key must be an encrypted card."

They searched. Nothing.

Until Julián, almost by inertia, returned to the fourth-floor windowsill. Where, days earlier, he had found a notebook with a phrase written in it.

This time there was no notebook.

There was a metal card, wrapped in a linen napkin.

He slipped it into his pocket without saying a word.

Amélie saw him from the doorway. She nodded.

They returned to the server. They inserted the card.

Click.

The system turned on. On the screen, just one line:

"NODUS INITIO - RESTRICTED ACCESS"

Amélie inserted the external drive. The system accepted the data extraction. The dump began.

"Five minutes," she said.

Julian didn't respond. He was at the window, looking out onto the street.

And then he saw it.

A black car. Headlights off. Parked on the corner. Engine running.

He turned to Amélie.

"Quick. We have company."

She didn't flinch. The meter read 72%.

"Can you cancel it?" he asked.

"Not without losing everything."

"Then don't cancel it."

Julian turned toward the door. He took an interference device out of his backpack. He activated it. It would cut the signal for three minutes. Nothing more.

"Make a duplicate," she said.

"What if we don't get out?"

Amélie looked at him.

"Then at least there will be a record."

The dump reached 100%. The drive disconnected. She stored it in an armored case. Julián turned off the jamming device.

Too late.

Footsteps on the stairs.

CHAPTER 16 - THE WARNING

Brussels. Monday. 1:57 a.m.

The footsteps climbed the stairs with surgical precision. They weren't running. They weren't shouting. That was worse. These were trained people. People who didn't need to rush because they already knew where to look.

Julian turned off the panel light. The room was dark again. Amélie put the unit with the *master node* data in an anti-radiation bag and held it against her chest, as if it were a transplanted organ.

"This way," Julian whispered.

They went down the secondary staircase, the one that connected to the basement. The building had been an administrative bunker in the 1980s, with emergency exits designed to evacuate ministers discreetly.

When they reached level -1, they came across a locked metal door. An old lock. Strong.

"Can you force it open?" asked Amélie.

"I can try."

While he worked, she took a small cylinder out of her jacket. "If we get caught, I'll destroy the unit. Don't hesitate."

Julian looked at her.

"It won't be necessary."

Click.

The door gave way. A narrow, unventilated hallway, damp and full of old pipes. They moved forward. The hallway led to a small room with a rusty trapdoor that opened onto a back street. Julian pushed.

Outside, silence.

"Let's go," he said.

But before they crossed, they heard a voice. Not from behind.

From ahead.

"Not so fast."

A figure emerged from the shadows.

Dark suit. Gloves. And a familiar face.

Henri Delvaux. The alleged mole. The technician Amélie believed to be neutralized. He was there, armed.

"You don't have to die," he said, as if reciting a clause. "You just have to hand it over."

Amélie didn't blink. "You were the distraction."

Delvaux nodded, without pride. "And you were the transport mechanism."

Julian raised his hand slowly.

"What if we don't deliver anything?"

Delvaux smiled briefly. "Then history will remember you as a warning. Not as a solution."

At that moment, Amélie threw the cylinder on the floor.

Flash. Smoke. A sharp bang, no fire. Only disorientation.

Julián pushed the trapdoor. They got out.

Screams behind them.

They ran down the narrow street. Brussels was asleep. No sirens. No alarms. The city allowed them to hunt in silence.

Two blocks away, they entered an underground garage. An old car with no license plate and its lights off was waiting for them there.

"Is that your escape plan?" Julián gasped.

"No. That's the car Yves left in case things went wrong."

They got in. They drove off. No GPS. No cell phone. Just intuition and fear.

As they drove away, Amélie checked the contents of the bag. The unit was still intact.

"We have the protocol," she said.

"Now what?"

"Now we're going to make it public."

Julian said nothing.

He knew what that meant.

And he also knew that Sorokin's name would soon appear.

CHAPTER 17 - FUNCTIONAL FICTION

Zurich. Monday. 3:14 a.m.

The room had no windows. Only screens. Seven of them. Three were off. Four were on, displaying lines of code, network flows, and financial heat maps that no mortal should see at that hour—or any other.

In the center, Viktor Sorokin. Black T-shirt. No watch. No jewelry. Just a glass of sparkling water on a steel table. He looked like just another technician, one of those engineers who inhabit the digital underground of the system. Until he spoke.

And when he did, everything became calculation.

"They've extracted the root protocol," he said, without looking at anyone.

To his left, a young man in an impeccable suit. In another life, he would have been an ambassador or a stockbroker. Now he looked more like a reprimanded student.

"Yes. Rue de la Loi. An hour ago. Delvaux couldn't stop them."

Sorokin sipped some water. A measured pause.

"Do you know what the real mistake of technocrats is?"

"What?"

"Believing that the truth needs protection." But the truth..." He gestured slightly toward the screens. "...only needs time.

He looked back at the graph. The master node was still active. Uninterrupted. The copy that Julian and Amélie had made was real, yes. But it wasn't unique. It wasn't even definitive.

"And the unit?" asked his companion.

"They have it. They think they can use it to stop the activation. They'll make it public. They'll try to provoke an institutional reaction.

"And that's not a problem?"

"No," said Sorokin, without raising his voice. "It's the next step."

He opened a file. A plan. Dated months ago. It was all there. From the moment Julián received that first email. From the moment Amélie called him. Even before Yves Morel decided to betray the project.

Everything... planned.

"When do we activate the next phase?" asked the assistant.

Sorokin smiled. A minimal, almost imperceptible gesture. More of a mental exhalation than a facial reflex.

"It's already activated."

He clicked. One of the screens showed a transaction. A flow of capital—exactly €1 billion—was leaving a Spanish entity for a banking structure with no fixed jurisdiction. An architecture designed to resist audits, sanctions, and logic.

The assistant swallowed hard.

"And them?"

"They're going to expose the system. Very well. We're going to thank them... for presenting it to the world with credibility.

The young man hesitated. Then he said, almost in a whisper:

"And Amélie?"

Sorokin didn't answer right away. He closed the file. Then he leaned over slightly, as if whispering something into the screen.

"She understands. She always has.

"Is she aware?"

"Let's just say... she shares certain principles. Not all of them. But enough."

"And Julian?"

—Julián still believes this is a war. Amélie knows it's architecture.

Silence.

"What if he finds out?"

Sorokin looked back at the screens. The graphs were updating nonstop. The money was flowing.

"Then the resistance will cease to be a bloc. And it will start to become... real.

The assistant nodded, uncomfortable. Sorokin stood up. He closed the last monitor.

"And what's the next step?"

"Let fear do its job. After that... the money will flow on its own.

CHAPTER 18 - THE ENVELOPES

Brussels. Monday. 11:36 a.m.

The sky was still gray. As if nothing had happened. As if the city did not harbor a new financial system, a functional conspiracy, a well-structured betrayal.

Julián was sitting on the terrace of a café that smelled of butter and politics. He had three envelopes in front of him: one for a financial journalist in Paris, another for a Finnish MEP with an incorruptible reputation, and the third for the European Court of Auditors.

In each envelope: A copy of the protocol. A summary of the system. Signed records. Evidence.

Amélie arrived unannounced, as usual.

"Did you send them already?"

"The last one ten minutes ago."

"And?"

"There's movement already."

She took out her phone and showed him the screen. #EurΩn was trending on Twitter, but not as a scandal. Not as a warning. But as the future.

"Financial decentralization is already here. Are we ready?" "Leak reveals alternative monetary plan in case of collapse: genius or threat?" "What if the ECB can't save us? Maybe Sorokin can."

"They used us," said Julian.

"No. They read us," corrected Amélie.

"We did the right thing."

"Yes. And that's why we'll lose."

A waiter placed two coffees on the table. Without asking. Without charging. As if he knew that people carrying envelopes like that didn't have time to pay.

Amélie took a folder out of her bag. She slid it toward him.

"What's this?"

"A list. People who haven't made up their minds yet. Banks that are outside the EurΩn ecosystem. Judges. Technicians. Two journalists from the old days.

Julian leafed through the list without enthusiasm. Then he stopped at a name. He marked it with his finger.

"Leo K.?" "What about him?"

Nothing. I'm just surprised to see him here. This guy was at the ECB. In the interoperability group.

Amélie didn't answer right away. Then she shrugged.

"He switched sides. Or so he says.

"And how do you know that?"

"He wrote to me. A few days ago. He said he wanted to help understand the technical aspects of the system.

—And did you reply?

"Yes."

Julian closed the folder. Not abruptly, but without care.

"You didn't mention that before."

Amélie held his gaze.

"I didn't think it was important." "I see."

He drank his coffee. It was cold. It didn't matter.

"So what are we going to do with this list?"

"Annoy people," she replied.

GABRIEL VÉLIZ

Julián said nothing. But something in his expression—a pause, a stiffness—betrayed a new crack.

He looked at the street. People walked as usual. The bills were still valid. The euro still existed.

But it was no longer the only one. And worst of all: it was no longer the desired currency.

CHAPTER 19 - GHOST SIGNATURE

Madrid. Monday. 4:21 p.m.

Teresa had seen strange things in her career: Judges who handed down sentences before trials. Lawyers who signed contracts without reading them. Ministers who lied without taking a breath.

But this was different.

She was sitting in front of a borrowed computer in a call shop in the Prosperidad neighborhood. The ceiling fan made more noise than the traffic on the street. The screen displayed an encrypted file sent by Julián. She had decrypted it with a password that only he and her shared memory knew: *Consulate1987*.

Inside: — The EurΩn records. — The names of early accesses. — The initial permissions. — The digital signatures.

And on the list, among unpronounceable names and Central European technocrats, one made her stop.

LAFUENTE, TERESA M. Temporary administrative authorization – legal validation Swiss legal structure subprocess (*deactivated*) Date: April 24, 2022
Signature: *t.lafuente.bog92*

"But what...?"

She read it twice. Three times.

He had no memory of that. He hadn't signed anything from EurΩn. No contracts, no consulting agreements. Until he remembered.

A call, a year and a half ago. A minor assignment. Technical review of a digital tax protocol for a Swiss firm with offices in Liechtenstein. An easy job. Nothing questionable. They paid well. She reviewed it, sent the report, and forgot about it.

But now she saw it clearly:

She had helped legalize the legal shell of the system. Without knowing it. Without wanting to. Or perhaps without wanting to look.

He leaned back in his chair. The fan was spinning. The world remained the same. But something inside her had fallen to the floor with a noise that no one else could hear.

She closed her laptop. She put it in her bag. And she called.

"Julian?"

"I'm here."

"I have a problem. A big one."

"Did you get the data?"

"Yes. And I'm working on it."

"What's going on?"

Teresa swallowed hard.

"My name appears as one of the lawyers who validated part of the system in Switzerland."

Silence.

"Are you sure?"

"I signed a legal document a year and a half ago, but I didn't know what was behind it. It was a tax structure. I didn't ask too many questions. You know how these things work..."

"Yes. I know exactly how it works," said Julian. It wasn't a statement. It was a diagnosis.

"What now?"

Pause.

"Now you're part of this."

"I already was."

"Yes, but now you know it." And the worst part is that you probably suspected it.

Teresa clenched her teeth.

"Are you saying I did it on purpose?"

"I'm saying you may have done it with your eyes closed. It's not the same thing, but it's not that different either.

Silence.

Teresa looked out the window. A bus was passing by. A child was crying on the sidewalk. A woman was buying lottery tickets.

"Then tell me what to do, Julian. Because if this blows up... my name won't be in a file. It'll be everywhere."

"It's up to you," he said curtly. "You can keep quiet and wait for this to blow over... or you can make some noise before they silence you.

Teresa didn't answer.

She hung up.

She stared at the phone. And for the first time since it all began, she didn't feel like she was part of a resistance. But part of what had to be resisted.

And yet, she knew exactly what she was going to do.

CHAPTER 20 - THE STATEMENT

Madrid. Monday. 11:38 p.m.

Teresa was not a fan of manifestos. She saw them as long excuses to justify mistakes. But this was different.

Or at least that's what she wanted to believe.

She was sitting in her kitchen, with her laptop open and a glass of wine she hadn't touched. On the screen, a blank document. No letterhead. No signature yet. Just words that she didn't know if anyone would read. Or if anyone would forgive her.

She began to write.

PERSONAL STATEMENT – TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My name is Teresa Lafuente. I have worked as an independent lawyer in tax and administrative matters for over twenty years. I have never been part of any European institution, nor have I worked for Sorokin, nor do I have in-depth knowledge of the EurΩn system.

However, in April 2022, I reviewed and approved the legal structure of a Swiss entity later used as a vehicle for the activation of that system. I did not know at the time the real purpose of the assignment. I did not ask any questions. I simply complied.

Today I saw my name in the internal records of the EurΩn protocol.

And that is why I am writing this.

Because silence is part of the design of this system. And because if we want to understand who is behind its construction, we must also accept who we are helping to sustain its foundations. Even if we didn't know it. Even if we didn't want to.

I have handed over all the documentation in my possession to three independent media outlets.

I don't want protection. Nor do I want to be in the spotlight. I just want to put it on record, now that we can still speak without permission.

Sincerely, T.L.

Teresa read the text. She did not edit it. She did not embellish it. She signed it with her initials. She thought that was enough. Or rather, she thought it prudent.

She opened her email. She sent it to three contacts:

— An investigative journalist who had been fired from a newspaper for writing too much. — A left-wing congresswoman with more enemies than voters. — A forum of radical technologists who love code more than the law.

Before clicking "send," he hesitated for half a second.

Was it a confession... or an insurance policy?

He didn't look for the answer. It didn't matter anymore.

Then he shut down his laptop. He remained silent. And for the first time in days, he slept without waking up in the middle of the night.

CHAPTER 21 - THE ECHO

Brussels. Tuesday. 9:42 a.m.

Teresa's note wasn't on the front page. It had no logo. It was not verified. It was not official.

But by that time, it had already been shared more than 60,000 times.

On Twitter. On forums. In private groups of lawyers. In chats among economic journalists. In mailing lists of technocrats who swore they never read anything other than *The Economist*.

And the worst—or best—part is that no one denied it.

An hour later, the Finnish MP quoted it in a parliamentary speech:

"It's not about whether EurΩn exists. It's about whether someone gave permission to build it. And if no one did, then someone must answer for it anyway."

The French journalist published an article in *Mediapart* with the headline:

"The lawyer who signed without knowing: an analysis of a perfect legal trap."

The ECB... remained silent.

For three hours.

Until the official spokesperson, in an impromptu press conference, uttered a sentence that would go down in the annals of contemporary cynicism:

"There is no evidence that any alternative monetary system is operating without authorization within the Union. And even if there were, its existence does not imply its legality."

Julián spat out his coffee. Amélie simply raised an eyebrow.

"Perfect," she said. "Now the calculated denials begin."

"Is that a good thing?"

"It's the first step before the purges."

"And what do we do?"

She looked at him.

"It's no longer about proving that EurΩn exists. It's about making sure it's not necessary."

"And how do we do that?"

"We have to find the structural flaw. The point where the system can't support its own narrative."

—What if it doesn't have one?

—Then all you can do is make noise. Enough noise that no one can say they didn't hear it."

On the screen, Teresa's statement was still there. Unembellished. Unmodified. Raw. Unappealable.

Julian smiled with a mixture of pride and panic.

"What if they kill her?"

Amélie closed the laptop.

"Too late."

"What do you mean, too late?"

"She's already become a symbol. And symbols don't die. They only multiply."

Silence.

A notification appeared on the laptop.

"L. K. has joined the waiting room."

Amélie clicked without asking.

The image appeared. Young, disheveled, wearing a wrinkled shirt from some academic conference. A smile that wasn't meant to please, just to amuse.

"Hello," said the newcomer. I'm Leo. They tell me I'm useful. Sometimes I'm also annoying. I hope to fulfill both roles today.

Julian said nothing.

Amélie responded with a curt gesture.

"He has access to fragments of the protocol that no one else has been able to decipher. He did it before. He can do it again."

"And why is he doing it now?"

Leo shrugged, delighted.

"Because it's fun to watch structures collapse from within. And because I get bored easily.

"Did you work on EurΩn?"

"On the theoretical framework, yes. On the implementation, no. Or so I think. The boundaries were... blurred.

Julian frowned.

"And why should we trust you?"

Leo smiled even more.

"Who said anything about trusting?"

CHAPTER 22 - STOPPING TIME

Frankfurt am Main. Tuesday. 4:03 p.m.

The meeting room had no windows. Only a clock. Someone had stopped it at 3:00 p.m.

An unintended metaphor.

Twelve people sitting around a glass table. All of them with enough power to break coins, redefine balance sheets, or make a country disappear from the headlines without a trace.

At the head of the table, Sébastien Thillieux. The only one with a loose tie. The only one who seemed to have slept less than the others.

"You are all aware of Ms. Lafuente's statement," he began, without preamble. "You are here because none of you want to publicly admit that you knew what the public now suspects.

A murmur of annoyance rippled around the table. No one liked truths so early in a meeting.

"The question is simple," he continued, "does EurΩn exist? Does EurΩn exist? No one answered.

He spoke again.

"Is it operating within the European financial system? Using legal layers built with phantom contracts? Hiding behind organizations that never signed anything, but facilitated everything?"

A woman with a stern expression and an Austrian surname raised her hand.

"What evidence do you have to support that claim?"

Thillieux slid a folder across the table. Inside: A copy of the root protocol. Dates. Internal IP addresses. Chain signatures. Everything.

—This has been handed over to several media outlets. In 48 hours, it will be the subject of a parliamentary investigation.

You can choose to ignore it. Or you can contain it.

"How do you contain a system that is already distributed?" asked another.

Silence.

Then someone said the unthinkable.

"There is an option."

Everyone turned to him. He was a technician, invited only out of necessity. No one knew him. And yet, they listened to him.

"We can implement a selective disconnection. Shut down all financial nodes that respond to certain network architectures at regular intervals. It would cause a brief but perhaps manageable banking panic.

"And that wouldn't collapse half of Europe?"

—Yes. But only for two or three days.

"What if EurΩn is designed precisely for that gap?"

Thillieux said it without raising his voice. But they heard him anyway.

Silence.

A young advisor in the corner spoke up for the first time:

"There's another variable."

"What is it?"

"An external analyst has started publishing fragments of the code base." Not from outside. From within the ECB's technical documentation system.

—An attacker?

—No. It seems he was part of the architecture group. Or at least, that's what he says. He signs as "L. K."

The older members frowned. The younger ones tried to hide the fact that they knew who he was talking about. Thillieux closed his eyes for a second.

"What are you leaking?"

"Details. Comments on the code. Logical errors. Unimplemented instructions. And something more dangerous: questions. The guy asks questions that no one wants to answer.

—Like what?"

"Who defined the execution priority between nodes?" With what legitimacy was the first validation block assigned? And why does the system assume that European law can be interpolated as metadata?"

More silence.

One of the regional governors slammed his hands on the table.

"And if we assume that EurΩn is not the problem... but rather the solution that someone has rushed to offer, what do we do?"

Thillieux looked at him with an almost cruel calm.

"Then," he said, "we have become the problem."

The clock was still stopped. But time, clearly, had not.

CHAPTER 23 - THE ECB MIRROR

Geneva. Wednesday. 02:08.

There was no flag in the room. There were no microphones. No minutes.

Just men and women who used to sign treaties. And now they were sitting as if someone else were signing theirs.

In the center of the table: Viktor Sorokin. No bodyguards. No documents. Just him. Dark suit. White shirt. Soft voice.

"I'm not here to demand anything," he said. Just to explain the inevitable.

One sentence. Neither aggressive nor friendly. But enough to silence those present, as if they had just lost their last argument.

One of them, a Dutchman who had spent fifteen years building consensus with meaningless words, dared to ask:

"So EurΩn is your backup plan?"

Sorokin looked at him with a serenity more disarming than any threat.

"EurΩn is not my plan. It is your legacy. I just put it into operation before you had time to call it *a committee*."

Another silence. More intense. More uncomfortable. One of the attendees looked down at his cell phone. Then he turned it off. Too late.

"And what does he want?" someone asked.

"I want you to get ready. Not to accept it. To accept that it's already happening."

One of the more reckless attendees interrupted him:

"This is a covert monetary coup. An illegal substitution of financial sovereignty."

Sorokin smiled for the first time. A minimal, surgical gesture.

"And isn't that what you do every time you apply a common monetary policy to countries with opposing realities? Isn't every decision you make a forced redistribution of power?"

"Are you comparing what you did with the ECB?"

"No," said Sorokin. I'm saying that the ECB needed a mirror.

And EurΩn is that mirror. Not to replace it. To force it to change. Or to die with dignity.

No one dared to point out that this phrase sounded more like a threat than a metaphor.

"What if we ban it?" asked an Italian member.

"Go ahead." And you will generate the legitimacy that I lack. Do it, and EurΩn will become not an alternative, but a refuge.

An advisor—young, discreet, with unforgettable glasses—slowly slid her cell phone under the table. On the screen, a private broadcast. The meeting... was already being broadcast in real time.

Someone saw it. They said nothing. Too late to close the door.

The German in the corner leaned forward.

"What if we accept it?"

Sorokin looked at him with something resembling respect.

"Then you'll live to see how people trust a system that never asked for permission more than ever before... because at least it didn't lie about what it was coming to do.

He stood up. No dramatic gesture. No farewell. He just said one last sentence before leaving:

"The currency of the future is not the euro. Nor is it the EurΩn. It is trust. And I got there first.

CHAPTER 24 - THE ARCHIVE

Lyon. Wednesday. 12:06 p.m.

They took refuge in an apartment rented for a week under a false name and with its own Wi-Fi network. No hotels. No credit cards. No movement that could be interpreted as panic.

Although it was.

Julián stood on the balcony, a cold coffee in his hand, staring at his cell phone. Amélie was reading on her laptop with the same expression surgeons use when they open a body knowing they won't be closing it again.

"It's done," he said. "They've published it."

He handed her his phone.

"Geneva: confidential meeting between financial leaders and Viktor Sorokin. ECB considers 'integrating EurΩn technical proposals into future digital strategies'. No official comment."

"They're considering it?" Julian repeated, with a bitter laugh. They've been fighting decentralization for years, and now they're 'considering' it...

Amélie didn't respond.

"Do you know what this means?" he continued. They've left us out. We're no longer the ones speaking out. Now we're the ones who get in the way.

She closed the laptop. She did it carefully. Like someone closing a coffin.

"You don't understand. It's no longer about whether EurΩn works. It's about people believing it can work better than what we have now.

"And what do we do about that?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

—Trust cannot be restored with evidence. Only with disappointment.

Julian looked at her. With contained anger.

"Is that all? Are we waiting for utopia to rust away?"

—No. We kept talking. We kept remembering how it started. And above all, who was behind it.

Julian looked at her. That last sentence. The tone was too precise. As if he already knew who to point the finger at.

"Did you know Sorokin had been in Geneva?"

Amélie blinked. Barely.

"No." "Are you sure?"

"Are you asking me if I warned him?"

Silence. Julian didn't answer.

She nodded slowly.

"It's too late for suspicions, Julian." At this point, there's only one thing left we can do right.

She stood up. She looked for paper. She took a blank sheet. She wrote a single word in the center. She placed it on the table.

File.

"If they win the narrative, at least let's put the facts on record."

Julian looked at her. And for the first time, he didn't think about stopping EurΩn. He thought about documenting how everyone—even them—had let it grow.

CHAPTER 25 - MICROPHONES ON

Madrid. Wednesday. 8:11 p.m.

Teresa held the envelope as if it weighed more than the paper indicated. It wasn't thick. It wasn't official. But inside it contained a decision.

She opened it.

Invitation to participate live Special debate: "CryptoEurope – Solution or Subversion?"

Confirmed guests: – A spokesperson for the ECB. – A technical advisor close to Viktor Sorokin. – A skeptical economist. – You.

Duration: 42 minutes. Format: uncut. Simultaneous broadcast: television, digital platforms, and the decentralized MirrorChain network.

Handwritten at the bottom of the page:

"We're not asking you to be a hero. Just tell what you already know."

Teresa closed the envelope. She poured herself a drink. She didn't drink it.

The temptation to refuse was immense. A silence would suffice. A short email. An excuse. Or simply nothing.

But then he opened his laptop. He went to a digital economy website.

And there, among graphs, columns, and cynicism, she saw her name.

"Who is Teresa Lafuente?" "The lawyer who signed the new order without knowing it." "Unwitting witness or silent collaborator."

The past was no longer hers. It had become interpretive property.

She closed her laptop. She walked around the house. She passed an old photo: her father, in his robe, on the day of his retirement. No one would have understood less than him.

He picked up the phone. He dialed Julian's number.

"Yes?"

"I'm going to do it," she said.

Pause.

"The debate?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm more than sure.

"You know they're going to try to destroy you?"

—Let them try. But if I don't do it, they'll have already beaten me.

Silence.

"Julian," she added. "Do you still have that summary you made of the protocols?"

"Sure.

Send it to me. I want to prepare the truth before they ask me for an opinion.

She hung up. The glass was still untouched. So was the night. But something inside him—a doubt, a guilt, a fatigue— had stopped asking for permission.

And for the first time in weeks, Teresa felt real fear. But also precision.

CHAPTER 26 - THE SIGNAL

Madrid. Thursday. 9:03 p.m.

The spotlights weren't harsh, but they were humiliating. They illuminated without warmth. Teresa was sitting at the far left of the set. Gray jacket, hair pulled back, hands on the table as if she were afraid to let them fall.

Opposite her: — A technician with a Baltic accent and a smile designed by public relations. — An ECB spokesperson with a poise made up of formal phrases. — And a cynical economist who already had his closing line ready for the viral clip.

The presenter was talking, but Teresa couldn't hear her. All she heard was the white noise of knowing there was no turning back.

"Let's start with you, Ms. Lafuente," said the journalist, in that neutral voice used by those who have rehearsed every possible tone. "Why did you decide to speak now?"

Teresa looked at the camera. She didn't smile. She didn't look down.

"Because silence no longer protected me. It only made me an accomplice."

First pause.

No one interrupted her.

"I signed a document a year and a half ago. I reviewed a legal structure that was used to build part of the *EurΩn* system. I didn't know what it was. I didn't ask. I didn't suspect anything."

"And what do you think now?"

—I think that not knowing is no longer a valid excuse. Not for me. Or for you. He looked back at his colleagues on the set.

The technician pretended to take notes.

The ECB spokesperson made that sophisticated gesture of appearing interested without committing herself.

The economist smiled, as if it were all a play he had written himself.

The journalist returned:

"Mr. Olev, you worked as an external consultant for one of the teams that designed the technical framework for *EurΩn*. Is it true that the system is currently active in the shadows?"

Olev, the technician, smiled with perfect patience.

"The term 'active' is imprecise. *EurΩn* is an exploratory architecture. It does not replace the euro. It does not impose conditions. It only offers an alternative environment in the event of a systemic contingency. A safety net. Nothing more.

Teresa looked at him. And for the first time that night, she raised her voice a little.

"A safety net that didn't ask for permission. That was built without public oversight. And that is now being presented as inevitable, because you know that what is announced as an 'emergency' always finds acceptance.

"Don't you think you're being a bit dramatic, Ms. Lafuente?" the economist interjected. "What's wrong with having a plan B?"

"Nothing," she replied. Except that in this case, plan B was designed by people who knew that plan A was going to fail... and did nothing to prevent it.

That left her speechless.

The journalist tried to redirect the conversation. "Do you think *EurΩn* poses a risk to the European Union?"

"*EurΩn* is what happens when trust dies and no one wants to bury it. It is not the enemy. But it is proof that the enemy was already here. We let it in when we normalized the idea that financial decisions do not require consent. Just design. Just narrative.

A pause. He looked at the camera again.

"I'm here today because I made a mistake. But I wasn't the only one. I was just the first to say it out loud.

At that moment, the channel's phone lines crashed. The *MirrorChain* stream doubled its audience in four minutes. And the name "Teresa Lafuente" was trending again. This time, without question marks.

CHAPTER 27 - ANALOG RESCUE

Lyon. Friday. 2:39 a.m.

The room was dimly lit. Only the blue light from the monitors illuminated the tired faces of Julián and Amélie. On the main screen, the decentralized *Open-Frame* platform displayed a message that should not have been there:

"INTEGRITY ERROR: checksum altered by root administrator."

Amélie turned pale.

"It can't be."

"There's a root administrator? They said it was autonomous." Julián typed as if he could undo reality with a command.

"Yes... but if one of the original validators of the system sold out, or was replaced..."

"Then we're transmitting data from inside a mirror."

Amélie threw the keyboard on the floor.

"This was our last line of defense. The Archive was the only way to ensure that the truth wasn't owned by anyone."

Julian approached the emergency console. He activated the backup. Another message:

"Network synchronized. Majority node detected. Unauthorized content override in progress."

"They're wiping our files in real time."

"Who?"

"Anyone with early access to the consensus protocol. If Sorokin got his people in before the system went public, then *OpenFrame* wasn't a choice. It was a trap.

Silence.

The air became unbreathable.

"What if we use a cold network?" Julian suggested. "Nothing online. Just physical distribution."

"Like in the 90s? USB drives? CD-ROMs?"

"Yes."

"And then what?"

"Then, let them store it. Let them read it. Let them bury it if necessary. But at least they'll know we didn't make it up."

Amélie nodded. She took out three hard drives. Old formats, almost nostalgic. One FAT32. One exFAT. One encrypted ISO.

"And who do we give it to?"

Julián thought. One answer emerged from all the doubts.

"To those who haven't chosen yet. Students. Programmers without a boss. Digital librarians. Bored anarchists.

Amélie smiled, exhausted.

"That's our resistance, huh? A technical manual distributed as banned literature.

"Yes. Because if Sorokin wants to rule the present... at least he can't control the memory of the past.

They began recording.

Outside, the early morning was indifferent.

But inside those discs, history was alive.

CHAPTER 28 - THE MIRROR

Zurich. Friday. 6:12 a.m.

Sorokin was alone, as he always was when things got important. He ate black bread and cold coffee for breakfast and read aloud fragments from the Archive that Julian and Amélie had tried to distribute.

The files were technically corrupted. But he had already read them. And the most ironic thing was that nothing in them bothered him.

"They're honest," he said quietly, like someone assessing an enemy with respect.

On the screen, a notification flashed.

ECB: Extraordinary meeting requested by joint initiative (Member State + Digital Fiscal Council)

Sorokin took the last sip of coffee. He made no gesture. He just said:

"Perfect."

He activated the camera. He opened a transmission. Unencrypted. Not private.

Public.

When the channel activated, *EurOn's* improvised logo appeared. And his face.

He began to speak.

"To those responsible for the European Central Bank, to the governments of the member states, and to all those who today wonder whether *EurΩn* is a hostile system or a possible tool:

I do not wish to replace anything. I have not come to usurp. I have built something because you stopped building.

The fear you feel is not because of me. It is because of the possibility that someone has done what you should have done ten years ago."

At that moment, thousands of simultaneous connections were opened. Journalists. Institutions. Citizens. And, of course, Julián and Amélie.

He continued.

"Today I am extending a formal offer.

Not of surrender. Not of absorption. Of convergence.

I propose that *EurΩn* be recognized as an auxiliary instrument of monetary emergency. Supervised by a joint council. With participation from the ECB. With public traceability. With open audits.

I give in. But I'm not going away.

You accept. But you don't kneel."

Economists' chat rooms crashed. The networks exploded. For a moment, the algorithms surrendered to the old power of structured discourse.

And then he said the words that no one expected:

"And if you reject this proposal... Then remember: it will not be *EurΩn* who breaks the Union. It will be your refusal to reform it."

And he ended the broadcast.

No signature. No applause. No music.

Just an echo.

And a Europe that no longer knew whether it was being conquered... or recruited.

CHAPTER 29 - THE CLAUSE

Marseille. Friday. 10:45 p.m.

The house was on top of a hill, overlooking the port, the noise, and the civilization that pretended everything was normal.

Inside, silence.

Only three people sat around a wooden table, with three glasses without wine and a laptop showing Viktor Sorokin's frozen face at the end of his broadcast.

"Did he really mean that?" Teresa asked, almost in a whisper.

"He's not saying anything he hasn't been planning to say for months," replied Amélie.

"What if the ECB accepts?"

"Then the coup will be legal. Voluntary. Irreversible.

Julian said nothing. He just stared at the screen.

"What if what he's proposing isn't so bad?" said Teresa. "Traceability, auditing, joint supervision... what if that's our only option?"

Amélie didn't answer right away. She got up. She walked over to the window. She spoke without looking at them.

"If we accept this, we'll be saying that a system designed in secret can be integrated into the legal system without consequences. We'll be normalizing that whoever acts first, rules. Even if they do so without asking.

"But it's better than nothing," insisted Teresa.

"No. It's worse than nothing," said Julián, finally. "Because it will seem like a solution. And people will stop looking for a real one."

Silence.

Teresa squeezed her glass. "So what do we do?"

"We publish it," said Amélie.

"The Archive?"

"Everything. Including the names." The facilitators. The accomplices. Those who knew. Those who kept quiet.

"And will they believe us?"

"No," said Julián. But they'll be forced to deny us. And in that attempt... the missing pieces will come out.

Teresa looked at them.

"What if Sorokin responds?"

"Let him. But this time, on our stage.

Amélie turned on an offline terminal. She connected one of the hard drives.

The screen filled with files.

"We're going to release the whole story. No embellishments. No headlines. No guarantees.

Julian turned to her.

"And what should we call it?"

Amélie thought about it. And she smiled for the first time in days.

"CryptoEurope: Manual for a surrender without gunfire."

CHAPTER 30 - SHARED SECRET

Saturday. 07:00 UTC. An anonymous link appears on the mirror servers of multiple technical forums, academic networks, and encrypted channels.

Title:

CRYPTOEUROPE *Manual for a Surrender Without Shooting* – Complete Documentation – — Signatures, records, chronology, contracts, source code, accesses, power maps —

Size: 4.2 GB. Format: compressed, signed, encrypted.

Inside: – An index of 134 sections. – PDF files, internal ECB logs. – Intercepted communications (legal and not so legal). – Hand-annotated code fragments. – Videos. – Sworn statements. – The name of Sorokin... and 27 other people.

Includes a final section:

Epilogue: Letter to those who will come *“Every system is born of betrayal. Some recognize it. Others call it legacy.”*

08:26 UTC – First Reaction

A Romanian news agency publishes a leaked summary of the index. No one pays attention. Until a digital analyst discovers that the cryptographic signature matches the ECB's digital environment.

And then, everything explodes.

10:04 – Media

The *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel*, *El País*, *Politico*, *La Repubblica*, and *Reuters* publish in parallel:

"The CryptoEurope Archive: a parallel system designed to replace the euro in the event of a controlled collapse."

A headline. A statement. No longer a question.

12:42 p.m. – Markets

Cryptocurrencies rise. The euro falls 3.2% in less than an hour. Not because there is panic. But because there is now an alternative.

The system is no longer the only one offering stability. Now it offers... history.

2:07 p.m. – ECB

Impromptu press conference. Pale spokesperson. Soulless reading:

"The contents of the file will be evaluated. The ECB reaffirms its commitment to transparency and institutional integrity. No critical violations have been identified."

Translation: "We've been caught, but we don't know how much."

4:01 p.m. – Sorokin

Posts a message.

"I appreciate the publication of the file. It was necessary. Every great work needs criticism. I will continue building. And anyone who wants to stop the train... let them stand on the tracks."

7:00 p.m. – Public opinion

Europe is not collapsing. Europe is breaking apart.

Northern countries call for caution. Southern countries call for control. The public is divided.

And among the anonymous comments flooding the internet, one stands out for its coldness:

"It doesn't matter who's right anymore. What matters is who will write the next chapter."

CHAPTER 31 - PANIC PARAMETERS

Vienna. Monday. 8:00 a.m.

The building had no sign, no doorbell. Just a gray door with an old lock that opened onto a hallway that smelled of stone and silence.

Amélie pushed. She entered.

An empty room. A table. Two chairs. And in one of them, him.

Viktor Sorokin wasn't dressed in black. He wore a light wool jacket and a collarless shirt. He looked like a tired professor, not the architect of a system that was bending Europe without firing a shot.

"Thank you for coming," he said.

Amélie didn't answer.

She sat down.

He placed a small notepad on the table. Nothing digital.

"Why here?" she asked.

"Because Vienna is neutral. Or so it pretends to be.

"And because you can't hide anymore."

Sorokin nodded.

"I don't want to hide."

"Then what do you want?"

"I want to understand why you're still fighting."

She looked at him.

"Because I still believe that if no one resists, then what you did wasn't a strategy."

It was a test.

"What if it was both?"

"Then you need witnesses. And that's why I'm here.

Sorokin folded his hands. He looked out the window, where the city was waking up, unaware that inside that room, the final point of its monetary policy was being discussed.

"You think this was a coup.

"It was."

"I think it was a rescue.

"A bailout that nobody asked for."

"Because no one knew how close they were to the bottom."

Amélie opened her notebook. She took out a piece of paper.

"This is the list of the system's initial validators. Twenty-seven names. Four are dead. Three are missing. Five have denied everything.

"And the rest," Sorokin interrupted, "are working.

"No. The rest are waiting for you to fail so they can survive you."

Sorokin looked at her. And for the first time in the entire conversation, he smiled. Not arrogantly. With resignation.

"And you? Why did you really come?"

"Because I wanted to see you up close before deciding if your story is worth more than the truth you erased to tell it.

"And what did you decide?"

She put the paper away. She closed the notebook.

"I don't know yet."

She stood up. But before leaving, she paused.

"Viktor, history will remember you."

"I don't care about that."

"It will anyway. But not as you expect."

"And how do you know that?"

She turned around.

"Because when all this collapses, it won't be your ideas that remain. It will be your methods. And methods always give away the author.

She left. She didn't close the door.

And he didn't move.

CHAPTER 32 - CONVERGENCE

Strasbourg. Tuesday. 10:00 a.m.

The courtroom was packed. Not out of morbid curiosity. Out of necessity.

The chair of the session, a Slovenian woman with a firm voice and limited patience, reviewed the agenda.

—Item three. Appearance of Ms. Teresa Lafuente, independent jurist. Subject: legal validation of structures used by the protocol known as *EurΩn*.

Teresa walked slowly to the podium. She did not greet anyone. She did not express her gratitude. She sat down.

She looked around: MEPs, advisors, cameras, interpreters, enemies.

And then she spoke.

"I'm not here to explain anything. I'm here to remind you.

One sentence. Simple. Unprepared. But the room fell silent.

"The *EurΩn* system was possible because many of you here did not want to know what was happening. Because it was technical. Because it was complex. Because it was convenient.

A representative intervened:

"Ms. Lafuente, do you have evidence that members of this chamber actively facilitated the system?"

"No," she replied. "I have evidence that you ignored it while it was being financed from within. And in law, omission also constitutes responsibility.

Murmurs.

"I signed a document without knowing what was behind it. And I said so. Publicly. Without hiding. Who else here can say the same?"

Silence.

"Are you aware of the economic cost of reversing the *EurΩn* protocol?" asked a representative from the centrist bloc.

"Yes." "And you still think it should be done?"

"No." "Then what?"

Teresa looked up.

"I don't think it should be dismantled." I think it should be recognized that it was born without legitimacy. And that if it is going to continue... it should be with names, with memory, and with responsibility.

The chairwoman of the session indicated that her time was up.

Teresa closed her folder.

"I did not come to stop the future. Just to remind you that it wasn't born alone. She stepped down from the podium.

An uncomfortable silence. Not because of what she had said. But because no one interrupted her.

And because, for the first time since it all began, no one could contradict her without lying.

CHAPTER 33 - CONTINGENCY CLAUSE

Brussels. Thursday. 3:00 p.m.

The Parliament chamber smelled of disinfectant, bad coffee, and political climax.

A digital sign announced the sole item on the agenda:

"Final vote: Conditional recognition of the EurΩn Protocol as an auxiliary financial contingency instrument."

Conditional. Auxiliary. Contingency.

Three words that said a lot... and denied everything.

The president announced the result, without drama:

"In favor: 412. Against: 189. Abstentions: 53. The motion is approved.

There was lukewarm applause. Some stood up. Others left without looking at anyone. As if what had been approved weighed more heavily on them than what had been defeated.

Marseille. An hour later.

The three of them were sitting on the same terrace where Julian and Amélie had begun to build the Archive.

Teresa lit a cigarette. "That's it."

Julian took the paper from her hands.

"How can something like 'auxiliary instrument' be approved?" What does that mean?"

Amélie replied without looking at them.

"It means that it's now legal... but only if it's used when the system fails. And since the system has been failing for years..."

"Then you can use it whenever you want," said Teresa.

"Exactly."

Julian drank. Water, for once.

"What about us?"

"We don't matter," said Amélie. The file is already circulating. Parliament has already voted. And Sorokin has already won, even if he has to pretend to share it.

Teresa looked out at the sea.

"Then that's it.

"No," said Julián. "Now something else begins."

"What?"

"Oblivion."

No one said anything.

The sun was setting, without urgency.

CHAPTER 34 - UNCLOSED DOCUMENTATION

Three years later. A small office in Lisbon. Natural light. Digital silence.

Julián works in a university library. He doesn't teach. He catalogs. He organizes files of defunct financial institutions. Sometimes, when he sees a reference to *the EurΩn*, he marks it with a red pen. Not to correct it. Just to remember that it was there.

Amélie lives in Copenhagen. She teaches applied political philosophy. A subject that didn't exist until she invented it. She doesn't mention what she did. But sometimes, when a student asks about the ethical limits of emerging systems, she pauses for a second longer than necessary. And that's enough.

Teresa returned to Madrid. She published a book. It didn't sell very well. But it was cited in several official reports with the cruelest phrase there is: "Relevant document, although not conclusive."

None of them ever spoke publicly about the Archive again.

No one asked them to.

The world moved on.

EurΩn was integrated without fanfare. The euro continued to exist, like a flag that no one bothers to lower. And the European Union finally became what

everyone suspected: a functional building constructed on documents that no one read in their entirety.

One afternoon, Julian received an envelope with no return address. Inside was a single printed sheet of paper.

"If it ever happens again, at least don't let it catch you asleep." — V. S.

Julián didn't tear it up. He filed it away. No number. No category. No glory.

And he kept it at the bottom of a box marked with a marker pen.

CRYPTOEUROPE – OPEN DOCUMENTATION

END.