



Strategic Tale 11.2

(On development methods: internal, external, partnerships)

What's the deal?

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And there I was, staring open-mouthed straight at the great Jean Paul, the king of the world, the perfect catch, an obscure object of desire, smart, as funny as hell, and the son-in-law that any father would like to have. And that was the problem, son-in-law. Indeed, Jean Paul was still there, kneeling in front of me and holding out a ring, with me standing with an irrepressible desire to run. And it was no wonder. All this had given me a panic attack; myriad doubts coursed through my body, pricking like needles from my head to my toes. He was clear: he was proposing total commitment: the same house, the same plans, the same bank account, the same life project. And he had to say it:

"Do you want to be Madame de Piaget?"

I swallowed hard so as not to shout out: No! For heaven's sake, was he asking me even to surrender my identity? Mrs. de Piaget? But I'm me, I love my name!

To be one? As if we were merging into a single entity, even though we call it marriage? His goal, he told me, was to grow, to be a family. Maybe he was asking me to go forth and multiply. Jean Paul wanted an unwavering commitment. This was no longer a question of being fed up and closing my own front door to enjoy my personal space, my little one-room flat. If I said yes, whenever I lost my temper and closed the bedroom door, I would then have to deal with him later face-to-face in the corridor. Overwhelmed? You must be joking! I broke into a sweat.

I know that marriage today need not be forever, forget the vow "until death do us part", but couldn't the guy have said something like: Shall we see how it goes? Shall we see more of each other? Or call me crazy, why didn't he suggest living together? Something less committed, less formal, less stifling. A first step, take it slowly. To evolve as "separate beings" and as "individuals in a relationship", striving towards a shared goal through engagement, trust, and understanding, with personal freedom, each with our own objectives, seeking to achieve that vision of life that has always been so different for each one of us separately.



Less commitment, yes; that would make this decision easier, more appealing, where we can share a lot but also have our own separate lives. And if so, I could shout out from the rooftops: Yes, Jean Paul, I do! And everyone would be happy, us and the twenty people who had stopped eating to watch us in the restaurant.

Without paying much attention to the gawking diners, I kept looking at him, smiling, gritting my teeth so much that I felt like I was going to break a tooth. Just keep smiling, as someone once said. Inside my head, a legion of neurons formed up like Spartans and began screaming out: Wake up! Don't you long to continue living alone? Alone! You manage your time, you're totally independent, you don't want to share your washing machine, and you hate toothbrushes in the same cup. That means you may have less that way, but what you do have, you know, is yours and yours alone, and you are in control morning, noon, and night. Girl, wake up and smell the coffee! Your own personal space is priceless to you. In-de-pen-dence.

By now, Jean Paul had stopped smiling and was about to get up, when one of those gifts that life has in store for you, my best friend, Chris, appeared. She was always to be trusted, always on the ball, and she knew me almost as well as my own mother; she knew about my doubts and my fears. I couldn't decide at that moment under pressure without a moment of calm reflection, so she shouted out:

"A toast to Ms Martínez!" Here's to our "flings"!

I couldn't stop laughing for the next hour. Everyone toasted the "happy couple"; even poor Jean Paul was delighted, but he still did not understand English well. Chris and I hugged each other tightly. For more than ten years, we have used the word "fling" to refer to the boys we meet from time to time, but who will never become serious boyfriends.

Jean Paul, don't get upset. We will continue seeing each other, but let's just wait and see. All in good time!

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