



THE MIRROR VISITOR

BOOK 4

Christelle Dabos

THE STORM OF ECHOES

"It's Pullman in a beret and Breton stripes... We're on the edge of our seats."

—*The Spinoff*

"The Storm of Echoes offers a chilling but simultaneously euphoric experience."

—POOJA BALE, *The Daily Californian*



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*Translated from the French
by Hildegarde Serle*



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VOLUME 3 RECALLED

THE MEMORY OF BABEL

After languishing for almost three years, Ophelia picks up Thorn's trail once again on Babel, an ark that is both cosmopolitan and a jewel of modernity. She gets to Babel with the help of Gail Fox, and Archibald, who, for months, have been searching for LandmArk using the Compass Roses.

As soon as she arrives on the ark of the twins, Pollux and Helen, Ophelia enrolls, under a false name, at the Good Family conservatoire in order to pursue her investigation into the true identity of God. She is then confronted by the omnipotence of the Lords of LUX, and the law of silence that, paradoxically, seems to prevail in this hub of information. In the wake of her investigation, strange deaths occur, people are struck down with sheer terror etched on their faces . . .

Ophelia's strenuous research finally enables her to find Thorn at the very heart of the Babel Memorial, a huge library claiming to be "the memory of the world," in which he had taken refuge to try to track down God. But against all expectations, God's identity lies hidden in some books for children, or rather, in their author, Eulalia Gonde. The distortion of her surname, Gonde, had gradually elevated her to the rank of God.

But if God is Eulalia, then who is the Other, that alter ego that Ophelia glimpses in the mirror, and who will cause the definitive

disintegration of the arks? And what are those echoes that Lazarus, one of God's allies, deems to be "the key to it all"?

CHARACTERS

OPHELIA

Born on the ark of Anima, Ophelia turned down two marriage proposals before finding herself obliged to marry Thorn, from the Pole. Her particular family power enables her to read the past of objects and to travel through mirrors. Due to an accident with a mirror when young, she has remained unusually clumsy, her voice is reedy, and she has a disarming propensity to get into scrapes. Small in stature, she hides her shyness behind her rectangular glasses, whose lenses change color according to her mood, and behind her old three-colored scarf, which her animism has contaminated, and from which she is never apart. Her family moans about her severe, outmoded dresses; and as for her reader's gloves, precious as they are, they fall apart at the seams thanks to the nervous nibbling of their owner. However, in order to pass unnoticed on the ark of Babel, she will sacrifice her thick brown curls for a short, yet still unruly, cut, and will hide her coat and scarf to don the midnight-blue uniform of the company of Forerunners.

Behind her discreet manner, Ophelia conceals determination and staunch resilience. Although initially staggered by the cruelty at the Pole, she remains as motivated as ever by a deep sense of fairness and truth and refuses to bow to the will of others when that will counters her own. Stubborn and headstrong, she spent more than two years searching for the slightest trace of Thorn, her missing husband, and crossed the arks to finally be able to admit her feelings to him and make him her closest ally. She proves ever more intrepid and ingenious in her

quest to discover both the identity of “God” and the cause of the cataclysm that divided the old world into many arks.

THORN

As Treasurer of the Pole, Thorn is ostensibly nothing more than a brusque, sullen accountant, as tall and surly as Ophelia is short and friendly. The bastard descendant of the Dragons clan, he was placed under the protection of his aunt, Berenilde, and also inherited, from his mother, the power of the Chroniclers, a fallen clan endowed with exceptional memories. Thorn's appearance reflects his character: reserved, and as cold as the ice covering his ark. Deeply misanthropic, he respects only numbers and cannot tolerate disorder. His every action is timed by the hands of the fob watch he always wears, and the weight of a difficult childhood seems to drag his smile downwards. However, he gradually reveals a true revulsion for violence, a fierce desire to protect his loved ones, and an unshakeable sense of duty. Obsessed with the desire to rehabilitate his family, he was counting on Ophelia's object-reading powers to unlock the secrets of the Book belonging to Farouk, the Pole's family spirit. Alas, events escaped his control: the dreadful plot in which he embroils his fiancée, his aunt, and others close to him almost leads all of them, more than once, to their death.

Determined not to involve Ophelia anymore against her will, Thorn chooses to disappear in order to investigate the identity of "God," and the implacable force that, secretly, seems to be governing life on the arks. And yet, it is when he teams up with Ophelia that they both reveal the best of themselves, as though cured of their flaws and insecurities by how they see each other. Thorn's scar-riddled, and now maimed, body proves to be the exact opposite of his brilliant mind, and testifies to his

ultimate desire to do good, to do the best for his family and the world he inhabits.

ARCHIBALD

A member of the Web clan, endowed with a version of the telepathy that is characteristic of members of the Pole family, Archibald is the Pole's ambassador, but the exact nature of his duties is unclear since an ambassador would be expected to have a certain sense of . . . diplomacy. He, however, devotes himself, body and soul, to doing the exact opposite. Scruffy, cavalier, and a skirt-chaser, he also makes a habit of never lying, and doesn't always care about the feelings of whomever he's speaking to. Paradoxically, he is both greatly respected and greatly disdained for his escapades. Maybe his angelic beauty makes people quicker to forgive his erring ways, or maybe his position at court, and the deferential fear his family inspires, give him a prestige that he does his utmost not to deserve. All the same, Archibald's irreverence actually conceals a keen intelligence and a profound melancholy. Behind his nonchalant exterior, the ambassador is a formidable political strategist, and is adept at giving the impression of serving only his own interests, when, in fact, most of his actions enable Ophelia, Berenilde, and even Thorn to survive in the face of their enemies. Since he was abducted from the heart of his estate of Clairdelune, supposedly the most secure place in Citaceleste, the Web has cut its ties with him. Archibald, severed from all his points of reference, is now a free agent, and is able to find routes between the Compass Roses, those conduits that enable travel from one side of the world to the other . . .

ROSALINE

Aunt Rosaline asked nothing of anyone when she was dispatched to the Pole as Ophelia's chaperone. Grouchy, and stiff as an unoiled door hinge, she is known for her unwavering practicality.

Behind her severe hair bun there does, indeed, hide a fiercely protective instinct and incorruptible morals, even in a hostile setting. Aunt Rosaline's particular power gives her a singular affinity with paper, so it's not unusual to see her keeping boredom, or nervousness, at bay by repairing any books or wallpaper she can lay her hands on. She loathes the bitter cold of the Pole, but she really loves her goddaughter Ophelia, and she adores Berenilde, with whom she has forged a strong and sincere friendship. When, having fulfilled her chaperoning duties, she is obliged to return to Anima, she misses Berenilde and the Pole terribly, even if she would sooner swallow her precious papers than admit it. So, as soon as the opportunity arises, Aunt Rosaline dives, without hesitation, into the first available Compass Rose to rejoin her adoptive family and support it in adversity.

BERENILDE AND VICTORIA

Beautiful and ruthless—those are the first words that spring to mind to describe the dazzling Berenilde, sole survivor of the Dragons clan, and Thorn’s aunt. As Farouk’s favorite, she is admired for her beauty, and feared for her scheming at the heart of Citaceleste. Warring clans and court conspiracies snatched away the lives of her husband, Nicholas, and her three children, Thomas, Marian, and Peter. Stoked by anger, grief, and the need to be a mother again, Berenilde shrinks from nothing to consolidate her position in court. Her capricious moods often land Ophelia in tricky situations, but, behind her sometimes abrasive manner, Berenilde is deeply attached to her.

Her pregnancy puts her in a very particular position, since she gives birth to the first direct descendant of a family spirit for centuries. Although she appears to disdain Archibald, she has blind faith in his loyalty and goodness, and makes him godfather to her daughter, Victoria. It is said that Berenilde and Victoria are the only two people Farouk truly cares about. Which is fortunate, since Victoria’s newfound power enables her to duplicate herself, and send, hither and thither, her astral double, whom only “God” and Farouk seem able to see. But to save the last child remaining to her, Berenilde won’t hesitate to use her claws.

GAIL AND FOX

Fox—real name Foster—is a servant at Clairdelune, in the service of Lady Clothilde, Archibald’s grandmother. He’s a red-haired giant, with a character as fiery as his mane. When Ophelia arrives at Clairdelune with a false identity—that of Mime, Berenilde’s valet—Fox takes her under his wing and agrees to initiate her into the mysteries of the court, in exchange for her first ten green sandglasses. When he becomes the victim of a technicality following the death of his mistress, Ophelia takes him into her service as an adviser. Fox is a faithful friend, a loyal guide, and a solid shoulder on which to lean. For years, he has harbored an affection, mixed with admiration, for Gail, Clairdelune’s mechanic.

Mother Hildegard’s protégée, Gail is the last surviving member of the Nihilists, a clan whose power was that of annihilating the powers of other clans. To conceal her origins, she dyes her short hair jet black, and wears a black monocle over what she calls her “bad eye.” More reserved than Fox, she nevertheless reciprocates his feelings for her, while never having really admitted so to him. Fundamentally honest, Gail detests court intrigues, and gives Ophelia her unfailing support.

ELIZABETH AND OCTAVIO

An aspiring virtuoso, Elizabeth is in charge of the division of apprentice Forerunners that Ophelia joins in Babel. Tall, slender, and with a face sprinkled with freckles, her grasp of humor is as poor as her grasp of information is great. Indeed, she specializes in databases. Elizabeth is Helen's goddaughter, and was born among the powerless, but she proves to be one of Ophelia's rare allies among the Forerunners.

As for Octavio, he descends from Pollux. He belongs to the family branch of the Visionaries: like his mother, Lady Septima, a professor at the Good Family, he benefits from phenomenally sharp eyesight. He is studying to become an apprentice virtuoso within the company of Forerunners. While his mother has every intention of making him top of his division, Octavio is determined to gain his position on his own merits. Uninvolved in Lady Septima's scheming, he befriends Ophelia, and then desperately tries to prove to her that he is "a good person," even to the extent of getting embroiled in some perilous situations that are beyond him.

AMBROSE AND LAZARUS

Lazarus travels from ark to ark, like the renowned explorer that he is. He recounts how, one day, wearing a diving suit, he had attempted to jump from the edge of the world, but had to be brought back up before he could see anything other than clouds. When he isn't roaming the world, he devotes himself to his inventions: it's thanks to him that Babel boasts many automatons, to combat "the servitude of man by man." Unfortunately, his cheerful and friendly demeanor conceals his loyalty to "God." His intentions may not be as pure as he makes them out to be.

By contrast, his son Ambrose is innocence and goodness personified. Disabled at birth, he has his left arm where his right should be, and his legs are similarly reversed. So, he gets around in a wheelchair and harbors the ambition of being a "whaxi" driver, to ferry people across Babel. He is the first to welcome and help Ophelia when she arrives on this unfamiliar ark. Nevertheless, he is aware of the existence of "God," and of his father's involvement in this vast conspiracy that governs the order of the world. When Ophelia enters the Good Family, and sends him desperate messages, the young man's laconic telegrams are few and far between. So she thinks he has abandoned her, whereas Ambrose, indoctrinated by his father, thinks that she is the "Other," that mysterious being that caused the disintegration of the arks.

FAMILY SPIRITS

No one really knows how the family spirits were born, or exactly which catastrophe cost them their memories. They have been around for centuries, immortal and omnipotent, with, as sole points of reference, their Books: ancient tomes made of a material similar to human skin; disturbing, mysterious, written in a language no one understands anymore, holding secrets that even Anima's most able readers haven't managed to unlock. The family spirits passed their powers on to their human descendants, and they rule, each in their own way, over their respective arks, which they never leave.

Artemis, the red-haired giantess who watches over Anima, has immersed herself in the stars, which she studies with fascination. She has very little contact with her descendants but endeavors to be a benevolent spirit on their behalf. She seems to have no interest whatsoever in anything concerning the past.

Farouk, the Pole's spirit, is capricious and irascible, like a child. His memory is so weak that he consigns all his thoughts and decisions to a notebook, kept for him by an Aide-memoire, but his psychic powers are inordinately strong. He has never really bothered to control them, and, often, the mental shock waves he sends out trigger searing migraines in those around him. Farouk, like most of the family spirits, is incredibly beautiful, but it's a beauty so cold that he seems to be hewn from marble. He tends to lounge around, in an attitude of total indifference to everything. He has just one obsession: unlocking the secrets of his Book, and his past.

On Babel, the twins Pollux and Helen form a complementary duo. Pollux is beauty, Helen intelligence. Unlike the other family spirits, Helen's physique is unsightly, out of proportion, and she moves with the help of a crinoline on castors, or mechanical limbs. Since she cannot have any descendants, she dedicates herself to the protection of the powerless, known as the Goddaughters of Helen. As for Pollux, he shows an almost paternal interest in his descendants, and they are known as the Sons of Pollux. With both Helen and Pollux being passionate about knowledge, they direct the establishment of the Good Family, which trains the elite of the nation, and supervises the running of the Memorial, the vast library incorporating all the books and knowledge accumulated since the Rupture of the world. They rule over the most cosmopolitan ark, but also the most militaristic, that Ophelia has explored.

If life on Anima is lighthearted, and that on the Pole is all intrigues and debauchery, life on Babel is bound by respect for rigid laws and the pursuit of knowledge. However, the Lords of LUX seem to be pulling the strings from the shadows and beware those who pry a little too closely!