

THE
NAEJ AND EINAD
MANIFESTO



JEAN S. JEROME

FREE READING SAMPLE

Prologue and Chapter 1

Jean S. Jerome
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The Naej and Einad Manifesto

A romantic novel inspired by true events

JEAN S. JEROME

English edition

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A romantic novel inspired by true events. Naej and Einad are pseudonyms. Dialogue and scenes are fictionalized.

Complete narrative • Prologue and 24 chapters.

AI-assisted writing, translation, cover art, and layout. No interior illustrations.

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About this novel

This romantic novel is inspired by the personal account of Jean S. Jerome. Naej and Einad are pseudonyms. The real-life foundation includes their school years in Port-au-Prince in 1998, their separation, their renewed contact in September 2026, their reunion in Canada, their business partnership, and their wedding at Vizcaya Gardens in Miami in October 2026.

Scenes, dialogue, private thoughts, incidental characters, objects, and connecting events have been fictionalized. Events involving the named businesses are literary inventions unless expressly identified as part of the author's account. The novel is not a documentary record. Royal cover images are symbolic artistic interpretations, not photographs of the actual wedding.

The English and French editions tell the same story. The account is presented as a romantic novel inspired by true events, with imagined scenes connecting the milestones.

For the answer

For the person who waited.

For the person who learned to answer.

A question without protection

Miami, October 2026

The envelope was in his inside pocket. Naej had checked twice, although he knew the paper had nowhere to go. On the first check he had touched only the corner. On the second he had pulled it halfway out, seen the crease across its face, and pushed it back before anyone noticed.

He could handle a hospital room full of people waiting for him to act. He could introduce himself, listen, ask the necessary questions. He could put order into the next five minutes when someone else's fear had made those five minutes unmanageable. But he had been standing beside a garden wall for nearly three minutes, trying to decide whether to give a woman a letter.

The woman was about to become his wife.

That ought to have simplified the matter.

Behind him, a chair scraped over stone. Somewhere beyond the clipped greenery, someone laughed, then lowered their voice. He took off his glasses and cleaned a lens that was not dirty. When he put them on again, Einad stood at the other end of the path.

She was watching him with the expression he remembered from school: patient for a moment longer, perhaps two, but not indefinitely.

"Are you coming?" she asked.

"I was looking for you."

"Without moving?"

He smiled. The nervousness did not leave; it made room for the smile.

She walked toward him. Up close, she was not a memory made young. There was a life in her face that he had not witnessed, a life he could not claim merely because he had known her before it. He loved that face. He loved, too, the fact that she would not let him pretend the missing years belonged to him.

"What is it?" she asked.

He brought out the envelope.

Her eyes moved to his hand. "A letter?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"I thought if I gave it to you afterward, it might sound as if I had waited until you couldn't change your mind."

She did not laugh. She took the envelope, but she did not open it.

"Naej, I will still have a mind afterward."

"I know."

"Good."

He had expected the correction to embarrass him. Instead it steadied him. This was the woman he was marrying: not a prize at the end of his courage, but a person whose freedom would remain intact beside his.

"It isn't a request," he said. "It's an answer I should have given you."

She looked at the unmarked envelope. For a moment the garden seemed to have fewer sounds.

"To which question?"

He could not explain without going back to a classroom in Port-au-Prince, a blue notebook, and a girl who had once asked him what he wanted.

So he began there.

The blue notebook

Port-au-Prince, 1998

Einad drew the window before she drew the house. It was a habit that irritated Naej, because a window required a wall, and a wall required a plan, and she had apparently decided to let the whole structure depend on where she wished the sunlight to fall.

"You will have to move that," he said.

She covered the page with her hand. "You haven't seen the rest."

"There is no rest."

"Exactly. You are criticizing a house that isn't finished."

"It has a floating window."

"It has a beginning."

They sat at the end of a wooden desk, with the blue notebook between them. Other students were leaving the room. The last lesson had ended, but neither of them had stood up. Naej had packed his books, unpacked one to check a page, and then packed it again. Einad had noticed. She intended to give him no assistance.

She removed her hand. Beneath the window she drew a wide sill, then a table with a chair on either side.

"What is the room for?" he asked.

"Work."

"What kind?"

"I don't know yet."

"You've built an office for a profession you haven't chosen."

"I have chosen something." She tapped the little table. "I want a place where I can do work that belongs to me."

He considered that. From the courtyard came the clatter of a dropped object and a burst of laughter. He was comfortable with the noise; it gave him time to think before speaking.

"Everybody's work belongs to them."

"Does it?"

"If they do it."

She turned toward him. "Then why do so many people explain what they want by telling you what someone else expects?"

He looked down at his bag. The buckle had caught a thread from the strap. He pulled at it.

"Naej."

"What?"

"I asked you a question."

"I heard it."

"And the buckle has an answer?"

He laughed, which was usually how she rescued him from his own hesitation. The difficulty was not that he had nothing to say. Quite often he had too much, all of it arriving together, and by the time he had arranged it into something he could bear to let her hear, she had asked another question.

"I think people are afraid of being wrong," he said.

"About what?"

"About what they want."

She held the pencil still. Then, with a care that made him more nervous than teasing did, she asked, "Are you?"

He should have answered about a profession. There were several respectable possibilities available, any one of which would have carried them safely into a discussion of examinations. Instead he looked at her hand on the notebook.

There was a faint gray mark on the side of her finger where the pencil had rubbed.

He wanted to keep sitting there.

It was such a small desire that admitting it ought to have been easy. Yet to say it aloud would reveal that he knew the lesson had ended, that he had no practical reason to remain, that his whole elaborate business with the schoolbag had been conducted in the hope that she would stay.

"You haven't answered," she said.

"No."

"That's an observation, not an answer."

He raised his eyes. "Sometimes."

She accepted that. It was one of the things he liked about her. She could be impatient with evasion without requiring a performance of courage. An honest little answer was worth more to her than an impressive one that had been borrowed.

She drew another chair at the table.

"Who is that for?" he asked.

"Someone who will tell me when the window is impossible."

He leaned closer to the drawing. "I didn't say impossible."

"You implied it."

"I said it was floating."

"Then help me give it a wall."

She pushed the notebook toward him. He took the pencil and drew a line. His sleeve touched hers. Neither moved away. For several seconds he concentrated with extraordinary seriousness on the thickness of a wall in a house that did not exist.

When he finished, she studied it.

"You've made the room smaller."

"I've made it stand up."

"Perhaps both matter."

Outside the door, a student called her name. Einad answered that she was coming, and the ordinary movement of departure began. The pencil went into the notebook. The notebook went into her bag. She stood and lifted the strap onto her shoulder.

Naej remained seated long enough for her to notice.

"You can walk with me," she said.

"I know."

"I was making sure."

They went out together. At the edge of the courtyard, he had to step aside to let two younger pupils pass. When he returned to her side, the small interruption had cost him the sentence he had almost said.

Einad waited until they were clear of the gate.

"You can ask me things too, you know."

"I do."

"You ask whether I finished an exercise. You ask whether I have a ruler."

"Do you?"

She stopped walking and looked at him. He managed to hold a solemn expression for perhaps a second. Then she laughed, and he laughed with her, relieved by a joke he had risked deliberately.

"All right," she said. "That was good."

He enjoyed the praise more than he intended to show.

For part of the way they talked about a classmate's impossible explanation for an unfinished assignment. Einad imitated the explanation badly and admitted it. Naej corrected the sequence of events, which made the story funnier. Their

companionship worked without much effort when neither tried to name what made it work.

At the point where their routes separated, she adjusted the strap on her shoulder.

"Tomorrow," she said.

"Yes."

She took two steps, then turned. "The window stays."

He watched her go before answering.

"I know."

That evening he opened his own notebook to a blank page. He had homework to do. Instead, he drew a rectangle, divided it with a vertical line, and shaded the lower edge to suggest a sill.

It was not a good drawing. The proportions were wrong, and one side leaned inward. He could have corrected it. He left it as it was.

Below it he wrote a question he had not asked her.

What happens if I want to stay?

Then he tore out the page. He did not throw it away. He folded it twice and put it inside the book he would take to school the next morning.