

More than thirty people collaborated in the creation of the book you are leafing through. We thank them from the depth of our hearts for the passion they dedicated to its realization.

*it felt like a fresh chaos*

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# PROSE

## Addiction

by Kristiina

Gutting the connections between the neurons, again?

You know, don't you – that you always have the opportunity to choose. Ignoring the stimulus is not helping you. Not helping you at all. How did you get in this vicious circle again?

You can feel your fingertips trembling from the beat of the heart when it is holding the tool in your hand. And suddenly a sharp, intense, almost mesmerizing feeling hits you like an ocean wave during a storm.

Kneeling in front of the plastic bucket makes you almost sick. You have an opportunity to fight, flight or freeze. But the smell is telling you – for the love of god, take the pin out already.

Pushing the old slippers on, you start moving towards the door. You open the door and all of a sudden dynamic movement hits. You stumble and fall to the ground beneath you. With a blink of an eye, you feel the cheeks turning red, eyes are full of tears, two of your favourite body parts are slipping in the avoidable mess.

Clumsy.  
Clumsy girl.

Does this only happen to me?

It does not go anywhere. It is stuck. Stuck in this loud thud.  
Bucket in your hands starts to roll down from the stairs.

*plahh – plahh – plahh*

Rolling down quietly until it is gone. In its way the zelatine like liquid is boring itself to *e v e r y* step on the staircase. Looks like the chocolate cream on your vanilla ice cream from last night what you got from Mcdonalds. And the smell hits you with the strong, almost rotten smell of fish. Plants can do it also, I can realize it now. This lazy Sunday has definitely an unavoidable cleaning task ahead.

## **Short Story**

By Simone

Once upon a time, on the top of a mountain, there was a white tiger living in peace. The tiger was really calm, independent, peaceful, perfectly adapted to its habitat. He didn't want and he didn't need to be somewhere else, he felt very comfortable in that place. At the feet of that mountain area there was a jungle, fully coloured, with a lot of different sounds, smells, and thousands of kinds of animals living there enjoying their lives.

One day, lions, gorillas, hippos, elephants, monkeys, snakes, big spiders, birds etc. organized a big party and they also tried to invite the tiger that was living on the mountain, even if until that time he always refused all invitations. But suddenly the tiger decided to go to the jungle, living his prejudice on the top of the mountain and he joined the party.

Finally he discovered how nice and amazing it was being together with very different kinds of animals that had several backgrounds, habits and stories. After this day, the white tiger decided to stay in the jungle forever.



# Every Trip Has an End

By Elisa

She took out of the basket the last wet sheet and hung it on the wire, spread it to avoid the folds then reached her grandmother.

« Have you already finished? »

« Yes, Grandma. » she said by placing the basket next to them and starting to collect things to bring back home.

« You're getting too fast Charlotte. »

The girl laughed and gave an elbow to the old woman to take her back to the house, they had finished everything they had to do that afternoon and by now it was approaching dinner time.

« Do you want to stay for dinner dear? » asked the old woman but Charlotte shook her head slightly.

« Thank you, Grandma, but I still have some homework to finish, and I'd like to do it before dinner. -smiling she kissed her cheek- I return tomorrow to lunch and we cook the pumpkin cake you promised me. »

« All right, dear, be careful going home and don't linger in the woods, I know you. » she threatened amused her by waving the ladle in the air.

« I won't, I promise. See you tomorrow! »

She screamed, closing the door behind her and filling her lungs with fresh air with a big breath.

The air smelled like winter; snow must have fallen on the mountains by now.

The sky was starting to darken, and it was tingling orange, she promised her grandmother not to linger in the woods but she had not told her anything about enjoying the show from the ravine to the east, she would lengthen the road to home.

She walked on the path occasionally greeting the people she met, who like her had lingered and were now reaching their homes after a day of work.

After a ten-minute walk she reached her goal and held her breath in front of that show. She got as close as possible to the safety fence and leaned her arms to it after leaving the books on the ground, standing there and watching the now rosy sky by sunset.

The calm situation was shaken by a strong wind blow, Charlotte was forced to close her eyes so quickly that her head started to spin, she kept her eyes closed for a long time and reopened them only when the wind calmed down.

It was no longer on the precipice but in a dark environment, she looked around lost and looked for some landmarks but did not find any.

She stretched her hands in the dark trying not to panic and was frightened when she touched something cold and hard, at her touch the crystal lit up by emitting violet light then went off again, slowly. Charlotte breathed deeply, calming her heartbeat and touched the crystal again, trying to look at what surrounded her in that small moment of light.

The crystal she was touching was not the only one, from the dark rocks that stood beside her rose other purple crystals, of different sizes.

It looked like a cave, but she had no idea where she was, and especially how she got there; a second before she was up and now...

She began to walk keeping contact on the crystals to get visibility but when out of curiosity she looked up she saw nothing but rock and crystals, she immediately began to think that she would never come out of there again.

Immersed in thoughts she stumbled upon a stone, lost contact with the crystal and fell into the darkness, she groaned with pain and heard a verse almost in response.

The heart jumped down her throat and after a few seconds of silence she took courage.

« Is there anyone? »

Another verse reached her ears and despite the pain in her leg she pulled up.

« Hello? »

A third verse as she walked gave her an idea of the direction in which she would have to go to find the source of that noise and after reaching the point where it was strongest and looking behind the boulders that sprung from the ground, she found what she was looking for.

The little animal jumped out of hiding frightening her to death and making her scream, but no one escaped, Charlotte looked at it incredulous and bewitched.

« You are a Womp. »

Her grandmother told her a lot about this animal that she knew was legendary.

It was said that the Womp had the task of accompanying travellers to their destination, many important mythological enterprises according to many had been carried out only with the help of this animal.

The Womp that now stood in front of Charlotte was small, it looked like a small hairy ball, the size of a basketball, on the back between the purple hairs sprouted some red spines and the tail was covered with red scales.

It had two large and round eyes, for a moment Charlotte believed to see them shining, small paws with sharp claws and two curved teeth coming out of its mouth.

It might have looked creepy, but it had something that made it tender, maybe the fact that it looked just like a puppy.

« If... if you are here is because I have a trip to do? Are the legends true? »

The animal jumped down from the stone and made some very fast steps despite the short legs then stopped and looked at her hissing with the forked tongue.

« Well... since I'm here and you're the only clue that I have, I deduced that the best thing to do is follow you. » she sighed, reaching him.

After the first twenty minutes of walking despite the fatigue and the fear Charlotte realized that she was smiling, the Womp continued to jump here and there, to run and then stop to look at her and wait for her, seemed happy and was putting a certain joy on her.

They had left the amethyst cave for a while now and now they were walking in a wider but still dark space; the rocks were covered with damp moss and Charlotte continued to be unable to see anything above her head.

« Can we stop? »

She had no chance to take into account the past time, but she was certain that they were walking for hours, her leg muscles were burning like crazy, and she was thirsty.

The Womp stopped to look at her almost as if it had understood the question and a moment later it started running again as if the answer was "no", the girl sighed and began to walk again; they travelled a curve and at the end of it the creature began to run, it stopped and waited for Charlotte to join it.

« Why- oh... » when she saw where it had brought her, she smiled with happiness, the waterfall in front of her created a lake of blue and clear water.

She rushed to drink to quench her thirst and when she was satisfied looked at the animal, not knowing whether it could understand it or not she thanked him.

The Womp started to move again and again she followed it this time for a few steps, until a patch of grass, it crouched there and closed its eyes, she sat on the soft and felt her legs so tired to be soft, finally she could rest and not lost a moment, she tightened her sweatshirt and lay down closing her eyes.

The second day was exciting because they finally saw the light of day, the Womp led her to the exit of the cave, it took time for her

eyes to get used to the sunlight again. It still looked like they were at the bottom of a deep valley.

The second day was also important for another event, the Womp led her in front of a crossroads and stopped to look at her.

« What? »

The animal's tail moved several times pointing first to one street and then to the other while its bright eyes were fixed on the girl.

« I must choose... » murmured Charlotte somewhat confused.

The Womp took a ride on itself, and she laughed amused then returned to focus on the two roads. She tried to find some clue as to where each would take her but found nothing to help her. She sighed, closing her eyes and relied only on her instincts, raised her arm pointing the way to the right, the animal issued a quick and sharp towards as if it was celebrating before taking the road indicated by Charlotte and restarting their journey, she followed it and kept wondering if it was the right choice.

They walked for hours, this time she was able to follow the flow of time thanks to the sun above them, when it began to set Charlotte understood that evening was approaching and a thought popped into her mind like a lightbulb turned on suddenly: she hadn't eaten in over 24 hours, and she wasn't hungry. She was thirsty, yes, but since she started that strange journey, she had never had the bites of hunger, now to be honest she was not even thirsty anymore.

It quickly got dark and the Womp led her out for the first time from the path they were following, in the distance she could see a building that seemed to be a barn, when they arrived Charlotte called for someone but no one answered her so she simply imitated the Womp and lay on the hay to be sheltered from the cold ground. For the first time, she struggled to fall asleep. She stayed up for hours watching the sleeping animal and wondering what was going on, why she? Why right now?

She awoke at dawn surprised that she was not tired after spending most of the night up and they resumed their journey for the third time.

Her legs didn't even hurt anymore.

They resumed the path abandoned the night before and to the surprise of the girl they began to meet some people; the first was a man leading a donkey, Charlotte greeted him, but he did not answer nor looked at her, the second one was a little girl who stopped in front of her and looked at her but was immediately called back by her mother.

The meetings increased but no one ever responded to the greeting of Charlotte who began to feel a sense of anguish within herself.

This malaise disappeared when a few kilometres away she recognized a village, her village. She looked incredulously at the Womp and for the first time it was the animal that ran after her to chase her.

The first place Charlotte went was the grandmother's house, on the edge of the village closer

at that moment. The old woman was out, she was laboriously withdrawing her clothes.

« Grandma! Let me help you. »

The silence that followed, the absence of response of the old woman made her feel that sense of anguish again.

She began to scream and try to touch the old woman, crying without any tears coming out of her eyes.

Grandma finished hanging clothes and returned home, Charlotte now devoid of energy just followed her.

On the kitchen cabinet where there had always been family photos now there was a photo of the young woman, portrayed smiling and carefree, in front of it a flower, a calla, Charlotte's favourite.

Every trip has an end and Charlotte's ended three days earlier.

# The Serenity of Rain

By Elian

A strong yet soothing rain takes a hold of the empty boulevard, reflecting every light shun by the lamps on the side of the road. It's as if nature is finally letting out all the pent up rage it held within for weeks. I'm the only soul roaming these empty roads, with slow blues music playing in my ears as I stroll on the edge of the river cutting through our capital. As I look forward, I see an endless road covered by these streetlamps, something like an infinite journey begging for me to take on.

Each step I take feels like an important event that will change the outcome of the universe. Everywhere I look around hides a story waiting to be discovered. So many people have been on this path before, all so different from me, all of them seeing it with different eyes and creating their own version of this little story. To my left the river is being slowly but roughly caressed by the powerful drops of rain flowing from the grey clouds above. To my right the wet boulevards reflect everything around it, creating the illusion of two separate dimensions uniting together, forming one huge entity.

As I slowly walk, I take in a deep breath and I sense the smell of the rain, such a pure and clean sensation, cleansing my entire body with it's cold touch, purifying every cell it touches, transcending my entire being into a contempt and meditative state. I take off my hood and let every water droplet caress my hair and skin. The sharp and tingly feeling all over my face waking my body up from a deep sleep and revitalizing it.

I slowly start seeing a gas station grow bigger in front of me, it's lively colour and strong neons create a high contrast and bring something new to the landscape. I remember a little dock coming up on my journey, so I decided to check out the station and buy

something to drink and enjoy later. As I enter, I give a friendly nod to the half-asleep cashier. As I look around, I feel as if I am in a totally different plan of existence, this realm was different from what I got used to. I shuffle around and grab a soda; I pay for it and leave the station with a gentle smile on my face.





I make my way to the dock as I roll a cigarette gently, so the rain doesn't wet the paper. I tap it a few times so the tobacco sits snug inside of it and I arrive. I go down a set of wet cement stairs full of leaves and sit down on the cold dock with my feet dangling above the water. I stop the music in order to hear the rain splash the river's water, open my drink and light my cigarette. I take one deep strike of the cigarette smoke and blow it out softly. Everything is serene, finally.

## **Internally settled**

By Francisc

### *Event*

Her profile resting on another chest, third person, not from afar, not intimate with that intimacy, but then the face is frontal, and the eyes open, and maybe close, if he so remembers, but mostly stay open and widely so, as that is of importance for the moment. The moment passes into one which is not consecutive, no follow-up, but montage, she, the face, but she herself closes distance and passes his then-sight, as he then chose to be the sight up close, to a secondary sight, not himself but his, to his ear, she sighs. Sighs? No, it requires repetition. It repeats and utters a word, what word? – utters nonsense. She utters nonsense, he allows, grip strengthened, she goes on, her tense presence in the present tense then and there, the body follows, what shapes? – what shapes he shapes, she takes shape, her onto him, he is onto her. She, preoccupying herself with him, but not in whole, with his one part, stroke, the bridge into, out of, him preoccupied with her preoccupation. Nothing else in sight, not his, one floating around,

strength and stroke, and a weakening feeling getting stronger, her back, stationary, stationary? – no, another repetition, arching, the arch descending, to raise again, good movement, good repetition, it stays. His body, formal, as such formless, her lower back, is the transition correct? No time to decide, her back, her legs, he can picture, brought to her sides, his legs – must be – elongated in-between. Remember movement. She moves, correction, repetition, she moves. Stroke incessantly, grip lighter. Change the structure, no time for in-between: belly up? No, lying on stomach, himself, upright. Holding arms tight, face pushed against chest, grip stronger than before as to smother the weakening feeling gotten too strong for repetition. Change between well-built images until half-built, her head raising, her neck as her back arching previously, hailing – what? Nothing, moaning – clear desire, desire without an end or err. Herself wholly, pumping between a minute object and something large enough to engulf him – his sight. Then her back arched inwards, hairs flowing down shoulders until they don't show, change, front, stroke as there's no more smothering, her entirety, himself included, his gaze – afar, legs retracted, he sees, he's never seen, he pictures. Her voice, it enters, he wills it, there she goes, there, there it comes.

It came in waves and contractions and a warm feeling going down like phlegm on each phalange. He held as the convulsions of his basin and buttocks working together in automatic anatomical perfection, as the unkempt parquet brought its old smell back, and the trash too, the trash needs to be taken out, as his mind freed itself of images contrived and constructed, he took note: trash to be taken out. With eyes closed following the small geometric show shaping on his still sealed eyelids, he felt as if dozing off, as his consciousness slowly yet literally was slipping away or down and leaving only a flow, formless, behind. He had to resist. Mustering up resistance was a must.

The window hummed with the city's everliving and continuous hum, at times breaking into a car exhausting its sound as it left the premises for a place unknown. No voices outside, no sidewalk stepped on by ongoing passers-by, a much more diffuse rhythm, a rhythm nonetheless, but mostly background – an electric hum. From beyond the walls at times, pipes guided someone's unclean water or filth down the drain, reminding him that beyond this cold sensation he was feeling, one that makes what has previously happened empty and irredeemably foreign, at four o'clock passed in the night or be it morning, he wasn't alone. Someone's stool stood as proof.

He could wait no more, he woke, shaking all lethargy away, eyelids shooting back like old-timey theatre curtains, he would think only later, to show the show: his ceiling. With it, space came back, his own, and his own body in it, too, the wet spots on his lingerie having turned cold, his organ shrinking to normal shrivelled state, index and middle fingers already gripping nothing. Trash to be taken out. Luggage checked. Travel clothes – on the chair, over the previously worn, to be washed, laundry. His fridge too participated in the hum, but ever so occasionally – due to energy consumption considerations, it stops and only starts its internal motor when the internal temperature rises above 0 degrees Celsius, and this sudden jolt of auditive input is startling only at night. To clean himself – a must.

There he huddled, having given up on boxers which lay crumpled somewhere in the trajectory he took from bed to the bath, arriving in front of and staring down the toilet bowl, he let go, viscous residue plumping down, he found himself somewhere between disappointed and disgusted. A few more strokes to clean off excess waste – uncircumcised – then he flushed. The sound of the pipes, perhaps reminders for someone else now.

With it resting on the sink bowl, he washed the penis and pubis, then his hands twice, before his face. He should clean his armpits maybe, which he decided to do, and did, no more time for a shower, less he wanted to be a no-shower. He returned and sat still in the nude on the bedside, the mattress had an uncomfortable way of taking the shape of his buttocks. From there, he could peer in any other room, facility rather, as he only had one room. He pays little for the place yet rent still swallows a third of his wage.

A cold feeling as if love had left earth through and out of his erection, it too a memory, not a dignified one. Remembering her, he felt cold once more – abashed.

The clothes pile stood, from where he looked, awfully close to the trash bags and resembled them, but not in a way in which he could easily confuse them, rather as if the semblance could tell or show something about his living standards and self-hygiene, and his own self in the end, in shape, yes, if not in content, but also in form, as this confusion or free association spoke to something higher than matter could, a thought-image he brushed off on account of pre-travel hassle, although not believing it one moment.

He stood up and started going through his obligations, a morning like a to-do list. Thoroughly swiping the deodorant stick along his left, then right armpit, with arms raised as if half crucified, hoping it will help. Clean boxers come first on his still damp pubis, but it will do, then the pants, one leg at a time, he struggled with the second, hopping twice, hoping not to stumble, and he didn't. Zipper and button still undone. Bent over, he lifted one foot, knee outwards and brushed something off the sole, grabbed a sock and put it on, then repeated the rinse. White button-up, but a t-shirt underneath first. The undone ends he shoved into his undone pants, then tied up all ends and pulled on the shirt's belly to clear all creases. It fits. The belt's tail bent through the pant straps, then returned on the other

side. The buckle bit down on a hole one down from that which would perfectly fit, meaning: long day ahead. No need to stress his insides for looks. His hair was topsy turvy and would have required a brush or a comb, but he settled on one stroke of a hand on each side. No second look in the mirror.

His luggage luckily had been compacted and closed hours before. Morning breath. Put on coat – dark blue windbreaker with thermal padding on the insides and a removable hoodie which he had removed so as to make it more casual, as opposed to sporty, since he had bought it two years ago from an actual clothing store, no retail or second hand, a decision that pushed him to wear it religiously and without great concern for the overall match with underlying layers. Shook the sides to feel the weight of his pockets, then padded them to find shapes. Essentials are there, keys jingle, half-finished pack pops one corner through the synthetic fabric, so the lighter too must be there, phone falls heavy on his left side. He took off the coat and knelt ever so slightly so as to not ruin the pants' lining and put one shoe at a time, and the end signalled his own time to leave. Still going through the self-inscribed notes, still in hurry, his mind had its last hoorah, beyond going through the back and forth of forgetting and remembering potentially forgotten entries, whose re-entering the memory would defeat their very escape, as he recalled – to take the trash out. With luggage, which for reference was not more than an overfilled backpack that stayed rigid and raised, pulling at his shoulders when worn with both straps, and flailed about failing to find balance with only one, and overburdened his trapezoidal shoulder muscles nonetheless, not by weight but with pressure, for now, held in one hand, and the trash bag, strangled with a cord at the opening which now resembled a sinus, in other hand, held at an angle so as not to touch his pants' side, he turned the knob with his knee and exited. These were the premises.

Leaving the luggage on the pavement, he produced the key and turned it twice, same as the knob, to check, then himself, still twice, still turning, down the spiral staircase, swerving around the old elevator, too old to function, old enough to awaken memories, olfactive, grease and mechanism, hardwood interior, softened, smoothed, and smirched from excessive touch, tactile, fingers feeling the figments of countless fingers before feeling the same surfaces, as well as how it's buttons would never push into place perfectly, but at an angle – they never looked right, visual too, the countless protective wires going into zigzags and overlapping at opposite variations exactly into Xs, and out the main entrance into the cold that hits you frontally, then wanders around your skin, and reminds you how skin can feel restrictive and of paper and how you must push on, which he did, to the first dumpster in sight, where he hurdled the bag in one overhead move, then with the free hand removed two wires too entwined to be used as such, and he spent some time pressing on knots and pulling at strings – he moved while doing so, with both eyes transfixed as if themselves entangled, backpack thrown on one shoulder joyously jotting up and down at each step, at times his posture put it, the backpack, in its place with a jolt – and something came undone and it was usable despite a singular stubborn knot withstanding, enough to reach his lobes without choking him on the way, good enough to stuff his inner ear and press play and press on until something appropriately upbeat and safely pleasant came up randomly or as much as client side doctored algorithms can prescribe, and it came up eventually and his pace started matching it in a march, his brain started firing, too, differently, while the world around lost a dimension – the empty space of outside silence now filled – past the constrictive construction site pedestrian blinds, the deli he likes but frequents irregularly so as not to tip over his monthly balance nor form a custom or habit or personal tradition out of a place he still would desire to further desire, finally stopping at the crosswalk. Music joyfully carrying on. A four-way intersection with two stoic red

stick figures racing to become a hurried green one, and as one did, he ran down that direction, stepping on white stripes exclusively, hopping even, the backpack nodding in agreement and against his centre of balance. A bark strong enough to be noticeable, to rip him out of the inner space that music creates, to which a twitch was his answer, and a pull on the leash and the cry of the dog's name was the end. The metro is a few corners down. It was around the time when streetlamps still burned despite the sun taking over their job, making their burning unnecessary and odd and ominous in a way only people that walked the streets at the time could tell. Not yet – light was still local. The station's name comes before it, a brightening burning neon box before him. The city's skyline started rising above his line of sight until it was swallowed entirely, and he was inside, following marble corridors down to rotating doors. The ticket was in the wallet if he remembered well, and the wallet should have been in the backpack's front pouch if he had so remembered to put it well before leaving. Otherwise, it sat on the bedside table – an image he could visualize and hardly distinguish if it was memory or just forgery. Forgery it was, as he patted himself on the back of the backpack and found it, and the ticket was inside. He let it slide into the slot, and it returned back out after a couple of vaguely mechanic utters from the door, which unlocks and unfolds for him. He entered and waited, dabbling with the phone, nothing concrete, just unlocking, scrolling from one side to the other, going through reflex protocols. Five past five.

Six, it had just changed. Sound came before the thing itself, shrieks, and a roar, then air with light and pure frameless movement, that slowly tamed down into tubing jungle, face level ads – and face ridden, as if the thinking behind and somewhere beyond in a publicity firm had been that if the ad is literally looking you in the eye, it is bound to convince you – and faces, which were lower than and lowered from the average eye level, all through half graffitied over windows. The voice came before the act

"ATTENTION DOORS ARE OPENING". In a kind of declarative shout only incorporeal announcers can utter. He stepped in down through the carriage's last door and sat down on the last chair, one that had *Wanker* written on it along with a squiggly arrow that, for men of his height and build sitting with legs apart, would point at the groin. An ad straight in front was looking at him, but also beyond, but also looking down on him, while floating text announced how *This trip could never stop.* on top of a rustic yet foreign panorama seeming to miss human presence, the overlapping face.

Carriages have a window at their end, which aligns perfectly with the other carriage's window, and they only unsync at a more splitting turn. When it moved, he couldn't hear anything but movement. Two stations down.

Commuters rarely use their phones at these hours (and printed media even less so), and those who do have mobiles out have immobile fingers and transfixed eyes and show no active participation with the media, which could be visual or even animated but must have an auditive side, a buffer or cover. The reduced yet relevant sample at hand only confirmed it with a slight deviation. He was not a deviation but a variation on the not-looking-at-one's-phone pool, or a part of the not-looking-at-anything group's, lets-his-eyes-wander-aimlessly subgroup, more precisely. And this focus group had a hard time cognitively, as the perceptive faculties went in and out of action at irrelevant even ill-suited times, creating illusions of importance in the mundane, or conversely, making them excessively aware of the fading boundary between the two, thus highlighting the more accidental nature of attention and the object worthy of it, which fall not only under epistemic frameworks mixed with considerations of innermost desire but also, a random flow or passing or meaning combinatorics with no mistakes or master key in sight or in thought. His pocket would have been open for the rokiest of petty thieves but a slightly more



watery shine of a person's eye which could have causes ranging from outside humidity or air pollution to an utmost and innermost personal tragedy which cannot be obscured as it returns in some small yet visible parts of one's physiognomy, it would not go unnoticed or un-ogled at.

Two seats down from the window parallel to the one his left arch banged rhythmically on, in tune with the metro's vibration, sat a woman he considered pleasant in a way that cannot be cited as beautiful but would be deemed colloquially cute. Such people, women to be entirely honest, produce in him a kind of daydreaming that falls short of fantasy but can imply enough desire to be vivid. The kind of could-be story that would have required him to imagine finding another key aspect worth the mention other than her immediate appearance to foment a full-on self-insert love story. Perks could include a random peek, which would make their accidental here-being peek into an encounter. Be it an event. The thought came with its double or reversal, her gaze upon him which at the time would have been requited. However, a would-be back and forth, or ping-pong peeping would've been thirdly cut short by the in-between, the two panes that separated and as such seemed to make an eventual interlocking of eyes from afar even more of a meaningful meeting. In it or in them or in-between them, a third layer returned him to himself, however, mirroring the frames and faces and profiles of his fellow commuters from his own carriage and himself in turn. And a turn it was as superimposed on her (the woman in the other compartment, which was yet unaware, less so participating, even less so willing or being aware of such will) face was his, dark circles under meandering eyes included, a sight which clearly must have been present on the other side. Thus, the possibility that she would meet his eyes directly came doubled or mirrored or paralleled by her meeting her own, and as far as further doublings or folding-ins go, these couldn't have been optically sustained and only existed in mind or in metaphor insofar as they,

too, would have, if anything eventually happened, acted as mirrors or as doublings or reversals, a line of reasoning he imagined he could narrate over the years when reminiscing about their first encounter or be it event while laying in an intimate environ such as among white crumpled bed sheets in a late or lazy morning, partially undressed still holding onto their raspy voices and each other, an image in which she ended up looking true to life but he himself looked nothing alike, his shape in this image rather being a stand-in for what he must have been in fact in fantasy – just a male presence, but the railway station came before their relation's realization; the same automatic voice announces the arrival to his station and the automatic doors open with a sigh and he exits and with exhaust they close.

### *Vent*

The outside brought a livelier world, but the light was still diffuse. It was close to 6 sharp and thus close to his leave and more viscerally important close to an occasion for shut-eye in the bus for four hours or so or until one limb inadvertently went painfully numb, and closer spatially and temporally, to her.

The station or meeting point or travel node was situated along an important traffic artery which most often saw constant commute across the entire 24 hour period and congestion would not be restricted to high activity time frames (between 7 and 10 AM devoted to corporate employees juggling the steering wheel, stick shift and coffee cup-cigarette combination, then 12 to 14 PM which most often sees a high tide for delivery, catering and general logistics crews darting their beluga whale vans in high-risk-high-efficiency-bonus justified endeavours, and lastly 7 to 9 PM, the period most likely to host road rage events as well as general aggressivity in traffic).

Early birds would see their flight cut short by fumes looming over a still distant tomorrow that, still, was today for someone. His head peeked from the depths of the metro station like worms from a soft, fresh dirt patch, an image he imagined from up above, a bird's eye view, a false frame, something he still understood and enjoyed. Not yet six sharp, so he found time to make the automatic doors let out a high-pitched sound at his presence and humanly warm air into the cooled to numbness protruding features of his face. The cashiers were still battling an internal tug of war between the here-now excessively alight reality and one fading in content, not so in form or feel, oneiric anamnesis. Glassy eyes under meaty bags and a work uniform made for no human particular. Their names shone and disappeared from certain angles; he was scanning the aisles like all that enter but do not want anything in particular do. Along one aisle, manufactured desires and unsure eyes aligned, and his hand sealed the deal by crackling the steely sealed packaging of a sweet. Card, naturally, as his line of work dictates. Sale done, and he sailed off through the silence of the entry doors' alarms, back into the same cold.

Maybe a notch of a difference lost due to the not just-a-notch of a difference between the in and out of MegaMart, the mini version fitted for building fronts and street corners but furnished just the same as the larger chain. The mascot's – a literal homunculus leaning on the first M and toppling it slightly - balloon finger's rotund tip hushing something that, from the cartoonishly expressive grimace, meant complicity. The small prices, of course, the secret's point being its defeat – don't tell how small our prices are, and folks will surely ask. When no car wheezed by, the whole store fizzed like one mosquito-killing lamp. Customers entering – the fizz of one small death.

In the bus station, which was an inner yard paved with concrete whose complete tar darkness was sectioned by recurring white

lines, and nothing else but for the shelters with rows of seats like plastic eggshells underneath, with nondescript scum, gathered in the backside-shape dents and a small ready-made shack with a large lowercase *i* lightbox sign on top that was currently out. He sat down, backside on the edge and cervical vertebrae pinching the backrest. Two white quadrants away, disparate people were forming a group, exchanging short remarks but not looks. The men's belts tended to squeeze their waists, and checkered shirts would stretch over protruding ruments. Only some aquiline noses emerged from beneath windbreaker flaps. Their looks spoke about how they had been through this standing wait before. He tore apart the heat-sealed bag and had his morning treat in quickly succeeding bites, then crumpled the wrapping into something of a ball that would not stay as such and threw it into the plastic orifice of the nearby trash can. Few minutes remained, not yet sharp, not yet light; he lit a cigarette and let the passing wind have most of it.

Cigarette butt gone, and there the bus front came stopping with a pneumatic sigh smack in the middle of his sight. The backpack goes below, and he went up the stairs towards the columns of silently dozing dozens of colleagues that came before, and he found a seat somewhere in the back, by the window, where he rested his arch on the small zig zagging curtain that was just a bit less cold than the glass pane.

Through smudges, the city was slowly turning from faint logos and business signs into towering flats speckled with the odd insomniac lit window. He felt his eyes slowly giving up on sight and lids slowly connecting as industrial outskirts passed by, endless aluminium facades, empty parking lots and the lights above spurring out luminescent cones upon the nothing-there and then he felt inner nothingness himself and just fell asleep.

In a rewind type of way, his recent past was coming up as if his unconscious was recalling past then-and-there's until it would find another sleeping instance, the light was out and would've been for a while over large expanses of grassy land marked by some off-fences and the change in the agricultural cultivation that filled the bottom half of the glass that his arch was beating in the rhythm of the bus, and looked like dementia must feel, indeterminate, yet ever-present and vaguely relatable, with only the mountain lines like some distant, troubled waves on an EEG still exulting at something foreign and beyond the horizon, perspective, or comprehension.

He blew lightly on the pane, and two cloudy circles grew and disappeared just as soon. He exhaled all his breath with all his mouth, and it seemed to linger for longer, and he made a simple smiling simile with his index, the traces of which had his fingerprint at their ends, and he then tried to rub it off entirely only to smudge the glass and dirty his palm's side with a coat of condense and dust which he tried to clean off on the seat's print geometry and the small and prickly hairs of the coverlet that were dark blue but also had some vibrant purple and green elements that formed small repeating patterns and also some larger ones, yet still recurrent. His gaze followed power lines like lax jump ropes between structures that seemed to have short arms and freakishly long legs and no head and were, as if, advancing towards the highway only to skip over into a distance beyond his shoulder. The geography slowly shifted too; the mountains were not just marginally observable anymore. Morning he heard, and he turned to see a man his age, more scrawny and prostrated so that his back arched and his shoulders held his head between, face turned away to a direction yet uncertain.

The morning sounded like a shortened good morning, and it seemed addressed to him by that man, yet he did not want to respond without being certain that it was him to whom the good

morning was wished upon. Two more hours, the man continued unincited, and he finally requited with a nod.

He couldn't have seen it consciously, but only with his peripheral vision, and, in this case, he would've understood his answer. He did not remember to have sat next to anyone, less so, since he took the seat next to the window and he( arched, looking nowhere) was occupying the one next to the corridor which seemed to always be a second-hand option or one taken out of necessity especially if the trip implied or allowed for or needed a period of upright sleep, an already difficult and awkward process that would only be complicated more if the choice for a conscious, or sleep-through lean was between a stranger's shoulder or the empty corridor space. His hair looked kempt but to an obsessive degree which took away from the allure of a put-together man that a combed style is meant to signify and pushed it into the space of mania or some kind of control or self-image issue nonetheless. He couldn't have slept at all. Don't you find it weird in the least for people to sleep together? He went on piqued by something in his sight but not his (he himself, who was still departing the sleep state and trying to get a grip on the here-facts). I mean in the same space, and not in any other sense or with any double entendre that sleeping together may indicate.

He would open his hands in an explanatory manner as if presenting what he saw in front of him then and there. He (who tried to discern through the pudgy eyes what his turned travel partner was referring to) lifted his eyes, with a straightening of his back, over the backrest in front, only to see a collection of scalps and arms swinging with a slight lag as the road, which was turning from straight and open to more and more sinuous, among them only maybe recognising Rod's, full name Roderick Eland, also an employee in the regional marketing team, whose nickname did not suit or correlate well with his overflowing corporeal proportions but did allow for some

after-hours jokes and jabs playing on its phallic aspect (the nickname Rod isn't the man's only semblance of something of the sort given the folds that would form at the back of his precociously balding head), or Cecil's, another colleague in the same branch, long and narrow face elongating even more as his mandible fell during sleep and gaped his mouth into a sort of continuous gasp, but her, whom he tried most to locate, he did not see. I mean in the sense that sleeping is rightly seen as being private, especially deep sleep when you actually let your guard down entirely and go most inwardly, starting to dream dreams that could harken your innermost desires, while your eyes in freely bat in REM phase like you're having some kind of seizure.

He was starting to justifiably wonder if this man, having been visibly engaged extensively and deeply with the conclusions his rhetorical questions implied or hinted at, has been studying his twitching eyes before. A possibility only strengthened by the good morning greeting he imparted as soon as he was awake and with eyes departed into a direction unknown but not his own. The stuff that, not only you wouldn't chat about on a four-hour ride, but feel uncomfortable even thinking of, and if prompted, you would do all mental gymnastics to try and suppress it as much as possible until you're alone again. You know, the proverbial, think about your grandma when you're aroused in public so that it goes away, but it's never that easy, since, by doing so, not only do you pull the physical reaction out of unconscious space and put it smack in the middle of your conscious experience, but also because, by associating a thing, a person, a thought to excitation, you make it part of it and find yourself in the weird position where the sweet and inoffensive smile of your dear elder relative actually participates in your shameful public stiffy. In all capacities, you perform the Pavlovian Bell thing onto yourself, and even though, just like the bell's ring means nothing innately to a dog, the word "grandmother"

or the vague image you muster up like a reflex each time, starts symbolizing or becomes code for public arousal as such.

He (who brought his cheek closer but hadn't turned his gaze as if needing to observe something to continue his monolog) would speak in a hushed tone as if blowing out the words under his breath, which made it feel like they were sharing some common secret or complicity. And you can't even do that while dreaming when thoughts as obscene, violent, or sexual as they come can arise freely and uninvited. Stuff that would make HR redact several folders worth of damning data about. And some even speak out their minds when sleeping.

He nods as if to point at someone. Sam, he works two desks down from me and has been mumbling something for an hour now. Imagine him just unknowingly sharing how he wants, at least oneirically, to strangle someone in management or conveying the dialogue from a wet dream he has with that one girl he always meets during morning's coffee and fixes and follows around for too long and has to keep his eyes consciously up or away at times.

He stopped and fell silent for a while as if expecting an answer although it seemed that he left no space for it. While a first response would've been simple agreement, he also realized that his line about dreaming together seemed to play on the certitude that the psychological underbelly must always be a repressed obscenity and it must manifest in dreams, although most unconscious activities of the kind just spew out undigested thoughts or events that can be as mundane as spilling tea on your tie, or mistakenly running a red light, or anything of the sort, and that this divulged private meditation in itself seemed to point at or mediate a personal fear or concern with a hidden smutty side, more so the very act of sharing it outright, in a kind of projection of personal reflections onto other subjects, so it could've been more the case that he, whom did



not sleep and was visibly invested if not sucked in, had these concerns of thinking, saying, or acting out something in an out of control moment, even though the repression had its return in the very controlled and conscious even covertly self-conscious nature of his pointing it out in others, but he himself (who did sleep and could have been observed up close) may also have been a catalyst and may have said something otherworldly outwardly, perhaps about her, whom he cannot see and did not see while getting on, so that she may have been taken as unfinished business and considered by brain faculties as worthy of dreaming about, or lastly, it was likely from the light, almost hallucinatory and quick paced nature of his wording, that they, the observations were bordering or edging on subliminal or unconscious flights of the mind, as if although he was consciously speaking to another, he was just partially turned inwards and his mind was letting off the steam that dreams are supposed to, but through direct and waking speech.

I don't know was his answer, and he shrugged without turning and only introduced himself by his job position, marketing PA, and would refer to him by AA, meaning accounting agent, upon finding out his position.

The road started swerving and hugging the stiff cliff sides and the bus imprinted inertia onto the commuters, who slowly started waking up, one by one, some naturally, others from the excessive winding their necks would do at every 180-degree bend, and they were close to arrival, and the small personal vent blew cold air on his forehead and eyes and got them dry and made them ache, so he flipped the flaps off, and watched as the pines and firs twisted and turned and passed to fast to register and resembled the scan lines you get when fast-forwarding or reversing a VHS tape and he watched on without focusing on anything and they spoke no more with their shoulders only connecting out of inertia at harsher curves.

## *Even*

Their boss was pudgy in unpleasant ways and wore a suit that would not bend with his physiognomy but just hung straight and curtained his arms and legs but couldn't help his round gut with similar concealment. His expression was that of domestic comfort and a carefree peace of mind that you would see on corpulent Buddha figures in China shops, even more so as he was inclined, with elbows resting on the cabin's wooden railing, and waiting.

They gathered and formed some small groupuscules with colleagues that knew and recognised each other and exchanged some joking remarks, all in business casual office attire, a lot of white and dark blue and gray and black cloth, among the yellowish and viscerally green meadow that went on and led into a conifer forest that started unnaturally and vertiginously and was probably cut to make way for cabin guests and tourists and hitchhikers.

The boss, who was in all actuality just the general manager of the regional branch but would be called "the boss" jokingly to which he would answer with a faux intense face that only managed to bring forth and underline the flaps under his chin and also produce some deep wrinkle patterns that furrow across his forehead but stop around where his mid-frontal balding once started, was going to give them some instructions for the schedule and he would say schedule with a British *sh* but jokingly which mostly reduced to an introduction to the rooms and the mates that were to share them, small copy-paste hotel suites with two single beds with tables on the outer sides but none on the inner so that they were one push away from being king-size and a small square screen TV, old model, tubular, whose black wires would hang freely across the talc white walls and the TV remote that was wider at the end and had a type of rounded protrusion or underbelly to better fit into a hand and was both narrow and thin and with partially chipped and

uncoloured plastic at the front, and some of its buttons were either wiped clean and deformed by wear, mainly the power whose circle cut by a straight line was more of a fading half-moon and the 'next' button, only partially an arrow now and some numbers, specifically the one and three and seven the combinations of which did correlate with some wider audience stations that had both news and general interest shows and syndicated sitcoms that were a stamp of 90's liberalized television production but nowadays stuck around as a type of nostalgia fuel or safe watching choice and were interrupted by ads that he would skip and flip from one station to another for some time, while supine but still suited, on the bed, only after he had placed his backpack in one wardrobe that creaked and smelled like naphthalene and retirees and took off his shoes and had to wait for his roommate whom he chose once "the boss" asked them to form couples or even several-person but even numbered groups while raising two fingers in a peace sign and joining them together in a kind of handgun manoeuvre, that was the signal for the team building participants to form their teams. PA pointed and vocally said "AA" as a reminder that they had some history together, while he was looking at her whom he recognised by her clothing which was identical to her choices for the office and was identifiable by a mix of drab and grey formal wear and some feminine outbursts here and there, for instance, the suit dress was tight enough around the thighs to divulge her silhouette, and the stockings, although solid coloured and nowhere near see-through from afar, were not stocky and stuck close to her curves. Her hair, the order of appearance is important as his eyes would shoot up once realizing, was tied mid-high so as to leave locks hang both lower and on the sides and over her ears that only had one earring each and even those were generally small and simple, and her shoulders were kind of pointy and not rounded but boney same as the arms, same as the face, whose cheekbones were more bone than cheek. Middle-class chic, with a tinge of the tiredness that women her age face and have tried to hide but find themselves at

a moment in life where perhaps they got comfortable enough or even found beauty or self-image in that and just let it be. She went with someone else, but he found some solace when the boss, with his two fingers doing a kind of scissor or scission movement, or the type of locking of the two you do when you want to double-cross a promise or want to show you're rooting for someone, announced the groups would dissolve and change if needed. They essentially had nothing to do but form new and dynamic intra-corporate relations, of a nature unspecified, even mystified as "the boss's" acceptance of and even ironic agreement with double-entendre crass remarks meant that all was game, so to say, they could go at it, get there, do that, with most save for the gullible understanding what it, there, that, pointed at especially during a team-building trip, which is widely mythologised to be a sexual Shangri-la for repressed office flings. Men were too abashed to approach opposite gender co-workers outright and opted to do so towards their male mates but in an excessively on the nose manner,, some even embracing tenderly and faking a sailor's kiss, only to recoil back and look around for validating laughter, while the female co-workers did share a kind of embarrassed participation or complicity but only with their arms crossed as if they were cold and they might have been as the cabin and the surrounding meadow were at the height of a hill between two depressions from which wind would spur up from one side, make their clothes swish, backs arch or straighten, shoulders compact, same as legs, only to disappear with a trace of the trees rustling in the other valley, but no, it was embarrassment and unease. She's going with Laura Ballad, who's one step up the ladder from me, and is always strict and rigid, physically even, and has a sour face, with narrow features and small creases around the lips as if she's always keeping them pursed, which she kind of is but you can't tell. The kind of girl that looks nervous about having you around, worse, alert, or one twitch away from full-on agro, even when you haven't done anything. Yours will recoil away from her pretty soon.

The PA's observations underlined that he read his, the AA's, his teammate's, attitude astutely and could not only tell whom he was focusing on but also lent himself as a helping hand or a kind of ad-hoc wingman. I think she'll crack once they spend some time in the room, an off-placed pin can make Laura snap and not even in a covert passive-aggressive way, but full-on, fully conveyed. Plus, you want to get her after she goes through a few teams and gets kind of bored and even a bit pressured, not quite desperate, but you understand. And you then can show up and show solidarity and understanding, and even make a bit of fun of your past teammates and the whole thing we're doing here in general. I'll let you make fun of me if that helps.

The advice turned into a full-blown drill or planning out by the time they sat down at one of the scattered circular extendable tables intended for lunch, or the only meal that came included and required a gathering, as the PA or just PA was pointing his butter knife with the index resting on top while giving far-fetched descriptions that bordered on fantasizing and implausibility, the kind of, "you do x and y will happen and then you follow-up on it with z" and so on, going through the entire alphabet, only stopping to gulp, take a bite, or swallow what he was chewing on while speaking. He showed an interest in, or fascination with, even, the possibility of them, the AA and her whom they agreed to simply call she or her, which wasn't confusing and worked by way of a negative principle of naming and identification (she, the word 'she' meant not-Laura with pursed lips, or Sophie Nunez from PR, nor Yvette who they thought was Rowe after her recently wed husband, nor Fawn whose name was funny although none really fawned over her since she wasn't game and was passed the certain age at which she inspired the feel of new beginnings in the younger age groups that the lower tier office drones were part of. Only higher-ups had some decades behind, pot bellies, a superannuated sense of humour and their kids' college fees to pay.)

Lunch dragged on into the early hours of dusk, so that, when the participants, already catching the idea and coalescing into groups, were exiting the hall still rubbing bellies and commenting on served dishes, they were met with the golden hour glow, God rays emerging from among the fir branches, with fine dust floating included. The PA naturally had a plan that greatly diverged from the usual find a place to enjoy the scenery and day away from the city and routine and attempt some small talk and see where that goes trajectory that others would take, an approach he called gathering Intel, a moniker so self-serious, it was unfitting and almost funny. They would split and see what others did, or what was their attitude or vibe or shtick and then meet again to share.

AA found no better way to participate than hanging around at a safe distance and watching how his colleagues, whom he could tell apart from mountaineering geared run-of-the-mill tourists by attire and carefree attitude, nervously sit down with suit pants on the fresh grass or get up from a squatting posture to pat their backs and buttocks and brush off dust, or pull at their dresses that would raise over the knee when their legs were protracted and be extra careful with white shirts around plants and thin stockings around branches and rocks, or pull out their phones (they were allowed, as he found later, even encouraged to keep them so that the observers, the existence of which also came as a later realization, could freely assess if they became a distraction or a hindrance or even a tool for the purposes of the team building, or put more bluntly, if folks would wander around trying to find signal and phone friends or relatives or rather put them on silent and covertly swipe away any inconvenient incoming message) and push them against the sunset sky with one arm fully extended and freeze into frame, all at once, and snap and then look at the picture as soon as it is taken. "The boss" too would wander with a fixed lens camera, more fitting of nuclear family vacations, only to cover half his pudgy features at times, burst the flashlight and only afterwards kind of playfully wave and smile an

unwavering smile that to date has been without simile in placidity and downright dullness. AA would not have his photo taken as he was alone at the time and thus to be ignored since his solitary stare would tarnish the face of the activities at hand. He did see some arms around waists and/or shoulders, some hands left nonchalantly forgotten on knees or grasping among the grass at other fingers but made nothing of it. The sky was a vibrant lavender turning lilac, with fiery last-minute bursts where the sun was setting, and the rest was fading into a cold, cold blue.

Light was well gone beyond the hills,, and snowy mountain tops turned edges dark and diffuse, and the white shirts and dispersed and disparate persons or silhouettes just standing about in between day and night seemed as if out of focus, or out of place and lonely and ominous in a way he could not put his finger on, by the time PA was strolling carelessly, throwing his feet about, hands in pockets and sleeves up, announcing from afar and without shame, shade, nor fear of being heard, his findings. This mountain meadow has seen some stuff, and you're lucky that I did too, remember Grant Hancock from finances, you might know him, the guy whose punt-shaped glasses double his eyes' size and wears shirts that seem to need a bigger frame, maybe he lost weight, he comes up to me and starts asking me for advice, sexual that is, I know, but he puts it in this wooden economic language, I swear, long story short, he had an opportunity to go at it, but with two other folks, a guy and a girl, I forget whom and from where, and he espoused his problem in shareholding terms, as you may expect the shares being our dear lady colleague and the holders being Grant and the other, I don't think he mentioned their names, and by his own logic the issue was that, since he's not a sole shareholder, maybe not even the largest, or major, or dominant, one of them, among the two, his words not mine, his returns on investment would be lower or unsatisfactory, and I told him that although I do not commend, and I even condemn such metaphors that, if taken seriously, can be

brash and insensitive and objectifying, but if he wants to think of it in these terms, he should rather opt for a comparison with licensed or subscription based service models rather than shareholding which has some off-putting and ill-fitting ownership connotations, and that if he already subscribed, so to say, or invested, be it, he should just make the most of the availability period and at least cover his losses or even rack up a profit, although I do confess that I was mostly trying to play the game by his rules and that whatever investment or payback or loss or profit mean in sexual contexts was and is beyond me, but I also saw Rod *whatshisname's* ass poking out rhythmically from behind the shed uphill, and it looked disappointingly flaccid or flabby like two deflated balloons tied together somewhere between his legs, nonetheless he seemed live up to his nickname, although I didn't want to check, but clearly, people are having some fun around, either way, I think I saw her beyond that hill.

And he pointed beyond a black mound and gave a side nod as an impulse for AA to go, with a look that you would give to a hurt puppy, a crying child, a thing so much in need of help that you cannot but watch along knowing you cannot do much about it. AA got up and walked towards the mound, looking back only once to see PA lift to thumbs up in approval and then paravane his mouth with both palms and shout something that was lost among the foliage, in some kind an echo, and would've needed repeating for him to make out anything close to an intelligible message, then shifting his gaze forwards to the peak's line that radiated with the starry sky's dim milky light, and as he was approaching the top it became more detailed, more in focus, more there, grass crackling beneath, the smell of sap and cold wintry air that brushed away lethargy and kept you awake and alive, the cabin, that kitsch laminated log imitation outside facade turned into nothing but boxy inside lights, he thought for a moment he could glimpse a short-lived blitz which must've candidly fixed him against natural



ambiance, his white shirt, two buttons undone, dark navy blue pants that have lost their leg crease a while ago, five o'clock shadow grown into a day's long stubble, climbing, stumbling up the hill, and finally disappearing on the other side, where, from afar, he saw her in the middle of nothing, sitting on her side leaning on her right arm, chin on her shoulder as if watching something on her left, he advanced, despite at each step that was not yet next to her feeling a world apart, realizing his presence, the sound he makes, how she must hear it already, how she does not react, arriving next to her – like jumping into cold water, breaking the surface and being hit from all sides with a cold realization, he sat down, throwing his weight backwards and landing on his backside with a slight thump. Touch, like a possibility, how her shape must resist his, how at some point, his extended arm would stop and actually feel, and remain there, her profile, from afar, her profile, he remembers it resting as if on another chest, he remembers a lot more, someone awfully similar to himself, terribly alike, from afar, still, but intimate with her, as close as it goes, how he must feel, his windbreaker thrown about, the rest once more undone, clothes lifted and let loose, convention consensually defeated, he felt some sort of grief watching on, as the grass grasped by his fingers slowly stole from his warmth, she must've been alone, and the moon was not quite full yet, the pines shook in disagreement at each passing breeze, spiny foliage shaking noisily, he must've sat there for a while, he dozed off once more, but he looked awfully similar, they could've exchanged places but he never reached his place, as the drift that the mind goes through and the thoughts that come in waves took him away.

### *Odd*

Oddly enough, he woke up in his suit, in his bed, an arm-reach away from PA that was, oddly, or maybe not so much, sleeping still. Morning meant returning, with a quick breakfast before, he was

seated next to his roommate, who congratulated him for something he did not mention and kept on hinting at more outright, and without metaphor or euphemism once AA showed his earnest confusion. He, the AA, the PA finally said, did disappear around that meadow where she, whom he previously saw was by herself, was, and did not come back too soon, as PA killed considerable time pushing through TV channels, taking in late-night reruns and mesmerizing and hypnotic teleshopping marathons and did not know when exactly but he heard a bump on the other bed, it must've been late. Disbelief turned into frustration then turned into confusion, as the AA told his side, his sight – her with someone whom he could not pinpoint, and only knew he seemed oddly similar in attire and build and even movement as if watching himself in a recording and feeling that slight unease with the outward perception of himself. She was some tables away and didn't look their way but seemed tired and gone through a long night and little sleep.

The trip back was mostly silent; the bodies bopped and swung at hops and swerves, the previous day rewound, twists and turns, then straight roads and open plains, power lines jumping over them once more, first signs of industry, then entry into urbanscapes and nothing but signs.

He got off, took his backpack, and returned home with no opportunity to discuss the last night in private, finding no instance or motive to approach her and ask for clarifications regarding her past night. That night he watched on the unmoving ceiling, at times, light squares passing it, opposite to passing cars, and wondered.

His work environment was the same, but a new undercurrent was peeking its head. The team-building excursion remained a pleasurable albeit fading memory, and productivity grew while social tensions surprisingly disappeared. He met with PA a few times; he would smoke on a small balcony, by the fire escape and

down one floor by stairs. It was the case that prior to the trip, office gender tensions grew so intense and wide in reach that management feared collective action from a tough core of female employees who decried not only ogling and off-handed remarks from male colleagues (not partners), a complaint which was to be easily swept under the rug with a slew of sensitivity workshops but also asked for wage equity checks, which was aggravating. The solution, he later found out from HR, PA that is, who seemed to devote considerable time to social espionage, came in the form of an excursion during which management hoped that tension would unwind. And unwind they did, especially since a majority of the board decided on an anything-goes mentality and allowed inter-collegial intimacy scenarios, as these involved no risk for organizers, who would neither condone nor condemn such practices, opting to judge in absentia and would find any further complaints around such subjects as solid grounds for mass dismissals, although PA used discharge instead which seemed childish and insensitive. To everyone's surprise, still, the consummation of this or that tension, whether remaining a fling or turning into a full-on relationship later, resulted in an unprecedented and unparalleled work cohesion and dynamism, lifting the weight of fair pay obligations off the shoulders of HR and management. PA was to be soon demoted and relocated; reason cited: *poor team networking*.

He did see her at times and found the barely emerging lax attitudes towards personal or intimate or even colloquial collegial discussions to be good enough of a circumstance to ask her about the events. He first approached her slightly and obliquely, mentioning near to nothing about it, but rather joining her around kitchen facilities and bringing his shoulder ever so closer to hers as they waited for the coffee machine to do its job. Chit chat turned into friendly banter and was on the verge of something more, he felt and did so strongly. When he did what felt as popping the question, her

response was awfully off to him, by its pain normality. Yes, they did meet there and what happened happened, which she does not regret albeit (if he so wondered, she guessed about him) her not feeling she would be in the right place for any continuation. But, she concluded, they could remain friends. Any cordiality dispersed once he himself divulged that he was not there himself, which she found odd and crass, if not insulting outright. And while he tried to clarify that he was not there, from recollection, but saw her with someone oddly similar, but not him nonetheless, during their cupboard meetups that started turning colder and more distant, her disbelief turned into an ensuing distaste, then disgust, which finally materialized into a formal complaint.

One evening late in his shift, he was called up to HR and informed of the situation at hand. The boss, who, in that instant was only the general regional manager for him (a fact he made clear through a formal although superfluous introduction), sat at the opposite end of an empty and drab and cold room with no windows. He was asked to retire his inquires, but upon seeing the honesty with which he reiterated his events of that team trip, the regional general manager, following a go-ahead nod from the HR agent sat by the door, had no choice but to let him go, asking him emphatically to abstain from any legal action that would only result in a lawsuit he could not win.

At shift's end, he was taking his last look at the ten-storey glass building that was nothing more than the neon company logo floating in darkness, by that hour, with a box with his name under one arm, the agent from HR was seven floors up, marking his file with bold letters: "INTERNALLY SETTLED."

# O desconstruir do Amor

By Mariana

A minha vida foi longa, por ela passou muita gente. Foi uma vida preenchida por bons e maus momentos, por conquistas e lutas perdidas. A minha vida foi um alvoroço de emoções. Não mudaria nada, porque aquilo que passei, faz de mim aquilo que eu sou hoje.

A primeira pessoa de quem tenho saudades, é do meu pai. Por muito duro e frio que ele fosse, não havia amor maior que o dele.

Fui uma rapariga realmente feliz, o Rafael era uma pessoa incrível. Nada é como hoje em dia, na altura escrevíamos cartas de amor. Realmente todas as cartas de amor, durante muitos anos ouvir dizer, se pensarmos bem, são ridículas. Mas na verdade, não seriam cartas de amor se não fossem ridículas porque todas as cartas de amor, se há amor, têm de ser ridículas. Se querem que vos diga, só quem nunca escreveu cartas de amor é que é ridículo. São essas cartas de amor que me lembram como eras fascinante.

É por isso que te adoro. As pessoas vêem o que não vêem; os olhos no futuro vêem o que não pode ver-se. Este é o dia, esta é a hora, este é o momento.

Hoje em dia, todos falamos de civilização mas só vemos o nosso lado, ouvimos os outros a dizerem que se as coisas fossem diferentes, sofreríamos menos, a dizerem que se tudo fosse como nós queremos, seria melhor. Mas olhando para trás, pergunto-me se realmente parava e escutava o que me diziam, se parava e olhava para o que se passava à minha volta. A realidade sempre é mais ou menos, aquilo que esperamos porque no dia-a-dia, somos iguais a nós próprios.

Foi tão difícil, cumprir com o que o meu pai me ordenou. Mesmo assim posso dizer que depois de ter feito o meu luto, as coisas começaram a melhorar. E afinal o Manel não era assim tão mau, quanto eu pensava. Foi uma pessoa presente, um homem que a partir do dia em que ficamos noivos, não saiu da minha beira e sim, os preparativos para o casamento ajudaram. Lembro-me como se fosse hoje, quando dancei com ele e com o meu pai.

Depois de todo o alarido do casamento, de toda uma viagem de núpcias. Voltámos a casa, à realidade, voltámos aos problemas. Naquela época, passei tanto tempo a pensar nas minhas coisas, no meu casamento, na minha dor, em tudo que me esqueci de um grande amigo. Sem dúvida que é um grande amigo, porque nada me exigiu e quando voltei, pudemos falar. Afinal de contas, não é todos os dias que se diz ao mundo que não somos aquilo que ele destinava para nós.

Os primeiros tempos de casamento, os primeiros anos, na verdade até o Tiago nascer, foi tudo muito bonito, foi tudo aquilo a que se pode chamar “o viver dos primeiros tempos de um casal”, a “paixão ardente”. Depois de o Tiago nascer, houve qualquer coisa na cabeça do Manel que mudou, como um “click”. Acho que nunca é fácil para uma mulher, assumir que sofreu de violência doméstica. Sim fui uma mulher que levou na cara do marido.

Porém um dia foi como se a voz do meu filho, tivesse sido de novo o “click” para voltar a ter o meu marido. Os anos passaram e tudo foi melhorando, toda a gente muda mas as marcas ficaram. Em mim, no meu filho, em todos aqueles que conviviam connosco... E o meu pai durante esse tempo nada fez... Tive oportunidade de lhe perguntar pouco tempo antes de ele morrer.

Se há pessoa que me faz falta hoje em dia, é o meu pai mas é uma aprendizagem, aprender a viver com as saudades. Os poetas

costumam dizer que as estrelas são as freiras eternas. Consigo compreender a pouca capacidade do meu pai em se exprimir. Se houve alguém com ele se conseguiu exprimir, foi com o Tiago. Olho para ele e comovo-me. Comovo-me como a água que corre, quando o chão é inclinado. Quando o meu pai foi, o Tiago ficou e foi quem enfrentou o seu pai.

Posso dizer que a minha vida foi repleta de emoções. Agora que revivi alguns dos momentos importantes da minha vida, estou pronta para partir. Às vezes é complicado olharmos para nós e veremos que o tempo passou e que já não somos capazes de fazer o que fazíamos antes, mas ao mesmo tempo, percebemos que é bom isso acontecer, porque é dizer que vivemos a nossa vida até ao limite. Eu posso dizer que vivi a minha vida. Se há coisa que me orgulho foi de nunca ter desistido, sei que nunca estive sozinha nesta luta, houve sempre alguém que me acompanhou, me deu paciência, me deu força, me deu coragem mesmo quando eu já não sabia onde a ir buscar. A vocês, só tenho mais uma coisa a dizer: Atualmente, as pessoas estão tão ocupadas com o seu dia-a-dia que não se lembram de nos visitar e quando a morte chega, todos sentem que deviam ter feito mais. Está na altura de amarem, de estarem e de serem alguém presente para quem nunca vos deixo de amar.

# Magic Realism

By Raul

Think of one object you bring with yourself and represent you. It has to be inspiring. In my case there's no object but an image of a projection of my mind.

It brings me to the main topic I'd like to be experiencing during all my life. Adventure.

Now you can think if it is possible to live a human experience with or without magic in your own skin. With or without experiencing reality out of your thoughts or imagination.

If you experience reality it means you can go like a journalist into the deepness of a masonic lodge and not just think how atrocious or tenebrous they are, if they are.

About magic it can be realizing that all our experience it's managed by fine and invisible threads that connect people, animals, and situations.

The main character of this story is supposed to live life mixing reality with magical experiences. It is supposed to walk the hero's journey from a huge transformation until the forward comes to him.

You, the reader, are invited to join into the next adventure that begins like going up in a helicopter with the mix of fun and desire to know all beauty and greatness.



## Día tras día

By Vicky

Me siento en calma ante el viaje de la vida, aun sabiendo que no hay nada seguro, aun sabiendo que mañana quizás tenga que volver a conocerme de nuevo. Me presentaré día tras día frente al espejo con el misterio de no saber la respuesta definitiva, y con la esperanza de no encontrarla nunca para embarcarme en mil y una aventuras. Con la intriga y la curiosidad de conocer mis mil luces y sombras, con la incertidumbre de no saber quién me mira a los ojos a través del espejo. Pero reconociendo todas las mañanas la sonrisa de la esperanza y de los sueños que aún están por llegar, sin yo siquiera saberlo, sin yo siquiera esperarlos.

Y dentro de años, mis pies contarán doloridos y orgullosos todo aquello que han vivido, todo aquello que han visto, todo aquello que han tocado. Serán la memoria de quien soy yo. Y mis manos expresarán lo vivido con el movimiento de los elementos, a veces fluyendo, otras quemando, otras dejándose llevar y otras conectando.

## Hot Chocolate

By Raquel

Hot chocolate means Sunday, means “Paladín”, the little Chinese man in a sachet in the table or in the kitchen stand waiting to be prepared. What if we still followed this tradition...

Imagine a typical Sunday. Mom prepared a thicker one for her and dad and put some milk in my sister's and mine. We talked about the zoo, and we were preparing ourselves for the excursion. I notice that lots of memories are forgotten now, just the idea remains in my heart. The idea of hot chocolate means love and harmony.

## V březnu cesta tam a zase zpátky

By Ella

Po dvou měsících cest po jihovýchodní Asii s batohem na zádech, okouzlení exotikou Indie a monitorování statistik Covidu, sedím na střeše svého hostelu v centru Saigonu, zapaluji si další cigaretu a srkám vietnamské kafe s kondenzovaným mlékem. Celá se klepu. Potřebovala bych obejmout. Jakou sílu mají dva hloupé emaily. Jeden mě právě připravil o vysněnou práci v Austrálii, druhý mi vzal čtyři měsíce práce na projektu a hlavně půdu pod nohama. Vždyť následující tři týdny měly být to nejlepší z celého tripu a teď ani nevím, co budu dělat zítra. Všichni spí. Jak si teď připadám daleko. A to mám zítra narozeniny.

S úlevou v Istanbulu nastupuji na palubu letadla směr Tel Aviv, s maskou na obličeji, ale už blízko. Předě mnou usedá mladá rodina. Maminka všem rozdává dezinfekční ubrousky a nabádá své děti utřít si svá sedadla, opěradla i prostor před sebou. Pozoruji je se zájmem i údivem. Pak si všimnu, že jejich příkladu následuje mladík vedle mě. Měla bych se snad taky potřít dezinfekcí? Co se to proboha děje?

“How are you feeling about the border closure?”

He turns his head to me in the bed.

“Relieved to be honest. With everything that is happening, I want to be near my family, and everyone is saying this will blow over soon. You?”

“Me too actually. I was worried what the distance would do to us. You being in Prague will definitely make everything easier. This way I can simply jump on a plane, meet you at least once a month and see where that takes us.”

# Fool's guidance

By Alfonso

"Come on, it's just a door", I said harshly.

He was still doubting, God, even going for a twenty-minute walk felt like a tragedy. Always afraid, always so incompetent, dragging me into his statism, and by extension, my life, linked to his weakness.

It has been three years since he was diagnosed. I mean I get it, my dad cannot trust his perception of reality, but deciding not to trust me? Even when I'm sacrificing so much for him? I know he is aware of that, and his decision to make me live in his fantasy world feels so fucking unfair. I grabbed his hand, to guide him.

"See? It's just the door to the street." I explained while trying to go through, together. He went even more back inside, leaving me alone in that pathetic scenario.

I sat down on the floor; he didn't even have the guts to tell me what he was seeing if he had any idea at all but managed to make me feel guilty with those sad puppy eyes.

"Ok, whenever you are ready," I exasperated. We were still for a long frustrating minute, and then he came next to me and sat down also.

Many times, I tried to build up the courage to tell him I cannot do this anymore, and this seemed like a good moment, but then he finally dared to speak.

"This is why your mother left me".

My father was never the condescending type, so that was weird. I was surprised and looked at him.

“Well, that, and I’m sure her new husband has a bigger dick”, he continued with a very dramatic serious face.

He maintained the character for a moment, then smirked.

It had been a while since I remembered how he constantly did those bad jokes, and I ended up smiling.

He never told me what was on the other side of the door, and we didn’t go outside that day, but at that moment, while sitting on the floor, I recognized my father again.

## **Disconnected From Myself**

By Claudia

I was here thinking about a story when suddenly... I fell asleep. My subconscious, the world of the unknown dreams, told me about a certain reality.

During the youth exchange we had a 5-day detox from our phones and social media. At first I thought it was going to be "painful" to let go of our phones when we're so attached to them. After letting go, I noticed a sudden change in myself and others.

We are all connected in different but similar ways.

It was very comforting, and we started seeing more than just believing it's there. The nature came to us multiple times, and there we were, close to it.

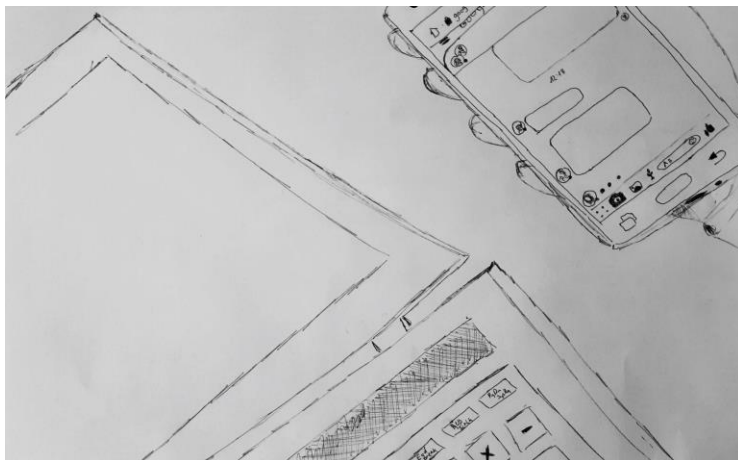
*It's strange how we stopped seeing things for what and who they are.*

I also felt a reconnection within me. Something familiar but not unknown. It felt like nature wanted to be friends with me again and accepted my apology for not being its friend.

We got so caught up in technology that chewing food doesn't feel the same, that the feelings and emotions just went away.

In this dream we had our phones back and the feeling of it was like having your heart struck my lighting of not knowing yourself and not being present in the moment.

As I woke up, it was nice to know it was just a dream. A dream that made me write this story and so I'm thankful I fell asleep because even knowing all of this, I would only know the feeling when we got our phones back and now, I can live with a phone without hurting myself.



*"What's wrong with the communication" by Valentyna*

## what Bergolo can evoke in yourself

By Lucie

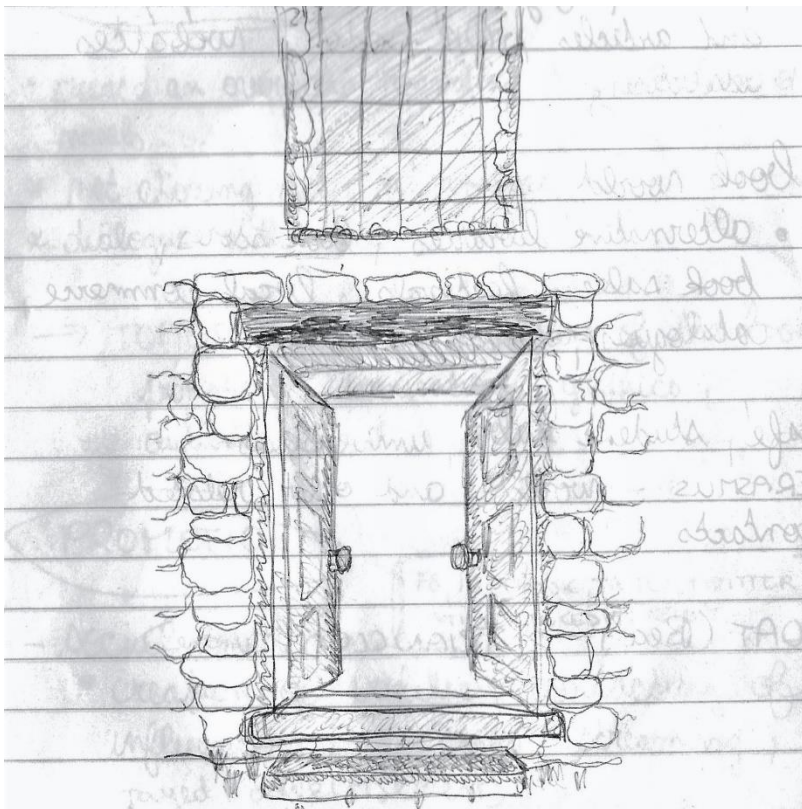
*A few verses, sentences full of inner thinking and a sketch of the door. Created at the Cappella di San Sebastiano in Bergolo, on a lazy sunny afternoon of September 2021.*

Where am I supposed to go,  
which doors to open  
and which to close (forever),  
the answer must be hidden inside  
still far away to know.

The lonely church on a hill, an old useless barque, and me. Peaceful tiny village surrounded by mountains, somehow completely separated from the rest of the world. The only sound, except from the subtle signs of the living nature around, is the ringing of the bells coming from the very heart of Bergolo. I have never thought before, the Sunday noon ringing could fit so accurately and perfectly into the place. The late summer in Italy seems like a paradise. The sun is not taking away your breath and burning your soul out, but the beams cover you gently like the arms of your loved ones. The energy comes in waves which copy the flurries of a light summer breeze. There is nothing to distract you. This environment could literally serve as a living image of the concept of 'calmness'.

I wish I could simply absorb all the peace around and insert it in myself. Even though it is not visible at all and just few would guess, thoughts are constantly running through my head, and I have to fight huge battles with the inner self every day. How come I grew up

in a supportive and complete family, but I do not see myself creating mine one day? Why have I studied for so long when the greatest outcome is that I have no idea who I would like to become and where to go? How did it happen that I gave many times so much love and attention to people, who were not willing to show me even the basic respect and care that we should have for other human beings in general?



People judge. People see what they want to see. In my case, most of the time everyone thinks that I am the funny one with all the problems sorted out, who is prepared to be there for others to help and support them without expecting anything back. But there are the little bugs in my mind, all the insecurities that I carry all the time and I was adding one by one, so they changed from a pocket size to a huge suitcase that you take to a year long journey around the world. Am I enough?

I confess I found a way. To explore the outer world makes you forget about the inner one. To be surrounded by people, new ones or the ones that you love the most, takes you away from the needed but freaking harsh time that you spend with yourself alone. I zigzag between the dark corners of myself and so far, I am successful in that.

Well, dear reader... imagine the little butterfly that just arrived from an unknown place and sat on the nearest grave, probably to catch a breath or just enjoy this quiet sunny moment. So carefree, with a clear goal and purpose in this world, isn't it? I promise I will try to discover myself and make things better, but for now, let me just forget and dream about being the grass, the ringing bell, the leaf that just fell down from the oak standing nearby... being the perfect puzzle piece in a faultless picture of nature.



# Seasickness

By Bea

On top of a small hill there was a lighthouse, which was surrounded by the sea and only connected to the mainland through a stone bridge. In the lighthouse lived a fisherman, an old man with strong arms, dark skin and tired hands. Every day, before the sun woke up, he got in his boat with a net, some ropes over his shoulder and sailed, leaving the lighthouse behind until the only thing he could see was water. The sea bored him; it was the only thing he had ever known. He was tired of it, of its' sounds, of its' moves, of its' colours and smells. There had been days, in which small things, like feeling the salt on his body, made him happy, but now, just the memory of those days made him even more sick of the sea. He hated it.

During those hours in which he floated in his boat, his salvation was in his head and in the stories and news he heard on the radio, that was the only thing that kept him company during the nights in his lighthouse. The voices in the radio talked about small towns in the mainland and about the fields, that depending on the time of the year turned yellow, or brown, or green, or even white. The sea was always the same all year round; no snow could stay on it, no grass could grow, no leaf could dry. And so, he dreamed about those fields, where boredom wouldn't have a way of even existing.

Every day, when water was the only thing to be seen, the fisherman thought: "Tomorrow I will cross the stone bridge and go see the fields with my own eyes. Get lost there. Maybe even never come back". But when the morning arrived, a thought kept haunting him: "What if I feel *landsick* in the fields?". On the radio he had heard that some people felt something called "seasickness" when they went to the sea. The thought of it used to make him laugh, but now feeling *landsick* paralyzed him.

One day sitting on his boat, the fisherman saw a fish jumping out of the water. The fish seemed to float on the air, to be suspended there for a long while, before it splashed back into the water. "Maybe that fish wanted to see what the air was like," the old man thought. "Maybe it also wanted to get lost in the air and never go back to the water. Maybe it was afraid of feeling *airsick*..." The fisherman saw himself in that fish and he understood that the sea, like it had been there for the small animal, would stay there for him to come splashing back in in case of need. Waiting patiently.

The next day, the boat didn't sail into the sea; before crossing the stone bridge, the fisherman glanced back to the infinite blue, took a deep breath, and started walking. He walked for hours and felt confused not hearing the seagulls over his head or not feeling the water on his hands. He stayed alert, trying to notice any sign of *land sickness*. "Is this pressure in my chest?" he wondered. Little did he know that what he was feeling was homesick.

The fields he walked in for hours weren't what he had imagined from the stories of the radio. With every step, he realized that the colours of the landscape around him had similar tonalities, which he found less beautiful than the deep blue; barely any sound could be heard, and the sun burnt on his head the same way it did when he sat in his boat. Everything in the dry field seemed static and heavy.

The more he walked, the stronger the feeling of homesickness got, until the fisherman went from wanting to get lost in the fields, to feeling lost. So lost that he stopped moving. He scanned the land around him, desperate, tired. Far in the distance, he saw a shape that looked familiar, and putting together the last energies that remained inside of him, he walked towards it.

It was a boat. A small fisherman's boat laying there in the middle of the dry land. The paint was worn out, the wooden seat was broken and the floor full of black feathers and dead leaves. Despite it all, he had the urge to step inside.

Sitting there, alone, he realized how similar those fields were to the sea. Vast, no road, silence, solitude. And in that oddly unknown but somehow familiar place, he missed the water. Sitting in that abandoned boat, the fisherman abandoned himself to his thoughts. And he dreamed of the sea. Or he remembered the sea. After so many years of boredom, the memory of his life back at sea filled his spirit. After all, sometimes memories seem like dreams. He felt ready to go back to the water.



*drawing made for the Bea's story by Kristiina*

## Un dolç retrobament

By Bàrbara

Feia temps que no ens retrobàvem, aquella nina i jo. Havíem perdut el contacte des que els pensaments es feren tot un embús i els interessos se'm desdibuixaren a la terrible adolescència, una època tan fora sentit. Tot d'una, sense tan sols plantejar una altra opció, vaig entrar a estudiar el grau i, ah, el món universitari era tan diferent d'allò que esperava: ignorant. Ignorant, sempre. Perquè mai saps què serà demà, no? I realment tampoc *sabem* res. Ella encara no s'ho plantejava, no pensava en el sentit de l'existència. Vi-vi-a, amb la fricativa ben marcada dos cops.

Aquests últims anys la sentia tan llunyana, i jo havia estat tan distant. Tot i això, la memòria continua tota plena de records. Tenia ganes de confessar-li que l'havia enyorada, que m'alegrava de ser-hi allà, amb ella. Quin dolç retrobament. Se m'apropa amb la seva cara plena d'innocència i em fa un somriure d'aquests que diuen *de oreja a oreja*. Tenim una llarga conversa i només se'm venen al cap els bons moments. Els dolents me'ls guard per quan torni d'aquest viatge oníric. Quin millor lloc per tenir un diàleg interior amb la jo de 7, 8 anys?

Ai, Bergolo, serveixes per a tots els tòpics literaris: jo n'he escollit el del record d'infantesa però estàs modelat pel *locus amoenus* i el *tempus fugit*.

## Knights in rags

By Alex

John opens his eyes as the high noon sun is shining on his eyelids. He looks at the other half of his king-sized bed as if he was searching for something. He jerks around, paying a little too much attention to his body. After a moment of stillness, he turns his gaze towards a jar brimming with a transparent liquid, carefully placed on the end table. With a swift arm movement, he reaches his hand and grabs the jar gulping all the contents. He lets out a loud sigh and his face fills up with relief.

He is hastily preparing a meal and carefully placing two glasses of vodka to enjoy along with it.

“There is nothing wrong with enjoying a drink during my meal” he said to himself quietly. “This will be the last one for today, I’ve had enough” He glances at the picture of his wife. She had left him years ago. “Damn woman!” he mumbles, “How dare she do this to me? After all I’ve done for her! Ungrateful whore! ... it’s time to think things through!” he says. “I should go to see my friends – they still care about me.”

He gets out of the house and rushes to the nearest day bar. As soon as he enters, he feels in control, comfortable among “friends”.

He starts by ordering two drinks: “I wouldn’t want to bother you too soon, honey!” he tells the waitress. The disgust present on her face is casually overlooked by the merry crowd who drift in “deep and meaningful conversation”.

John is bitching about his wife: “She left me just last week, what am I supposed to do now?” he rambles on “She did this just to make me suffer! This life is bullshit!”

To no one's benefit, the conversation keeps dragging on like an unshakable disease. They are playing victims, they are blaming the world, they are even blaming each other. They criticize a lot, anyone and everyone. They brag about how great they are and how hard they've had it. They are in a desperate climb to seize the high moral ground and assert themselves as good and righteous, alone against the terrors of the world – True knights in rags.

The ale kept pouring, it was early afternoon and John was cat-calling the waitress, harassing her for not bringing his double shot sooner. He takes one sip of the Vodka...

Night fell over Bergolo. Its dark veil covered the land separating the known from the unknown.

The threshold was paper thin, the lights of the village reveal only a fraction of the landscape, the rest is covered in pitch black darkness. One step into the dark and one has to face the unexpected. Wander too far, one might lose their way.

This picture perfectly illustrates the life of an addict. They are pulled by invisible strings towards the dark, mesmerized by its call. In the shadows, they are no longer seen – they just fade away.

John opened his eyes as the high noon sun was shining on his eyelids. He is vaguely sipping from the double vodka shot but that is his last memory. Experiencing constant memory loss, he doesn't know what day it is, in fact he doesn't even remember what night looks like.

He looks at the other half of his king-sized bed as if he was searching for something. He didn't know whether had come home alone. There were times when he had brought other women home, even when his wife was in the house.

He jerks around, paying a little too much attention to his body. He is checking for injuries. It wasn't uncommon for him to be bruised all over. He never does know if he gets into a fight with someone or just falls on his face.

A moment of stillness and thoughts his wife started to invade his mind. He sees her stunning beauty. He can feel her warmth and kindness. He remembers her calm and nurturing personality that had made him fall in love with her. He knows that she had loved him with all her heart – until the very end, until the substance abuse drew a wedge so deep between them that she had to walk away for both of their sakes.

He turns his gaze towards a jar brimming with a transparent liquid, carefully placed on the end table. With a swift arm movement, he reaches his hand...

## Secret friend

By Katka

In a room, when everyone else left, just me and you stayed and looked into the eyes of each other. *“Are you my secret friend?”* I asked. Just a gentle smile appeared on your face, and you let me come closer and smell your perfume on your neck. I recognised it already before, but the smell was so intense and I wanted to breathe it in again. I did. *“So, you are.” “I am.”* You left. I stayed alone there. I keep the memory of the smell of you until now. Where are you? Who is it smelling to you right now?

# I'll make Devil cry, my friends

By Vojta

Some of his friends had said Dr. Gesundheit is a damn bastard. The truth was far simpler: Dr. Gesundheit was a psychopath. Probably because of that, he was one of the best psychologists in Europe. He was showing no compassion to his patients. He didn't pity them, didn't curse them ... he just listened. No matter what they told him, he simply leaned forward. "Tell me more," he would say, looking at you with his deep brown eyes as if there would be nothing more important than you. "Please, keep talking, I want to hear it, tell me everything."

"The truth is, human behaviour fascinates me," he confessed. "I'm trying to understand every detail of it."

"Have you succeeded?"

"I believe so. It seems Europeans think in certain patterns. Just a few hundred more cases and my sample will be so saturated I could move to the Middle Eastern mentality in peace?"

The fact is one would not notice anything wrong with his behaviour. Dr. Gesundheit smiled sincerely and exactly as long as he should. His body posture radiated confidence, his handshake was firm and exactly three seconds long, he had known when and how to touch a person, and – if it was appropriate – he was ready to offer an embrace. He spoke fluently and intriguingly; he was saying the right things with the right tone, and when he was, from time to time, telling a joke, the punchline was strong enough to make men groan with laughter and women blush.

But that was the problem: Dr. Gesundheit never made a mistake. I soon realized his behaviour is thoroughly calculated, and after five years of knowing him, I got goosebumps every time I met him. It



was one of the reasons why he had so few close friends. He didn't seem to be bothered by that, though.

"You're a manipulator," I blamed him once, while we were drinking a twenty-two-year-old whiskey Gold Cock and smoking cigars Romeo y Julieta Belvederes.

"I am," he said without a blush.

"You're admitting it just like that?"

"Sure. Everybody manipulates, though not all admit it. The difference is in how good we're at it."

"And how good are you?"

"I don't know anyone better."

"Don't be so arrogant."

"I'm just being honest. The key lies in working with emotions. First, you must know the man – and for knowing him you must listen to him first. It's not enough to hear him. You have to listen to him. Then, you must be able to touch the right string... and in playing an instrument of the human psyche I'm a real virtuoso. Half an hour is enough for me to make others feel like God or vice versa, bring them to tears."

"Bullshit."

"You don't believe me?"

"Of course I don't."

I was already a little bit drunk, otherwise, I would have never made such a stupid mistake like heckling Dr. Gesundheit.

Half an hour later, I was crying in his arms. He smiled at me compassionately (which means "insincerely" in his case) and said: "See?" The tears left me in a blink of an eye, immediately replaced by the feeling of a knife in the back and an avalanche of anger.

"You're worse than a devil," I threw in his face.

His next words thrust the knife even deeper. "Don't take it so badly," he said. "I would be able to make cry even the devil himself."

"I'd like to see that," I spat out, but Gesundheit didn't react. He looked pensive as if caught in thoughts.

"Well, why not?" he said. "How much will you bet I can do it?" Capitalist morality was rooted in me deeply enough to make me, despite the anger, briskly reflect the status of my account.

"Ten thousand euros!" I fired with a feeling of vengeful satisfaction. I was sure that the doctor would accept the bet, as well as he could not possibly win.

"Okay," he nodded and offered me his hand. I hesitated but then I shook it.

That's how the weirdest psychological experiment of the 21st century started and I was so lucky I could be present.

A contract affirming the bet came the next morning:

*Mr. X. Gesundheit notifies Mr. Y. Aachen herewith that he will make the devil called Lucifer cry at psychotherapeutic sittings. The whole session will be recorded on camera, proving that the devil will be dripping tears from his eyes at the end of the session, which will not be caused by physical, but mental pain.*

*A single tear is considered a victory for Mr. X. Gesundheit. Otherwise, a victory will belong to Mr. Y. Aachen.*

*A winning prize is counted 10,000 (ten thousand by words) € that were transferred on account XXXXXXXXXXXX/YYYY by the part of the X. Gesundheit. It is expected that Y. Aachen will transfer the same amount of money to the same account within one week from receiving this letter.*

*The receiver is confirming the agreement by signing this contract.*

Easy-earned bucks, I thought, still pondering everything I knew about Dr. Gesundheit. Yes, he was a psychopath. Yes, he was toying with people like a director with actors. Yes, if he decided on something, nothing could stop him. Yet, to make the devil cry? Lucifer, Torchbearer, master of hypocrisy and deception? It was ridiculous.

I wiped the drop of sweat from my neck and picked up a pen... Another letter came to me one week later.

*Dear friend,*

*I would like to invite you to very unusual psychotherapeutic sessions, which will be held in my office on XX/X/2015 at 23:23. Although you cannot be present, I invite you into my office in the next room from where you can watch the whole operation. As you certainly realize, I am violating the medical secret, but surely you will agree that my patient is so exceptional that it falls outside the ordinary laws of our state and traditional rules of morality (about which, as you know, I don't give a fuck from the top of my heart (which I don't have)).*

*If you want to be present, please, come to my office at 23:00 exactly. Be punctual, otherwise, you may find out I will not be able to let you in.*

*Sincerely*

*Gesundheit*

Entirely perplexed, I sent word to my wife that I will not be coming home tonight, and I rang the door of Gesundheit's office at 22:59. He greeted me baldly, not even trying to smile. Basically, he looked like a robot. I hoped it was caused by tension, but I knew this is what the doctor's face really looks like: empty, without emotion.

"Can I get you a drink?" he offered.

"Whisky," I said.

"Which one?" he revealed his private bar, rich enough to make a whole company of Russian soldiers and one Saint Bernard rescue dog drunk.

"Any," I replied angrily and threw my coat on a chair. "X, are you really asking me to believe the devil will come here tonight?"

"Yes," he said, while he was pouring me a hearty glass of scotch whiskey Aberfeldy.

"But ... how?" I asked, unable to compose more intelligent sentences.

"It was easy," he said. "True, I had to read Faust carefully, the Master and Margarita as well, and study several esoteric scripts of poor literacy level. In the end, it was enough to slice the throat of a new-born baby, draw a pentagram from its blood and invoke the devil with all words that crossed my mind."

"And he will just – wait, what did you say about the baby?"

"I am kidding," he said with his robotic voice.

Chills run over my back. Was it just a flicker of his truly morbid sense of humour, or did he really...? I'll have to go through all the newspapers, police reports, and files of missing people tomorrow. I didn't ask myself if he would be capable of cold-blooded murder since the answer was clear; he didn't do it yet only because he had no reason to.

"And what happened?" I asked, trying to lead my thoughts away from the scary subject.

"Well ... the poodle appeared in a room, we made an agreement, I had signed an allotment with my blood and then, he disappeared."

"A poodle?"

"Oh my, poor Goethe. Complete your literary education."

"What exactly did you –"

"You will see. And now, go to the office, my guest will be here any minute." He urged me to the next room, settling me behind a table with a computer whose screen was projecting the room for meeting

with patients; Gesundheit apparently hid the camera in the corner of the ceiling. He left me with bottles of mineral water and whiskey and closed the door. The lock clicked. In a panic, I ran to the door and began to shake the handle but Dr. Gesundheit shouted: "Stop it!" "You locked me! Let me out!"

"No. It's for your own sake. I can't afford letting you disturb us during the session – it would be disrespectful to my patient, and it would render more difficult conditions for me. True, it would be an interesting challenge, but I would have to consider our agreement invalid. Now, calm down!"

I slammed the door one more time and let it be. I sat down at the table, crossed my arms, and muttered under my breath it was for the last time I had something to do with Dr. Gesundheit.

The screen got rippled so unexpectedly, I almost fell off the chair. The devil entered the adjourned room without flashy effects; he simply materialized in the middle of the room. He looked like a middle-aged gentleman, with short black hair and carefully trimmed beard, which, altogether with a blazer and a handkerchief jutting from his breast pocket, were supplying an appearance of metrosexual hipster. This impression was disturbed only by an old-fashioned cane with a silver head, which – as I rather guessed – had the shape of a skull. What was indisputable, the anti-aureole of black mist billowing around his body.

Dr. Gesundheit rose from his chair Lobster and Shelley coated with brown leather. "Welcome! I'm so glad you came," he reached out his hand to the stranger. The Devil looked at him with contempt but accepted it. The three-second handshake was prolonged when the devil didn't let Gesundheit pull it off. The doctor didn't hesitate; he put his hands on the grip (devil couldn't trump the gesture because of his wand) and stepped closer. "Sit down here, please," he nodded to the chair.

"I'd rather stand," the devil said, and with a disdainful expression he finally released the doctor.

"I'm afraid, it is quite inappropriate for our purpose," Gesundheit said. He sat down, threw a leg over the other, joined hands in a pyramid shape, and reaching this aggressively arrogant position, he continued: "Let me summarize the terms of our agreement first. You give me an hour of your time – half an hour would be sufficient, but I had to count in the necessary formalities. During this hour, you willingly answer any questions I ask if it will be in your power. At the end of this hour, my soul will be yours."

I gasped. Is he serious?

"Unless you will be grateful to me at the end of our session," Gesundheit continued. "In that case, I am free, and our agreement is deemed complete and fulfilled."

"I know the agreement," the Devil said. "I wrote it."

"Of course. To lead our conversation with somewhat more pleasant conditions ... would you, please, sit down?"

Devil snorted but accepted the seat. Despite the shape of the chair, he sat straight, feet at the width of shoulders, the wand resting across his knees. He prompted the doctor with an elegant gesture: "Well?"

"For the beginning, let me say I am grateful that you accepted my invitation. I will not deny I've never had a more interesting encounter," Dr. Gesundheit said. His voice was sincere, slightly excited, but not forceful; conversely, he sounded as disclosing a confidential secret to a friend. "I'm going to ask you for answers nobody in the world has."

"What'll it be?" the devil sighed. "Do you want to know where Atlantis lies? How to find buried treasures? Or how mature cosmic civilizations are? Will you ask me, perhaps, who killed Kennedy?"

"Not really. I'm interested in you. I would like you to open up to me. You should know we are here in an intimate circle and anything you say will never leave this room," Gesundheit lied the devil to the face with an absolute assurance ... and it seemed he was getting away with it.

"Tell me, Lucifer," he addressed familiarly, "what was it like when you were born?"

"It's not in my power," Lucifer replied.

"How so?" Dr. Gesundheit raised his eyebrows.

"I wasn't born," Lucifer said. "I was created."

"What was it like?"

"It's inexpressible. Imagine you come to this world in your twenties, and you know everything possible to know. Ask me how many stars are in the universe, and I'll tell you, as well as I can tell you easily what is the fifth root of 3,456.6548, or reveal the final number of  $\pi$ ." Doctor straightened legs together and folded hands in his lap. His eyes were fixed on the devil as if he was a cubist painting in which colours are hiding the final answer to the meaning of life; he examined it with an attentive, patient, and most curious gaze.

"How did you feel?" he asked.

"I was happy. Everything was right, exactly as it should be. I didn't share the same thought with my brothers, but still, we know everything about each other. Our father loved us, and we loved him."

"What went wrong?"

Devil shrugged his shoulders: "He created a man."

"Was it so bad?"

"Even worse. The worst thing he could ever do. People weren't only limited – they were stupid, tied to the material body, driven by desires that fogged their minds. Additionally, they were evil."

"What did you do with that?"

"I told the Creator I don't think this was a good idea. Because people will destroy the splendour of his work."

"What did he answer?"

"He told me to hold my tongue. Not to mingle with things I don't understand because neither I know everything, and I don't understand the real meaning of humanity."

Dr. Gesundheit leaned forward and spoke his miraculous spell: "Tell me more about it."

"He was wrong if you want to know. I knew very well what people meant. They meant destruction. They were toddlers and we were doomed to taking matches out of their hands over and over again. But in their embrace, the Earth was like a match factory, and people used to fret whenever we were depriving them of their 'toys'. They threw them at us, they condemned us and spat dirt at God."

Doctor nodded. "What did you do with that?"

"I showed God the true nature of humanity. Instead of taking the matches out of their hands, I put them under their nose and let them set themselves on fire."

"How did the Creator take it?"

"He was furious. Apparently, I did something I didn't have the right to do. I interfered without his permission."

The doctor nodded to encourage him.

"So, he overthrew me down to earth. 'You refused to listen,' he told me, 'you wanted to do what you see fit. Well, now I give you a chance. You can do anything you want from now on. There, among them. "

"How did that make you feel?"

"Horribly. I've never experienced anything worse. Imagine you are the happiest man in the world. And suddenly you lose everything. A father. Mother. Family. Friends. Home. They will banish you to the world to freeze, without money or clothes, to do whatever you want. It was cruel, pointlessly cruel. God likes to claim how kind he is, but I don't see any kindness. Just cruelty."

Dr. Gesundheit nodded again. He showed no sympathy. "Tell me more," he asked the devil.

"What more?" the devil exclaimed.

"What you see fit."



"I don't want to tell you anything."

"I'm sorry for that. What did you do next? "

"What would I do? I arranged as I needed. I created a new home, made new friends. I lived on."

"And God? And the people? How did you interact with them? "

"With God frequently. At first. I wanted to prove to him I was right. I was showing him how easily people can be seduced to do evil and how often they are bad even without me doing anything. Even the best of them eventually succumbed."

"All?"

"Almost," the devil admitted, "except that bastard Lot. He was such a stubborn mule that I suspect him to be just stupid. But he spoke too cleverly for it."

"And further?"

"One day, I almost convinced God to end everything. He sent a flood to the world that should destroy all humanity, but at the last moment, he changed his mind. Supposedly people still did not reveal their potential."

"How did you feel?"

"As a runner who sprains his ankle ten meters before the finish."

"And further?"

"Eventually I stopped going to him. It had been meaningless. God was like a blind man. He kept saying that everything is alright. He was driving me mad with being like that."

"So what did you do?"

"Not much. I wanted to spend some time with my friends, but I didn't have many opportunities for it. Every moment, I was invoked by someone who wanted something from me. Power, glory, love, wealth, answers. I must admit, if mankind surprised me by something, then by starting to worship me. And why have they started? Just to upset God. I consider it absolutely ridiculous. 'How can they be so stupid?' I thought. Not like I didn't expect it from the very beginning. I told him how bad their race is, but he didn't listen, so reap the whirlwind."

"I see. But if I'm not mistaken, God sent someone to redeem mankind?"

"Do you talk about Yeshua?"

"Yes, his son."

"I'm the Son of God!"

"So he's your brother then. Younger brother, I presume. "

"Daddy's boy," the devil snorted.

"Why did you come to him, when he meditated in the desert?"

"I wanted to remind him he is not the only Son of God."

The devil paused for a moment. Dr. Gesundheit leaned forward and asked him: "Tell me more."

"I wanted him to realize he doesn't have to do everything father tells him. That he has his own will. I knew what was supposed to happen to him. And he knew it as well. All angels knew it. I wanted to tell him he doesn't have to die on the cross."

"What did he reply?"

"He said it's all right. He told me he doesn't want to die, but if the Father wants, he will. I asked him why, and he replied God has his reason for it. He has a reason for everything. I couldn't bear it! I didn't want to be a sheep who is blindly following its shepherd, I wanted more!"

"Why do you lose your temper?" the doctor asked. "You're free."

The Devil blinked and sank into a chair. "Because it annoys me how goody boy Yeshua is," he said. The black cloud around his body has grown considerably.

"Do you miss it sometimes?" Dr. Gesundheit asked.

"Miss what?"

"Heaven. Friends. The times you were part of the family."

The Devil lowered his eyes; a black cloud pulsed. "What is the meaning of all this?" he growled.

"I want to help," Gesundheit said.

"Help? To me? Why?"

"Because I don't think anyone else ever tried it."

"You're right, nobody did. Do you know why? Because I don't want any help."

"Who doesn't want to accept help, cannot be helped," the doctor admitted. "Let me talk to you. If you will have the feeling that you don't need any help at the end of our interview, I will let you be. You will get my soul for it in return – there is nothing more I can pay for it."

"Why should I want to have your soul?"

"Because God will not get it then?" the doctor suggested.

Devil slid deeper into the chair and stroked his chin. He looked thoughtful.

"Answer me, please, one question, Lucifer: did you ever miss Heaven?"

"I did," Devil affirmed after a while. "I missed it so much. I still miss it."

"Would you want to go back?"

"No. I don't want to be a sheep like Yeshua."

"So, you don't want to go back up, do you?"

"I didn't say that," the Devil replied. Pauses between his answers were growing longer.

"What do you want then?" Gesundheit asked.

"I ... I don't know, I ... I guess I want God to accept me the way I am."

"Did you tell him that any time?"

"Of course not."

"Why don't you tell him now?"

"Because he wouldn't listen to me! He never listens, a typical characteristic of one who is omniscient and doesn't give a fuck!"

"If he knows everything, he knows how you feel as well. Do you think he doesn't understand you?"

"How should I know, I'm not God," Lucifer retorted.

"Did you ever try to apologize to him?"

"For what?!" Devil bellowed. "What should I apologize to him for?"

"You tell me," the doctor said. "Have you never done anything you should be apologizing for?"

"No."

The doctor waited.

"But I did it for him!" Lucifer shouted. "I just want him to realize something!"

"If God is omniscient, should he really realize something?"

"Who knows if he is omniscient? He's only claiming that and convincing everyone else."

"What do you think: is he omniscient? "

The Devil bowed his eyes: "He is."

"So do you think there is something you should apologize to him for?"

"I guess," he sighed. "But I am never going to do it."

"You obviously have full right to do it and I am not going to persuade you otherwise. However, we are discussing what could be helpful for you now. And you are the one who must tell me, I can't tell you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Let me put it this way: you've been on the earth since the beginning of time, aren't you?"

"Rather about six thousand years."

"It's quite a time as well. What have you achieved during that time?"

"Excuse me?"

"Are you happy?"

"What?"

"I know the answer to this question is never simple. In spite of that, please, try it."

"You are mistaken, Doctor, the answer is very simple," Devil retorted; poison was dripping from his tongue. "I'm not happy. Already for an eternity. "

"What have you ever done to change it?"

"A lot of things! I built a home, I found friends! We are torturing people together, it's fun to watch them suffer, knowing he will do

nothing about it!" he stood up abruptly and jabbed a finger at the sky; the wand fell from his knees and slammed the floor with a metallic noise. Then, there was silence. The Devil stared at the ceiling; not only his body but the cloud around him frozen as well. Dr. Gesundheit nodded slowly. "And did it help?" he asked.

Lucifer fell back into the chair. He looked devastated.

"One should be honest to himself," the doctor said. "If one isn't satisfied, he needs to change something. To operate on unchanging formulas isn't working."

"And what do you think I should be doing?"

"The point is, what do you think you should be doing?" For a moment it seemed the Doctor finished. But then he spoke again: "However, if you ask me for my opinion, I believe you should be honest to yourself. You are crushed by the feeling of injustice. It affects everything you do. Still, it doesn't bring you happiness. If escaping doesn't help, you should confront the problem. Not offensively. Meekly. Go to God and talk to him. Tell him that you're sorry. Not for the reason of receiving forgiveness. But to show your real emotions."

"But I'm not sorry!"

"Really?"

Lucifer hid his face to hands.

"No," he whispered.

The black aura around his body throbbed furiously and ... was it just me, or did it really start to withdraw to him?

Dr. Gesundheit put a hand on his knee. "There's no reason to get upset. It does not help. Let the pain out."

"לך תזדיין!"

Shattering scream shook the room; swept papers off the table, shuddered the windowpanes, and knocked Gesundheit back into his chair. At the same time, Lucifer leaped to his feet, grabbed

a chair, and flung it across the room. One-thousand-euro gem got turned to splinters splattered around the room. Then, the Devil launched at wallpapers and images, he was tearing and clawing, he slashed the table and broke the coat hanger. Black fog veiled the camera, the whole picture got drowned in it.

I sat frozen in the chair as if I had dived into the liquid nitrogen, unable to move, I could watch just the emptiness of the screen. Then, the mist parted like scattered by an autumn breeze and I saw the bravest thing I have ever seen in my entire life.

Dr. Gesundheit Lucifer embraced Lucifer. He hugged Devil from behind, locked him in arms, and buried his nose in devil's hair. And as they stood there, it seemed their bodies were glowing. Astounded, I stared at the frozen scene, disrupted by a single bead of movement; a silver tear trickling from Lucifer's wide eyes.

"It requires courage. We regret most of what we didn't do. Just try it," Gesundheit said.

Lucifer nodded. He broke the embrace, pulled the doctor's head to himself, kissed it quickly, and disappeared.

When he was left alone in the room, the Doctor opened his bar. He poured a liqueur, pulled a cigar out of the housing, and lit next to the open window. Then, as if he remembered something, he approached his office. The lock clicked, but nobody opened the door. The doctor returned to the window.

It took me quite some time before I was able to enter the demolished room. I tried to speak twice. For the third time, still strongly faltering, I succeeded. "It ... it was ... it was ..."  
"It was your ten thousand," the doctor replied with his robotic voice and turned to me. "How did you like it? I wonder if I shouldn't have a chat with Jesus now. Considering his dubious fixation on his

father, he must surely have a terrible problem. I would even take a guess at the Oedipus complex.”

He poured me a glass without asking.

"Do not look so perplexed," he told me while forcing it into my shaking hand. "Seen through the lenses of modern medicine, everybody has a problem. And if not, we will quickly make one for him."

I haven't been betting with Dr. Gesundheit ever since.

## The Romantics

By Άγγελος

Special people, full of love and intense emotions. You usually distinguish them by their look and the way they express themselves. "It seems to you, you have romantic eyes," a lady once told me. They are falling deeply in love; they are selfish and assertive. They believe in the people around them, no matter how many times they are betrayed. So many miles away but so grounded, the romantics, manage to express themselves in a few and special ways.

"You do not want to just go through a daily routine, you want strong emotions. But it is not at all easy to look for and manage them "

"Society does not fully accept its romantic self and rejects these people because it has a fast pace and does not catch up to live what it chooses but what others choose."

*with a song The trip by Still Corners  
Greek version "Οι Ρομαντικοί" available online*

# Lohoc-la

By Simão & Elian

*To Fabiano, who inspired us to write this story.  
Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.*

"It's Jameson now, dad!"— he screamed to his father.  
"I don't understand how you can just discard your roots like that, son."  
"I don't understand how you can't."

This was just like any other morning in Jameson's household. His family, especially his father, ruled all that was under the skies, and had some impressive leverage and influence above them too.

Jameson felt like the black sheep of the family, as his brothers and sisters were already following in the bloodline's footsteps. Not him, though. Lohoc-la, or "skies above", was their home. Cuddled between the Green Mountains of the old world, the basalt pathway, full of statues of their family, lead to the end of the Cliff. There it lied a strong house, used both for prayer and as a meeting area for the youngsters. That's when and where Jameson met his greatest companion, Tek-Ila. Ila, as they called him, also did not care for his best friend's royal heritage. The values they both shared were far more important than some arbitrary family tree, and that's why they were both drawn to the old legend of the "Cutty's Ark", supposedly filled with the magical elixir which would bring eternal happiness to the valley. Mystery, adventure and hope drew them together, and it would, once again, lead them towards an epic journey.

This being said, who would join them? It wouldn't be a person or an animal, a God or even a demon. You see, Jameson had a special ring on his pinkie finger. made from the greenest and clearest jade, it could open up to reveal his biggest influence, Ginie. If I hadn't



seen it with my own two eyes, I would also not believe his description, but Ginie was a big, four-legged, talking and hat-wearing blue eye. He would pop out of the ring whenever he felt like the situation needed some mending. In a species of his own, Ginie had unlimited wisdom, from which the pair benefited tremendously.

They were prepared for this trip long before they started, and that sense of finally fulfilling a destiny brought glow to their souls. Back home, their friends waited patiently for news of their adventurous peers. Biri and Wini, or “the twins”, anxiously continued with their daily lives, not knowing if they would ever see Jameson or Tek-Ila again. The households they escaped from could only wait, knowing that life would never be the same if they were to never return.

Even if they didn’t know it at the time, not returning was a real concern. There was a group of people, known as Wod’or, who knew what the trio were up to and did not appreciate their intentions. While Jameson’s family ruled all under the skies through light, the Wod’or wanted to rule through fear and darkness. Their leader was Securitás. As a Grandmaster Wizard, he was more powerful than virtually anyone in Lohoc-Ia. But alas, he had no intention of using his powers for good. He was born as the child-prodigy of the Wirginny, a group known for their relatively small size. Jameson’s father quickly sensed the child’s immense power and took him under his wing as his own son, long before Jameson was born. As time went on and with Jameson’s father guidance, Securitás mastered his own powers, becoming the right-hand man in ruling Lohoc-Ia. He was the first to be tasked with finding the Cutty’s Ark, being, at the time, the only worthy candidate in the whole realm.

Before departing on his journey, though, he was gifted the “Flower of Life”, as protection, good-luck token and as a sign of appreciation, much like Jameson received the ring that contains

Ginie. The “Flower of Life”, unbeknownst to Jameson’s father, would corrupt Securitás and give him enough power to justify his desertion. He hid it in the “Forest of Eyes”, a forest dense and scary enough as to hide it where no one would ever find it, and powerful enough to stop people from reaching it. As he grew more and more frustrated with Jameson’s father’s behavior, he stopped with the quest for Cutty’s Ark. “Why would I help him rule,” he wondered, “if I am powerful enough to overthrow him?”.

Of course, Jameson and Ila knew nothing of this and, unknowingly in danger, they left Lohoc-la whilst being followed. They didn’t know it until it was already too late. Ginie popped off of the jade ring and looked at the somber forest around them. Ila and Jameson knew something was off, but there is a fundamental difference between bad energies and bad company. The latter appeared, as one of the Wod’or jumped out of the bushes surrounding the path. “You don’t want to do this”, said the cloaked figure. “There’s more like me where I came from”. Unimpressed, Jameson took a step forward. Ila followed and the Wod’or disappeared again, which prompted Ginie to return to the ring. Weary of what they were going up against, the mood changed. There was no longer laughter in those who were the most merry, exactly what the Wod’or wanted – this was a planned diversion.

The diversion purportedly led them towards a different path, one which would lead them to a certain dense, scary forest. The stone road, in so many ways different from the traditional basalt ones you would find in Lohoc-la, seemed to have them walk in circles. This was not a coincidence, as Securitás had held the forest hostage under a powerful spell, making it seem endless for those who could not break it. Although Jameson and Tek-Ila could not decipher what was wrong, Ginie was buzzing to hop out of the ring as soon as they took the first steps through the unusual path. One must not forget that Ginie was an eye amongst the Forest of Eyes, and as

such could see through the whole charade. “This forest is under the influence... of dark magic”, Ginie explained. They both gasped and looked at each other. Ginie continued: “You see, your father, Jameson, he gave someone immense power through an object like the ring you bear; and it is using the forest to protect itself from us. It is making its surroundings look like an endless maze and making us look like fools in the process. No more!”. Having said this, Ginie launched itself through the sky and a beam of light pierced through the trees. He pointed north, and the group followed; and eventually, there it was: the Flower of Life, unattended.

“What now?”, Ila asked. “What shall we do with it?”. Jameson answered: “The Flower of Life is not inherently good or bad, it is just immensely powerful, just like *Securitas* once was. Like the *Wirginny*, it is the choices you make, rather than your birth, that define your worth. Let us set the Flower free”. And so they did. Through the darkness and somberness, they freed the Flower from its burden. A shockwave hit everything that there was under the skies and *Securitas* knew right away what had happened.

“Hmph. So they got through that... That’s alright by me. If we can’t beat them by power, we will beat them by sheer numbers, as they are no match for us.”

Jameson was not expecting all this when he left the comfort of his household and was visibly affected as they made their way towards the white temple where the *Cutty’s Ark* lay upon. The road, even if lighter without the spell, began feeling darker and darker as they approached the conclusion that the *Wod’or* would be there to stop them from taking the ark back to the valley. Through scorching heat and harsh winds, they got a glimpse of the temple after a few more hours of walking. The *Wod’or*, naturally, were there waiting for them, and so was *Securitas*. As Jameson wanted to turn back and return home, Ginie popped out again. “Remember who you are,”

he said. "You are Dionisius, son of Zeus, a God by natural right and by the laws that rule all that there is under the skies". The skies, in response, cleared up and the Sun, along with some sparsely placed white clouds, appeared as Zeus' response to his son finally figuring out his true calling. Securitás was stunned: he had always thought of Jameson (or Dionisius) as the weak link of his Godly family, and as such the one who would pose the lesser threat to him; in the end, it was the complete opposite. The son of Zeus - who had previously treated Securitás as his own offspring - was now defeating him by doing exactly what he was sent out to do, but never did.

"It could have been me", Securitás whispered from atop the mountain. "It could have been me". There and then, a lightning struck from the clouds and hit the Wod'or leader, banishing him from the realm of the living. The group was in awe and (it continues in the next paragraph)

The Wod'or, stunned, ran in a scramble, leaving the temple unattended. The trio made their way up and finally looked at the Cutty's Ark. Dionisius looked at it and touched it gently with his right hand. Without needing anything else, the lock popped and inside was the elixir that would bring happiness to the population of Lohoc-la. He decided to call it "Alcohol", as "Lohoc-la" means "skies above" and alcohol, being merely reversed, means "above the skies", which was how people felt with the elixir. Dionisius then named it after the people and objects who helped him during the voyage: Jameson's became a famous brand, and so did "Cutty Sark", an adaptation of "Cutty's Ark". Ginie became gin, Tek-Ila became Tequila and Biri and Wini became beer and wine.

This is the story of how alcohol first appeared on human lands, as a gift from the Gods, and about how water and the security forces, Wod'or and Securitás, became the natural enemy to alcohol's effect.

# At times there's something more, but mostly, it's space

By Francisc

*These two texts are dedications in themselves.*

## Us, Then

I left while the sky was still only at a nuance distance from the earth, and for our world, its form and content, filling and contour, were the same, I was watching myself and other passengers float through void, doubled and fading into nothing, with only points of light exposing an explosion of something from a deep dark nothing.

Just like the ecologically viable light bulbs, in some unclear distance, beyond tall industrial abstractions, expressionistically lit, still under pointillist cities and small towns, far yet from all that's still unnamed, something was slowly starting to paint the sky blue, here they were coming, the waves of blue.

With all the meandering gazes, desirable passengers who were at a coincidence away from being unaccidental, with all graphic tees folding their message into something wearable, from all outside fields turning the wilds into something arable, and certainly with the passing of night into day, of the light through the world, only to stop at each of our edges, as to respect our constitution, with all that my mind was attempting to make of it, the it of then, a then which in writing was now, albeit already thought of in the past, beneath skeletal totems driving volts miles across, beyond industrial destitution that sparked the memory of when it first sparked my interest and how difficult I thought my life to be then, but for the wrong reasons, and how, nevertheless, I could concede most such thoughts with your image in mind, a vague one, but a then-soon-to-happen opportunity for on-sight corrections, not anymore since, the nevertheless turned into nevermore, with nothing else in particular,

as the windows started showing fields like old paintings in a dimly lit room, I thought of you doing pirouettes through pictures, ever turning, ever turning away.

The worst of my love was explosive, I would think, but it ended up being a long lookout, your worst response, the same force, we'd concede, but in truth, nothing but the same sameness. But, this warm dimness, fighting your fading, under a wet-wool sky, inhaling vapours of cheap cologne that always make the world feel brand new and, on the move, in this light, this shine, this unspeakable light, this has always been the only good I know. The rain started darting its drops haphazardly, one window was full of glass veins, the other was covered by soft hairs, the type you have on your legs in the summer, the ones I was so glad to have observed.

In complete contradiction, some buildings' ruins are only lone walls, as for others, the structure, the pillars remain. I'm scared to see you one day and find out that we have so differently tainted our common past. I wish I could call you by the words that I viscerally feel, but even in solitude, they sound unsolicited.

There was a beauty in travel, in unknowing, in the safe haven that was your name; now I drive my meandering gaze as if walking my dog in the early hours, although I know no centre now, I'm lost. The Sun birthed a day once more, the foliage is inexhaustible yet bland, and as for the makings of man, I could watch them corrode under a torrid summer fire. The truth, dear, is that my morning comes with mourning. The truth of our thoughts – those synchronisations of cognition and affect that we have while slipping out of sleep – the sign of the days, for me as I wake, is a deep unrepentant ache.

I never did sleep well, but even fatigue can feel different. The bags under my eyes scare me, the fact that my skin could turn to such a tint of black. ...

## Her, There

There's a small window of time, somewhen between passport checks that have you step back and look like yourself for a few seconds and boarding, when the mass of people segregates into priority and non-that, reminding all about their place on the plane, and any other plane of their existence. Just before, you overloaded your back with your luggage, with a hop and now you have a nice five to ten minutes to stare at the fairly hairy neck of the man in front. He's a tourist but does not wear holiday clothes, that are wider and show more and seem to break some urban taboos and don't look right if you're not on a beach or in a vague vicinity, sipping sappy and too sweet beverages that have just enough alcohol to get you tipsy and that's just cheap enough to be viable and sellable, the sweet spot between a sweet tooth and an ache for inebriation, and also another taboo broken. His clothes are pretty mundane but seem a bit higher-end and show-offy and thus iffy and tacky, for sure.

Well before that, you think, well before that seems just beyond not a series of retractable belt fences, but miles and worlds away, although, granted, you are in the international area, no longer on national, but a liminal soil, so you are correct. You are far and she is far, and she'll head home, and you'll be far-flung back to your place. Put in your place, just like the ticket says. There is this small and open window of time when you've left behind the harassing rows of duty-free clothes stores and liquor of course and cigarettes all free of any fees or taxes but tripled in price nonetheless, the shopping mall-like place that makes all airports seem the same, and that leaves you with a feeling of being held hostage via bodily needs and social desires for the sake of a couple of Euros of profit, and that's unacceptable for most or tacitly agreed with for some and pleasant only for the happy, placidly, naively, pathetically happy few that weave, or better, design their couture identities around money. There are some, more try so.

But you learn to get over it and float through it all, and the light, shine and colour spectacle of ads is still pleasurable even more so when you are not invested, literally, but look on from afar, with a distance, the distance between your monthly wage and the price that would make up a good third. And when you do pass and finish showing how similar your current face is with the one plastered on your travel document and say thank you when prompted by the have a good flight, you get the small window of time, entirely open, you sit down and if you are lucky, you spend some quality time with your phone, your face burning in a different cold LED tinge with each stroke or scroll of your thumb, one small square reflecting it all on each pupil, but you are not lucky, your network provider does not provide data roaming where you just were and while you found the radio, and media, silence pleasant even deep and different and sophisticated in an old-fashioned way until then, now it's not the case and your neurons would like to be shot like blind bullets in vicious calcified reward loops but they cannot and you must think, or anything close to that.

You've been in airports for a while now; at first, when you're a child especially, they are like amusement parks with treats and gifts and lights and your parents holding hands and yours too and the big line for the big rollercoaster at the end. Although it quickly becomes, quickly as in the first hour in after take-off, pretty disappointing, and you remember that this metal thing that holds you miles up from the ground yet still rattles without pause and shakes worse than cars at times is not meant for entertainment, on-board brochures be damned, but for commute, alienated, utilitarian, mature. And there's where you land for a while, airports earn this coat of paint of sleek maturity, as you are in one because you are someone and you go somewhere for some reason, just like anyone else. Yes, it is uncomfortably early, and your armpits are sweaty just like your feet, face full of sebum, too, and you will have to suffer this for several hours and take one day to recollect after the trip, but personnel



treat you nicely and calls you Mr and surname and wishes you a good flight as if some great event depended on it. And you do lay with heavy limbs, but the glass and aluminium combo make this place look formal and serious and high tech but not tacky, and eternal most of all.

An airport is eternal. Nothing temporal sticks, clocks tick away, blackened pixels light up in green and announce the open gate, then turn yellow, boarding, then red, final call, as grandiose and biblical as it sounds, and you can buy watches and set yours to the local time of where you're going to but the place you're in has no time. Light has its flight, seasons change and skies open to pour water or sprinkle lumps of snow on or darken the earth with grey clouds like wet wool, but it all happens somewhere beyond, through windows like flat-screen TVs, not even the rays that make your face shine from sebum and sweat or drops racing down and uniting in arborescent networks can be enough proof that something is there as you stay and your mind races like a hounded out dog just firing in all directions with all cylinders just to keep up, and the timing makes it all seem unreal, this horrendous hour that should not see the tireless neon lights of signs of women and men and white teeth enjoying something that you can buy. You feel your eyes and the lids are heavy. But there is no time, no, not here, time is like your residue, like the sweat under your armpits, something that you secrete and take with you, a smell, the smell of tired men with ten to twelve-hour flights behind and more to come ahead, traveling salesmen, that is how time smells and that you take with you. Yet you're not left with the impression of maturity for long, as this coat too is a patine and wears off.

Catching a flight has some sadness to it, like a melancholy that no one directly faces when seated around the yet unopened gate, and sadness is what is on your mind too. Sure, you don't have Internet and the airport Wi-Fi gets stuck in endless registration loops, but

you do have your phone and your phone has pictures and you look at them. As if savouring the taste of food after having swallowed it, there's a melancholy in that too.

You don't do so to remember, by all means, you can recall where you took them, more so you looked at them immediately after, to check for the need of a retake and it's soon enough that you can kind of reach out and grab the general feeling or vibe you had when you pressed the red button. You always tried to make it less touristy and that had you take some pictures that went beyond direct aesthetic enjoyment and bordered on irony, some type of personal memes that you can send your friends back home without context and receive some positive feedback. Of the top of your head, an anthropomorphic hot dog in chains in London, to be sent to your American friend, some inscription from a hydrant in Italy that, by some linguistic convulsions, sounded like self-fellatio in your language, to fellow guy friends, they'll like it, Karl Marx Straße in Berlin for those back home that would find it just otherworldly, in a parallel reality kind of way, even scandalous to have anything neutral or non-negative associated with communism, a dumpster with a red hammer and sickle graffiti painted on it, in Greece.

The pictures you look at are nothing of the sort. They really are formally tame, and very personal in content, you feel like your dad or something by having taken them as if expecting to reminisce over them later in life and not to let them disappear countless scrolls down your gallery. The videos you watch for a while and cringe at your voice and then speed up, you see your recent past on fast forward, you feel it that way too. Maybe she does the same, maybe she would appreciate that you sit there in dead time and dead silence with a stupid smile painted across and just, well, are kind of happy. In the way in which all happiness is bitter due to the end of what made it happen. People tend to act the same on the way to the airport and become excessively sensitive and

touchy-feely upon seeing the automatic doors slide and swallow people that really do disappear. You pull at time then, stretch it to its breaking point. You hug it out and almost disperse only to feel the cold on your shoulder and soul as you turn and you turn back, and there is no good end to it, time is well pressed between the two and between you and the first checkpoint just like fresh leaves are pressed between two pages. You can't keep it, and as there is no trigger, you must create it, a gesture almost like pulling out a gun and shooting straight up, although even the mimicry of such a gesture would attract the bad type of attention and would not fly here. At some point, some primitive must-do fight-or-flight kicks in and you push on to your flight as it must be done but something puts up a fight. As you zig-zag your way through meaningless and absurd mazes of fencing, you look back regularly and rhythmically to recognise her silhouette and color palette and if she looks back you are happy and if she doesn't you still are, knowing there will be a turn at which she will have turned and you will need to turn no more, and your body will suddenly feel like something has been ripped off of it although being there in its entirety, but not, you cannot say it, whole.

The pictures do not make it justice, there are fragments in her movements that are something close to beauty incarnate and they make you happy and make it worthy for you to make it to her, although it breathes an air of melancholy upon the pictures' pixels as if remembering that one day that flat static image will be all you have. Something ripped off something that should be whole. Why wasn't staying behind placed under the same fight-or-flight faculty, and not just a want, a whim, and why did the lizard brain comply with reified concepts of travel expenses and adherence to nine-to-five job responsibilities, in other words, why were your Id and Superego shaking hands behind your unconscious proverbial back, that you will never know. You walk in line, you respect directions and signs, you smile and thank, and it feels nothing close to

oppressive, but it should. You're among your folk now – if you hear it, you can discern it, but you cannot understand, or get it. It all feels so deflated, you are deflated, you could see it, all around you, and you too, inflatable people and their valves open and they fall limp, limb after limb, and as your rubber head caves in and swallows your face, you look outside and the sky flickers like old neon, one perfectly square tile falls out and behind baby blue background and thin white clouds like stretch marks, there is an aluminium installation or scaffolding barely holding it all up, and then black void, or worse the same airport interior, the eternal, the same, the all, you can never escape it.

You can snap out of it, naturally, there will be time, and you will make it back, it's not done, not over, just postponed. It really is, you cannot state it differently, a matter of time (so, no matter now). And you must be patient and resourceful and strong-willed, of course. The world is open in a way, and she is there, so there is a chance. The feeling you had on the first turn of the maze when you couldn't pinpoint her beyond paravanes, not even her back, nothing, was something that arises from the chest like a weakness and just overwhelms the eyes. Like an irk, then an ache. The vague feeling you've been, not here, but like this before, or both, but sentiment tends to impose its temporality. *Sentiment temporality*. How did it pass so quickly? That is the answer, it comes with the territory, and the time. But each instance is no iteration, it almost wipes clean all the previous ones, and maybe that's why people say it's meant to be, it seems so, as all other previous *meants* are swept clean. A possessive sentiment in a way, taking over all the affect, making past iterations utterly empty and gone, a swath of people you cared about in this exact way now returned to the great mass of strangers, of *whoeverfolk*. You cannot feel this fear now, this very thing happening again, and not in the way in which some say they just cannot imagine going through this or doing that, not as a moral keeping away, but just a cognitive impossibility. As you were

tucking in your shirt and putting your belt back on, you watched past the scanning machines eating and excreting bags at a pace, you saw an empty marble-floor room, its expanse shattered by invaginated rows of pillars connected by belts that looked like safety belts, you saw people pass through them without, and finding no, fault, old women with sagging bodies under sundresses and strollers lagging behind, tall and fair and so viscerally and socially uncool northerners with a cohort of well-behaved kids that will turn out well and a marriage that goes on correctly, if not well, the here-stay inhabitants chatting about the here-say, and you yourself were there, pulling at straps and braces creasing your clothes and thinking in a dangerously serious way about missing a flight and what happens if you do so, what's the protocol or procedure or if there is any or are you really out of joint when out of time, and anything just would just go, and you would go back, and what would back mean once the stupor and adrenaline and serotonin and, and, and... and all end. There will be a day when you'll miss your plane when you'll reclaim time and get a good whiff of it, you say to yourself, and you look at the pictures no more. You must embark, you're out waiting for the bus and the flatland of landing tracks trail off into flat distance, the worst kind of infinite, and look cheap and fake and ordered but in a conveyor belt-produced type of way, just like toy sets. You look in the distance and for a reason that is beyond motivation and maybe not worthy of reading into, you expect to see her, and she naturally isn't there.

There will have been a past future, the plane will have taken off and turned the world beneath into a crude distance, and by the time you will have arrived, messages would have flooded and pulled you back into blinding life, but for a small, very small window of time, distant words, past pictures cannot replace a glance through blinds, or an attempt at that, and you're left to live with the vague impression that something you've always seen as similar to a thing you must scratch and claw and grasp at has fallen into some sort of

place, two things coincided with the grandeur of colliding stars, but with the fine fit of two puzzle pieces, and that just now, when you're on the verge of thinking something stupid like you're entering adulthood, manhood, whatever you call it, and you believe it even, you're stuck with the impression, with the assurance that whatever has been put into movement, or first gear, on tracks, or had its lift-off, may just be, maybe, the most important thing in your life. And there is grace and grief in that.

## **The Blind Path**

By Nazaret

Everything felt suddenly more alive and exciting. I felt a very deep connection with nature. I usually enjoy it with my eyes but meeting it through my hands was a different story: it was like meeting a secret part of an old friend. The touch of the plants made me feel relaxed, I entered a state of complete awareness of the present moment. Like a child exploring the world and trying to make sense of it: the velvet leaves, the spiky pinecones, the delicate plants, all were part of a diverse world of sensations. I was in a trance; it was like a dream where you know what is happening but, at the same time, you notice everything is unknown. I do this walk every day, however, this time felt like the first one.

I could also feel some adrenaline because I could fall at any moment if I was not careful enough. When it was time to get back my sight, it took me some time to come back to reality. I was born again, and the whole walk was there to enjoy it from now on, giving it a new value. Sometimes the best experiences are hidden in plain view, all we must do is get out of our comfort zone to discover them.

# The Immortal

By Elisa

He got up from the bed and this time did not look at the time, took the sweater, shoes and came out. Outside the room he put on his shoes and set off towards that beloved place. The tower, the highest and the most solid.

The staircase was long but as always, he enjoyed all the steps and all the steps that brought him a little closer to the desired goal. He arrived almost without realizing it because on the last steps the thoughts had escaped to his control and had crowded ferociously his mind.

As divine light it was the light of the Moon that brought him back there, with his feet on those ancient bricks, ruined by time and bad weather.

He loved that place, that cold air that penetrated his nostrils with malice making him cry in the eyes but then he got used to it and then that cold caressed him gently, almost rocking him like the warm blankets and the pillow in which his head sank, they couldn't do anything.

He sat on the narrow sill because of the safety railing (which could actually be overcome without effort) and glanced at the Moon.

Oh, their chats were wonderful, he liked them so much that he often wanted to relive them, but he never had the courage to write them down, to take notes.

He breathed deeply and looked down where the grass could hardly be seen below; that vision caused him a sick shiver, he trembled for

a handful of minutes, he again closed his eyes and turned his head so as to avert his eyes.

He went through the pocket of the sweatshirt and took out a piece of cloth, torn but still young if looked at well and with conscience, as if the time around it had stopped.

In fact, it was so, it seems impossible but sometimes time really stops, the years do not go on, do not increase, it is like immortality and yet it is death.

He had often thought about it; the only way to live forever is to die, brutally and suddenly, to create scandal, fear, strong feelings that automatically (by human nature) are printed in people's memories.

He held the cloth in his hand and smiled bitterly.

It wasn't his intent, being immortal, it wasn't like him.

*But she wanted it and she became it.*

*Despite the meters of earth blocking her cold body she still lived in the minds of all those who had seen her at the foot of the tower. He had a frightfully unnatural position and an empty expression.*

*She spent the night there before she was found.*

*He was still asleep and had not been awakened. The news was communicated to him only when he arrived in the room, after waking up in the empty bed.*

*They had offered to see her one last time, but he had refused, had given the order to prepare her for the service and forbidden*



*everyone to look for him, before leaving he had asked where it had happened and there he had headed, on the highest tower.*

A tear fell on his cheek and fell on his hand.

At the top of the tower, he had looked around and approached one of the windows where a piece of reddish cloth waved entangled in the rusty railing.

He sat there and remained until late at night, aware of the arrival of the cold and the Moon.

«Why?»

Looking at the bright satellite he had repeated the question, screaming this time then remained in silence, a restless silence and especially sad.

He had been listening to the wind blow in the dark without looking down for fear, despite the darkness, of seeing the mark left by her.

The servants had obeyed and did not seek him until the next morning.

He leaned his head on one of the columns and looked at the Moon then said a simple: «good evening»

In the nearest village again arrived, as every night, that light voice carried by the wind carrying an empty conversation, full of unanswered questions.

## An intermission

By David

The grimy, angled windows interfered with the sun's aggravating desire to secrete its radiation through any crevice it could find, as they stood as obstinate keepers of murk, holding the light in contempt and the dark in high regard, and preserving the sensation of paranoia that peeled off the walls like old, shrivelled wallpaper, taking the room as its hostage, shielding it from the outside world, ensuring its survival. The room lacked a good source of illumination, so the varied stages of decay that domestic appliances tend to display after time etches its perpetual name on them could not be seen by eyes that had not been accustomed to an absence of light. This circumstance made the room appear as though it had been frozen in time; forever caught in a place where entropy would show its distasteful face only at the end, and not throughout. Inside, behind a typewriter, Palomino sat hunched, a stack of yellowed paper near him, going back and forth through his mind, trying to remember how to spell the word *disruption*. "D-y-s", he thought, hammering each letter firmly, each type bar striking the ribbon with precision, leaving its contour on the yellow sheet of paper that was neatly wrapped around the cylindrical platen.

"No, no, no; not like that. Not like that at all!", he said aloud, uprooting the paper from the typewriter. Then, after crumpling it with both of his hands, threw it over his shoulder without looking. The crumpled ball of paper arched through the air like a ballerina, only to land with a silent thump on the dusty floor.

In the room, only sorrow grew, sprouting from beneath the floorboard where seeds of habit wallowed in a mire of melancholy and murk. The floor was covered by a rug of ashen dust on which shoe marks, overlapping each other and circling the room, were engraved deeply, possibly showing moments of intense thought.

Countless days Palomino spent in this room – 102A – which was positioned on the fifth floor of the run-down Honey Ferguson motel, writing – or trying to, without prosperity, it seemed – a first draft of an autobiography which he had been hired to ghost write. The autobiography in question would then be attributed as having been written by G. R. DuQuette, an influential figure, a renaissance man and a man of the times: the past, the present and, unquestionably, the future. He'd been hired by an assistant of an assistant to an assistant; the echelons of assistants going on and on into what seemed to Palomino a spiral that had no end and no beginning. What had recommended him for this most prestigious project was his ongoing small career as a modest playwright for off-off-off-Broadway productions, wherein he wrote an intimate play which got a couple of rave reviews and a handful of good ones (and a dozen of bad ones) about a fictionalized account of a depressed and downtrodden Leon Trotsky who expressed his aches, inner turmoil and socialist ideas through romantic ballads, and his unrequited love towards a musk deer he encountered while exiled in Siberia. Neither the subject nor the scope of it attracted the attention of G. R. DuQuette's many metaphorical eyes, but its complex themes that touched upon the human condition, filled with despair, hope, love and its absence, emotion, aspiration, nature, utopian socialism, the past, the present and the future – all seen through the eyes of a historical figure. Though Palomino rejected at first the proposition made to him, stating that plays are about and for the people, whereas autobiographies are just a way for those with wealth and power to engrave themselves upon the ever-continuous pages of history, he accepted the offer eventually, realizing that with the money he'd make, he'd be able to finance some of his unproduced plays and continue with his awakening of the common man. Yet, as days passed and nights came about without a trace of belletrist revelation, Palomino found himself at the base of a towering mountain portrayed by yellowish pages of paper, some empty, some with just a word or two, some filled with long sentences and

never-ending paragraphs, crushed in wrinkly and uneven orbs. As another insipid night prefaced itself outside, Palomino faced the empty typewriter with tired eyes.

Words seemed devious to him, their many meanings now a congeries of shapeless things, without a clear pattern; mirages in a desert in which he was a traveller adrift. With the tips of his thumb and index finger he pinched the bridge of his nose and rubbed it slowly in a circular motion. He closed his eyes and right before him verbs and adverbs, nouns and pronouns, interjections, conjunctions, and adjectives cavorted with disdain in a circle dance, a mocking ritual. He stretched out an arm as though to catch them, but they scurried off, leaving him with an empty mind. He'd been unable to sleep properly for some time now and this sporadic scarcity of repose, conjoined with a deficiency in inspiration, was tearing his mind apart, starting to drive him mad. He rose from his chair and straightened his back: a deep, drained sigh flew out of his mouth as his backbones crackled, relieved. He unconsciously and instinctively trailed the overlapping shoe marks that decked the floor, having no clear thought in his head. After two laps around the caliginous room, he stopped and looked intently at the silent typewriter, which was both a friend and a foe, changed his route and went towards the bathroom.

The dull light dispersed by the lonely, drooping light bulb revealed one small window that was sorrowfully hanging onto the blue ceramic tiles that were decorating the four walls. The window led to nowhere, but a grey and shrivelled landscape filled with cobwebs and dead flies. To the right and slightly below, the muddy mirror reflected the rest of the cramped bathroom: underneath it, a fissured sink, a rusty bathtub stained with yellow spots of unsure origin, a high-level toilet, its reinforced cistern up on the wall, protruding from up there like a ceramic whitehead. Palomino approached the sink, turned on the faucet that controlled the cold-

water flow, brought his head low and his mouth near the stream of water and drank. Whereupon he wiped the wetness around his lips and chin and looked in the mirror, leaning on the sink, his palms holding its margins. He could not clearly recognize himself and felt as though he were an anthropologist and his reflection an unknown species of archaic human that he was studying, unable to recognize its physiognomy. He left the bathroom and turned off the light, hoping that the reflection in the mirror would stay behind, trapped on the other side.

Outside, the streetlamps shone for nobody in particular, save for one or two cars that sometimes sped through the cold avenues. The night had taken over the empty city and the buildings looked forlorn under its darkness. Palomino was looking out the window, drawing from a cigarette, contemplating the smoke he was inhaling and exhaling, lost in ersatz reflection. A screeching sound cried through the streets and pierced through the night, and the tyres of the car stopped short of the kerb. The taxicab's door opened, and a man got out. He had a big suitcase in one hand which he carried effortlessly. The man slammed the taxicab's door and yelled, "A mad man ya are, driving like that!". A reply from the driver came within seconds, but Palomino could not make out what it said, the driver being inside the taxicab and he, Palomino, being at the fifth floor, a great enough distance between them two for a clear sound to reach his ears, not that any of this abrupt occurrence registered or mattered much to him. The man, one hand on the suitcase's handle and one on his hat, looked up for a brief moment then entered the Honey Ferguson motel. After a few minutes, the buzzer of room 102A rang and a high-pitched ding resonated behind the closed door. Palomino, still absent behind the cigarette, jolted at the sudden sound. He wasn't expecting anybody and, besides, nobody he would regard as a friend knew where he was – not that there was somebody who'd be interested in his whereabouts in time and space to begin with. He did not hurry towards the door, and so the

buzzer rang a second time. Before opening the door, he peered through the peephole. Its fish-eye lens gave the visitor, who was a man, a burlesque appearance. He looked like a wide, miniature model of a carnie. Palomino opened the door.

“Hi there, friend!” the man, who just got out of the taxicab and entered the motel a few minutes ago said. His voice had a nasal quality and a buoyant intonation and filled the space around him.

“Whadda ya say, whadda ya know! Looks like we’re neighbors! I’m next door, in room 103B; once someone moves in 104C, we’re gonna have the first three letters of the alphabet!” He chuckled at this observation and brought up his room key to demonstrate his declaration. “Oh boy, where’s my manners?! The name’s Layton Clayton!”. He placed his suitcase on the floor and stretched out his arm to shake his neighbour’s and make his acquaintance.

Palomino shook his hand, his still lit cigarette in the other. Layton’s extremities were fat and clammy, and his fingers looked like weeny Vienna sausages.

“Ya can call me Layton... or Clayton. I go by both names!” and he chuckled again, his plump, rosy cheeks contracting and relaxing with every word he spoke. He was a rotund individual, short in stature, with a theatrical demeanour; a brunet chevron moustache was neatly nestled between his top lip and his large, red, bulbous whiskey nose.

“I’m Palomino,” Palomino said, visibly taken aback by Layton Clayton’s energy.

“Palomino, huh?” Layton Clayton asked, not in a manner which required a reply, but rather to himself, scratching his forehead – which was glistening with sweat under the motel’s hall light – just

under the brim of his brown homburg hat that complemented the rest of his attire: a brown, cotton suit jacket, a mustard vest over an eggshell white shirt, brown cotton pants and faux leather oxblood shoes. “Funny name, that! Say, what cigarettes ya smoking there?” “They’re R. J. Johnsons; their smoke’s velvety, and it leaves an aftertaste of intimacy, the closest we can come into contact with fire without being immediately charred.”

“Funny explanation, that! I quit smoking a long time ago, got chronic bronchitis, a doctor who’s a friend of mine told me. Say, whadda ya do for work?”

“I’m a playwright and, not to sound pretentious, a critic called me ‘the probable new voice of the next generation’,” but he indeed was pretentious; he always took pride in his writing and that particular line. Then, he added, “However, right now I’m working on a project about which I cannot talk without discretion. It’s a biography of sorts”.

“A-ha! I knew ya were some sort of artist. I saw ya smoking out the window before I went in the motel, and I thought, boy(!), that guy up there’s sure thinking hard about some fancy things right now! And besides, ya look tired – a mark of someone who’s thinking hard, I’ve heard it said. Do ya get enough sleep done in between your...,” he paused, looking for a decorative way to describe Palomino’s occupation, but found none, “... work?”

“To be honest, lately I’ve been having problems with that recreational activity. I don’t know if it’s this oppressive room that’s extinguishing my hibernation or if it’s my newfound inefficiency in getting any quality writing done that’s keeping me from sleeping. Do you want to come in?” he asked at the end of his explanation. Even though he wasn’t really in the mood in which one must be to be

open to having guests over, he figured that perhaps a conversation with a layman would spur his creative prowess.

“Aww, yer too swell of a fella, but I can’t. I gotta unpack my things,” and he picked up the suitcase and raised it slightly so as to underline that undertaking. “Maybe next time. I’ll hold ya to it!” he chuckled again. “By the way, I have some syrup, prescribed to me by a doctor who’s a friend of mine. If ya keep having trouble sleeping, let me know and we can solve that right there and then!”

“Thank you, but I worry that any kind of medication will cloud my writing.”

“This one’s made from some Chinese or Asian plants or something, so it’s all natural. But I see what ya mean, an intellectual like yerself must have his mind sharp at all times. If ya change yer mind, lemme know. I’m just next door!” his chuckle resonated throughout the empty hall. “Catch ya on the flipside, friend!”

~

Soon, Layton Clayton became the main cause of Palomino’s lack of rest. Whereas before he’d been able to get at least some simulacra of sleep, now even the dream’s antechamber, the delicate, semi-conscious transitory space between waking life and the faraway land of slumber had become a mere illusion. Writing and the lack thereof had become a second, if not a third concern for him. What was imperative now was finding a way to stop the deep, droning, guttural sounds that were reverberating through the walls and drowned everything in their path, pushing through the air like bulldozers, rattling the pipes of the motel and scraping the wallpaper off with their low frequency, that seemed to be coming from Layton Clayton’s accommodation. They sometimes stopped during the day, for brief periods, but during the night they were



unceasing and more powerful. He had tried everything that there was so that he would escape this torment: he had complained to the motel's receptionist and manager, but every time they came up, there was nothing to be heard; he had asked for a new room, but he was told that there were none available; he had hammered and kicked the wall that separated his room from the source of that beastly disturbance, he had knocked, kicked, yelled through the door, pleaded with whichever god there was above or below to stop those maddening noises or take his hearing away so that he won't hear anything anymore. Yet, the sounds kept coming through the walls and installations, their intensity and density increasing.

Palomino lay on his back, awake, underneath him the mattress moulded into the shape of his body. The same old ceiling hung above him, low and suffocating, its old and faded white paint looking greyish in the night, radiating static to his eyes. From time to time, shadows of various lengths and colours moved around on it, cast by the headlights of lonesome cars which were sometimes passing up and down the boulevard. A continuous faint light from a streetlamp – a glowing watchman which was illuminating its surroundings for nobody in particular – streamed inside the room through the same old windows that had seen enough and will see some more, trying to fight off the morose atmosphere to no end: in this room, now drenched in dissonance, only sorrow grew. It appeared to Palomino that it had been night forever. Sleepless days blended one into the other, forming a quagmire of blurred time.

Every day was exactly the same; there was no anticipation, no resolution and no rest. He thought he used to have a purpose, a goal though with its pathway foggy, a goal with an end, nonetheless. Now he was thinking that perhaps all might have been a dream, a chimera that grew in size as entropy ran its course. He closed his eyes and he fell into himself like a house of cards whose

base conceded under the pressure of the very cards it was made out of and the sounds appeared to him tactile and visible. They were massive, opaque waves that ceaselessly raced around, eroding with their hunger everything that was in their path.

They were cold to the touch, and they finally took over Palomino's environs and thoughts. He started having other visions; his shape was now that of a homunculus and was conscious only of his head, which looked back at him and uttered cryptic words. Then, he turned into a torso: his own torso. He writhed, limbless and headless, like a protozoan organism until his arms and legs grew, slithering like snakes, and his head popped up from between his shoulders; voices undulated in his ears, malicious modulations that turned into wistful whispers, bombarding him from every direction. He lay there, motionless with his eyes still closed, or perhaps open. He could not tell the difference anymore.

After a while these apparitions subsided and the deep, droning, guttural sounds returned in all their unadulterated glory. Laboriously, he rose up from his bed and went towards the bathroom. His bloodshot eyes, staring back at him from behind the smooth surface of the looking glass, were saying to him that it was time to rest; but he was hooked on the new dark age of his mind, ushered in by the sounds that were bellowing in his head. He decided to act upon his torment and tormentor. He washed his face with cold water and went out the door.

Out on the hall, the sickly light watched over the empty space with conviction, painting everything that was under its authority with unsure brushstrokes. Palomino now faced the closed entryway of apartment 103B, and he could have sworn that the door was trembling on account of the bedlam that was transpiring behind it. He took a few steps back and lunged with this right shoulder forward into the wooden door, hitting it right in the middle. Though it

trembled, it did not budge, so he lunged again. And again, making no headway. He realized that this was to no avail; he needed something with which to break it. Looking around, his head hazy and vision clouded, he spotted a single bit axe encased in a mounted cabinet – a tool to be used in emergencies. He broke the glass of the cabinet with his elbow with a determined blow and drew the axe as if from a sheath. With both his hands tightly gripping the haft of the axe, he struck the door. The blunt blade chipped some wood and varnish, but it did not pierce it. A newfound vigour aroused within him, and he unleashed a flurry of strikes upon the obstacle. With each strike, the door became feebler, and a hole was emerging where he'd struck; with each strike, the droning sounds growled and barked more menacingly, and the door trembled still. The hole in the wood was now big enough so that Palomino could fit his hand through it and open it from the inside, so he did. The lock clinked and he pushed the door ajar, not knowing what to expect, not knowing if some sort of creature, or Layton Clayton, would leap at him. Yet nothing happened. Even more than that, in an ironic twist of fate, the sounds stopped. The room fell silent, and Palomino dropped on his knees, the axe hitting the floor with a clang, and began crying the cry of a relieved man.

At last, there was silence. He remained like that for a few moments, basking in the dead air and absence of light. Everything was short lived, for the growling began again, in a crescendo that made Palomino's hair stand on end. A dejected yell that was immediately drowned by the increasing droning growling, bellowing, bark-like sounds discharged from his mouth. He rose up and felt dizzy, weary and despondent, the growls droning through his ears, picked up the axe and looked around the darkened room: he could not see much, but made out that it was exactly like his, except this one was a suite. To the right, opposite the bathroom there was another door, its contour looming out of the shadows. As he slowly approached the second door, fumbling through the blackness, the droning,

guttural sounds marched on. He readied his axe for a blow, but before striking, he decided to try and see if the door was open. He touched the doorknob and felt it vibrating in the palm of his hand. He pushed on it and the door opened and a wall of noise hit him, disequilibrating his fatigued legs. The room was as dark as the one that was now almost behind him; the exasperating, droning sounds marched on, ever more menacing and louder. He reached out one hand and felt around the wall to his left for a light switch. The tip of his index finger met with the plastic of the switch. He flicked it on. The room was immersed in light and his pupils contracted because of its incandescent power. Right before his very eyes, still sensitive to light, facing him was the source of the maddening sounds: the wall had become an organic being.

Spread over it all, from the floor up to the ceiling, a bulbous, malignant tumour breathed with growls. Its colour was the colour of an open wound, fleshy and bloody and glistened in the light. Palomino could see that it was riddled with pustules; some of them were inflamed and had a yellow colour; others were white while others had burst and left marks behind. As it breathed in and out, the walls around it, the floor and the ceiling vibrated, and the air filled with waves of ruthless and unyielding sounds. Palomino struck it with his axe and the breathing tumour gave out a loud and forceful bellow that pushed him back. He raised the axe again and struck it once more. The floor vibrated as if an earthquake had formed deep in the earth's entrails and then forced its way out, pushing all aside and wreaking havoc in its path. Using every ounce of energy left in his body, Palomino struck the tumefaction with one last violent blow. A menacing, sullen boom rang out as if the sky had just ruptured, letting out its last, devastating breath. Palomino felt a sharp pain and a final silence fell. He dropped the axe, left room 103B and returned to his own. He plopped on his bed, closed his eyes and a slight smile curved on his face. Blood trickled from inside his ears.

## A lion in the way

By Alex

The valley was filled with glittering dust – it was floating in the atmosphere in beautiful chaos. The lion was going about his day like he normally does – playfully chasing butterflies and vivid coloured bugs.

At night, when the dark veil took all his distractions away, thoughts would creep up on him like spiders on unsuspecting prey. He would wonder about what lies beyond the valley. He would dream of other lions, some, he imagines, were a lot like himself, some, he feared, were hugely different. He only ever knew the valley – all he could do was dream.

In the mornings, when the sun would rise and the glittering landscape would come to life, his troughs would wash away like the sands of time. He would find himself slipping back and once again, chasing, playing, dreaming.

Days went by and turned to months. Months turned to years and all records of time seemed to have been ultimately lost.

On one fateful afternoon, as the lion was cheerfully distracted, the sky began to ominously shift towards uncertainty. The glittering sand started to build into a blinding haze. As the wind began to furiously rise, a ravaging sandstorm took hold over the valley.

When the imminent threat had become apparent to the lion, it was already too late. There was no escape. The lion started sprinting away from the storm, but no one can outrun time. Terrified and overtaken by the storm, he could feel the furious brush of sand against his whole body. His senses were in disarray. He was

paralyzed. He was gasping for air. He was struggling to find shelter. He was roaring from pain. He fell, motionless.

Time is a mischievous concept. It brings the illusion of abundance and despair of scarcity so close together. There can be no grey areas. You think you have time, right until you don't.

The lion opens his eyes. The desert is limitless. The air is still. The sun is scorching the landscape. No amount of passing time can make the sun move an inch from where he's pinned to the sky. Nothing moves but the lion. He looks around and sees nothing – no landmarks, no dunes, no clouds. The sand is perfectly flat as far as the eye can see. The horizon is blurred, it is impossible to tell where the land ends and the sky begins.

Witnessing such a sight, the lion is filled with deep despair. A crushing lack of vision creates a void inside of him. He knows he needs to move, but he cannot take a step, he sees no path.

*His heart is racing as he is aimlessly pacing,  
Treading the hot sand, voraciously gazing.  
He looks at the sun, intensely blazing  
The hot sand beneath him and he starts chasing.*

*He's chasing the valley, the one that he lost.  
He's going nowhere, he feels like a ghost  
He pushes his limits, he's going beyond.  
He's looking for hope but none to be found.*

*Reality or a trick of the light,  
He sees an oasis, clearly in sight  
He moves forward, he will not falter.  
A quick glance around, and he sees water.*

There are many animals drinking there and some of them look oddly familiar to him – they are lions. As he approaches, they become aware of his presence and give him an acknowledging look. He can see no malice in their eyes, only acceptance. The lion continued walking inside the oasis. Halfway there, with cool moss beneath his paws, he feels compelled to take one last look backwards.

The desert was gone as suddenly as it had appeared. In his heart he understood. He was home.

## **Fluttering (Com un aleteig)**

By Bàrbara

Autumn was knocking on the door. The heat that year didn't want to vanish, how egotistical. It was already the 18th of September, yet the agony and the sweaty bodies were testing their limit. Wishes for freshness and harmony were in people's gazes.

Would it never end?

All of a sudden, in the blink of an eye, a piercing rumble is heard as greyness spreads throughout the sky. April closed her eyes and felt the first drop on her skin.

No, no — she muttered to herself. Not now — she echoed.

The khaki dress she was wearing was ruined. Her face, smeared.

She had to get to the party, and it was getting late.

Her flushed cheeks clearly exposed her embarrassment and self-consciousness. But no one among those present paid any attention to her attire, but rather to the aroma that impregnated it and its announcement of the arrival of a new season.

## no. 3 a vivid dream

By Kristiina

Do you give or are you willing to receive as well?

Warm, salty tears are pouring from her eyes when she is walking towards the unknown. In her heart she knows that change is good, it is a necessity. "Who will guide you in this blinded journey?" Tiptoeing towards the darkness a bright flash passes her eyes. Pain hits her hard. Sharp, like a knife in the hands of the butcher who is slaughtering the pig. Blood starts tripping from the parts where the needles were pushed.

Trip. trip. Trip.

Numbing pain is covering her body. Numbness is taking the fear, as well the sadness and happiness to its embrace. In it is a silent scream – "i need help", as she is falling into a blackening oblivion.

Awakened by a soft bubbly noise, she slowly opens her eyes. From a slight turn from the head, she notices a thick bordeo coloured liquid sticking in the hair. "I must have been hit.."she thinks to herself with a soft whisper from the lips which is as dry as a desert. From the movement of the fingertips she starts pulling the hair. A crack. Her scalp, core skin is in an echoing pain. From the corner of the eye she sees a wand, covered with a bordeo. With a force she grasps the magic wand into her hand. Slow-motionly she drops it on the floor again, part of it still in the palm. Liquid on it is sticky and warm. Pulling the head slowly up while pushing the hand she sees it broken.

Is it still there?

The magic.

Yes.

Magic!



Her eyes are wide open now.

Magic.

Bubbly noise in her head gets louder and louder. Leaving it unnoticed she observes the wand. Rapid thoughts are rushing through the mind as a realization arises – the empowerment.

Unnoticed.

Up on her feet she is holding the broken magic wand. It is not broken.

Broken

Magic.

Magic is never broken. Instead of one, there are two. The power lies within it.

Let it go.

Let. It. Go.

Could you just shut up?

Crickets are jumping between the dry hay making the sound of a cookie package opening. Have they had any? At all I mean.

A boy with a dog passed by, half-running from the pull of the leash. Cookie grumble was falling from his tiny hands. One of them was able to reach it. But with an instant, drop it on the dry hay. An alien. Sweet alien with chocolate cover. This is too much.

A flock of birds were passing the land. On their way to their winter homes, with new-born babies. Each of them some inches away from the other in order to give the strength for going further. The triangle. United. United power. One of the baby-birds is always behind from the others - the vulnerable one. On the way to the journey, they started from the oasis, full of flourishment from nature. A Sweden-buffet as they call it as food was everywhere, full of nutrition. Take as much as you need, but always leave for the others as well. You know?

And he is back – the boy with cookie crumbs and a dog with him.  
Embrace.

A sniff.

A kind face with cracking knuckles. Approaching the jumping crickets.

*It is not an ordinary world at all. There lyes peace. Fulfilment.  
Echoes from the minds. Unity. Support and love. Yes. LOVE.*

The one who left behind needed to reach it. Nourishment. Without hesitation it separated from the flock “i have the tools within me, I must not forget that. Ever. never. Never-ever.” wings flashing towards the air, it lost one what was broken from the attack. Air pulled it down as the feather from its wings passed to her mother. Not looking. She knew that this was the time.

Fly on. Fly on flock of birds. Maybe one day I will fly next to you.

Bubbling in her head arouses. This time not unnoticed. Louder. Symphonic loudness, echo from the bubble as it is hitting the other one. A volcano? Bubble bath? Boiled water for the afternoon tea?

Billions of thoughts rushing the head. Electric movement starts shaking her belly as the backbone shivers. Dynamic movement from the loud bubbling is definitely not left unnoticed anymore.

I am

I am not

I am not okei

I mustn't do this alone.

Awakening from the wakening she sees the tubes running over her eyes and breast. An open wound underneath it. White, bright, almost blinding light reflects from the wall with a sign on it –

Patient no. 2820.

## A book that travels

By Anna

On a bus stop, in front of a noise crossroad, at the entrance of the city. There it is. A small book with a dull brown cover. It is not one of the glossy ones, with fancy font and impressive title. Actually, it can be left unnoticed, until someone decides to take it in their hands and feel the really smooth cover, made from used velvet, and the strong paper of the 31 pages.

During this bookcrossing procedure, the book had met several kinds of readers who had evaluated its content in different ways. If you notice carefully, you can spot tiny marks from each one of them. Some scratches on the velvet from that time that someone has forgotten it in a camping place, underlined phrases with yellow marker from this guy that read it at the first time or some drawings in the blank spot from the girl that was bored among her classmates and was longing to go back home and dive into a novel.

The book has been waiting for months at that bus stop but now, this lady holding from the hand a little girl, has noticed it and decides to take it. For sure to fix it! Or maybe to throw it away in the garbage. Afterall, this book has never understood why it was chosen by the people. Among its worn-out pages there are not only successful stories. There are also failures, insecurities, anxiety, and disorientation. Was there any chance to be a bestseller in this fake culture of happiness?

The city noises are fading. They are traveling to the countryside. They have arrived home. The lady opens her bag and touches the velvet cover. It's the time...

"Darling, keep it carefully to the library", the lady is heard to say to her daughter.

"Finally! I was looking all over for this edition!"

## Naive self-destruction

By Alfonso

We were lost. Twenty-something-year-old kids choosing what most people seemed to look for; a loving relationship not knowing how to love.

We probably cared for each other genuinely at some point, with a blurry line separating compassion and denial, between the moral reward for helping a broken person and the cowardice of fleeing from our own personal struggles. As a tacit pact, we never made love, we fucked just for sport, looking for a cheap burst of dopamine, linking happiness to exhaustion and the shooting of my seed onto her chest and forgetting our unhealthy lives, fucking just for sport disguised as romance.

With a guy stuck in a comfortable depression and a girl in love with her romanticized death fantasies, an understanding was made about the mutual use of our bodies, forming a relationship marked by frivolous passion and fluids; blood, tears, humid blankets. We wanted each other, and nothing or no one was above the significance of that theatrical drama our time together meant gave to our lives when going to the other's house in the middle of the night after a big, long stupid telephone fight.

After one orgasmic afternoon that wasn't particularly fulfilling for either of us, as I laid with her on her mattress, her home for months, I started to think about my frustration and resentment, about her, about our fucking laziness and fear to change. But then something distracted me from what was my usual train of thought.

The room was full of a dense and humid air, it wasn't ventilated while we smoked, fucked, and screamed at each other for three days, and the touch of the wet pillows made me realize we conquered the

space, and that nothing separated us at that moment. We were our own context, we shared the creation of it, and for the first time I tried to really see her; her strong back and legs, her scars, her shiny skin from the sweat.

We were our own chosen poison, picked harshly and without much thought, but as I laid closer, I smelled her, and for a while, I found peace under the smelly armpit of Corvine.

## **A glimpse of serenity**

By Alex

It was a calm summer day, her beautiful, wavy hair was being stroked by the wind's gentle touch. The sun was caressing her soft skin with light and warmth as radiant as her big heart. Her silky dress matched the color of her mesmerizing eyes. A prolonged glance at them and I could feel sparks.

They start in the mind and begin to slowly expand. Once they touch the heart, they become part of it.

I dare to wonder if I will ever see her again. A jarring pause and it becomes inconsequential. Some moments are timeless. They have no past as they have no future. In their beauty, they can be both an ending and a beginning.

They are fragile, they are unique, they are intense.  
They are perfect.

## Reflection about an ordinary day

By Fiammetta

Hi, my name is Gian. If I'm talking with you, it's probably because I'm bored. I spend most of the day observing and thinking how stupid life is. My favourite place is the armchair but, if it is busy, also the sofa is fine. I've a house big enough but I always stay in the living room because there is a huge window from where I can see outside. My house overlooks a tree-lined street. There, it is often very busy, but for me it's like a concert. When I'm not abhorred with something, or I am not ignoring someone I enjoy watching the colours of the traffic lights or different transports. I can also enjoy the music from other apartments or from the street.

Wait! Shhh! What is this sound? Ah, nothing. Only the doorbell. What was I saying? Ah yes, I live in this flat, but my biggest wish is to escape. One time I almost did that, but my guardians caught me in the nick of time. Damn jailers and their rules. They are always around me. If I disappear, they immediately start to look for me unless they find me. My only moments of relaxation are when they go out or when they pretend to be dead. But in those moments the revenge comes for me, and I attack their face or their feet. In order to not make me bored, they give me tools to spend time with. Waste of time stupid idiots!!

Yeah, maybe I'm a little snob but I think that the people in the house can only love and idolize me. Even if they keep me under house arrest, they always want me to forgive them for it. They often offer useless objects that get me bored immediately. The same thing happens with food. I love to throw up all that mush they feed me with. And right after to ask for some fresh food. When they become crazy it's the best part of the day. It's also funny to destroy my littler and watch them while they clean up the disaster, swearing silently.

Uhm, what else can I tell you? Mhh, boh. I'll think during a nap.  
Zzz...

What? Another noise? Is this a voice? Oh yes, it's the voice of my owner. I forgot to say one thing. I have a moustache and I'm hairy. Yep, I'm an Italian cat. Sometime a prisoner, some other the king of the house. I love chicken. For this reason, my entire name is Gian Pollo.

**BYE BYE LOSER!!!**

*Chicken: pollo*



*drawing made for the Fiammetta's story by Valentyna*

# Paper Hearts

By David

Up in the sky the silent ivory moon stood tall and stoic, casting its mysterious light over the sea's merry waves which were ceaselessly racing back and forth, gently eroding the shore with their endless hunger. The fine sand had lost its caramel tint that it had during the day and now glimmered like silvery ghosts in the night. There, on the crystalline carpet, they lay embraced in an embrace that comforts you and carries you to a place where everything is beautiful and, for a moment or two, nothing is hurt. Their paper hearts crumpled up with each heartbeat and, with the next one, they'd straighten back as if in a dance whose music was faintly heard and whose rhythm played in a six by eight-time signature. Their paper hands kept each other warm in the brisk sea air. They lay on their backs now and, with weary eyes, she looked up at the midnight blue expanse that sprawled unbothered and forever. Her roseate lips parted as if wanting to say something, but the words stumbled before she spoke. She turned her lithe body towards him and brushed away a few strands of her wheat-coloured hair that tickled her nose and then she tittered her crystalline laugh. Her eyes met his and they stood like that, looking at each other, thinking about nothing and feeling everything. As if guided by an unseen and unknown force, their lips touched together, and both spoke in unison a language unheard but felt. An albatross flew lazily above the sea and dipped its beak into the salty water.



# Happy Dwarf

By Vojta

"Walk through me," the Dwarf smiled at them.

Martin tilted his head to the side; he looked a bit like a dog. David raised fists. And Anna rubbed her big blue eyes with her small fists. She snorted, cleaned the noodle with her palm, and wiped it in a flowered skirt. Then she lifted her eyes again to the large, porcelain dwarf with a lovely plump face spread into a wide smile. There was something peculiar about him, though she couldn't say what.

"Come on, don't cry," Dwarf told her. He had a melodious, deep voice.

He had appeared suddenly on an old playground with broken benches, a ragged carousel, broken swings, and had pushed all things to the side until the ground looked like a rugged carpet. There was a big hole in his body. Tunnel. "Just walk through me," he told them, "and you'll be happy forever." And they wanted to be happy, Martin, Anna, and David.

"I'll go," David decided.

"It looks odd to me," Martin hesitated.

"Oh, come on." The porcelain Dwarf couldn't move, but if he could, he would have waved his hand now. "So you will walk through me. What could possibly happen to you?"

"If nothing is going to happen, why would I walk through you?" Martin answered.

"Don't tell me you are afraid," the Dwarf laughed. As he spoke, his lower jaw dropped down as if he would be a robot toy.

"Yeah, no reason to be afraid," David added. "Just walking through, that is all it takes."

"But why would I do that?" Martin said. "Why does he insist on it so much? It is suspicious."

"I don't insist," said the Dwarf. "I just want to help you. I see how sad you are. Just walk through me – and you'll be happy forever."

"How is that possible?" Martin asked.

"Magic," the Dwarf smiled.

"I'll go through," David stomped for courage. He hunched, stuck his chin out, and stepped forward with hands frantically waving around.

Martin and Anna watched him intently.

Just before the Dwarf, David hesitated. He stopped and looked up; The dwarf towered in front of him like an elephant. His smile resembled the smile of a skull – eternal and unchanging. And the tunnel in Dwarf's belly... even though one could walk through in eight steps, and there were branches from the other side of the park bending down at the end of it... it seems the tunnel is swallowing the light and narrowing into an infinite black hole.

David staggered... and at that moment, the darkness of the tunnel shone with the pink colours of the spring gardens full of roses without thorns, in which the glasses of lemonade are still full, the bowls overflow with sweets, the sun never sets down, and no one has to go to school. David whooped enthusiastically and threw himself inside.

Martin grabbed Anna's hand and the girl raised her head in surprise. She looked at the boy, but Martin's eyes were glued to David; he didn't even realize what he was doing.

David entered the Dwarf and started to laugh. Two, three, four... five steps. The laughter was getting louder and louder. Then David started to dance. The grumpy boy with more strength than wits was gone, but the new David was leaping into the air as if he were catching butterflies!

"So," the Dwarf said, "have you ever seen your friend like that?"

"E-e," Anna shook her head.

"Has he ever been so happy?"

"No, he wasn't!" Anna admitted.

"And do you want to be so happy as well?"

"Yes!" Anna shouted. "Yes, yes, I want to!" She ran forward, then realized that Martin was still holding her.

"Wait," he tried to stop her.

"Why?"

Martin thought hard but couldn't come up with anything reasonable.

"We don't know him!" he pointed at the Dwarf.

"So what?" Anna twitched out in anger, stood up against Martin, and stomped. "Stop busting!"

Martin froze. He let go and withdrew, deeply hurt. Anna grunted. She stomped again and then turned to the Dwarf. The tunnel frightened her a little, so she closed her eyes and ran.

Martin watched as she stopped in the middle of the tunnel, lowered her arms, gazed around in amazement... and started to laugh. She looked happy.

"Do you see them?" the Dwarf said. "See how beautiful they are?"

Martin was watching. Anna just reached David at the other end of the tunnel, grabbed his hands and they started spinning together.

"What are you still afraid of?" the Dwarf asked. He sounded a little bit offended. "I want nothing but help you."

"Why?" Martin didn't understand.

"Because I see how unhappy you are. Don't you have enough? Of others not understanding you? Of their orders? Of not ever being good enough, pretty enough, strong enough, smart enough? Of being constantly alone? Just walk through me – and none of it will ever bother you again. "

"Why are you doing this for us?" Martin hoarse.

"Because we should be helping each other," the Dwarf replied.

Martin stepped forward. He saw his friends dancing on the other side of the tunnel. Slowly, step by step, he was approaching the darkness. The dwarf stared at him and smiled – and even though the smile was carved into a still face, to Martin it seemed to be wider and wider. And darkness, it was deeper and blacker...

When Martin was just a few steps from the Dwarf, the darkness bloomed with colors. It blossomed into a garden with green grass, a carpet of roses, tulips, daisies. All its trees were easy to climb, and swings with padded seats hung from them. There were carousels and slides spread around, the kittens wobbled in the grass, and tables were loaded with bowls of candies. Martin gasped. It was beautiful!

David and Anna finally stopped spinning. They sat down to one bowl of sweets and began to stuff into their mouths full palms of candies.

"Come on... join them," the Dwarf spurred.

Martin stopped. "They'll have a toothache," he whispered.

"What?" The Dwarf didn't understand.

Martin lifted his voice. "I said they will have a toothache."

"So what?"

"What do you mean 'so what?' I had a toothache once. It was awful! I couldn't sleep all night because of it until the doctor tore it out. "

"Your teeth won't hurt."

"How come?"

"They won't."

"You're lying!"

"I'm not lying. Go and try it."

"Why would I go there? I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"Look at the swings. They have pillows or something."

"So what? Who would want to sit on a hard swing?"

"I would. It feels better. And what about the roses?"

"What's with the roses again?"

"They have no thorns!"

"It doesn't matter!"

"Yes, it does. What is a rose without thorns?"

"Well, better roses, of course! It is as pretty, it smells good, and it's no longer dangerous."

"But that's not right. Roses should have thorns. They belong to them!"

"Not if you don't want to be stabbed," Dwarf replied, but Martin ignored him. He watched Anna, who had stopped stuffing herself, and looked toward the sky. She forgot to close her mouth; great dirty saliva ran down her lips.

"These are no roses at all," Martin whispered. "It's a hoax!"

"They're roses!" Dwarf howled.

"They are not! You're trying to cheat me! You've been persuading me all the time how terribly unhappy I am. But I'm not unhappy! Maybe I'm not always the best! Sometimes my parents scream at me, sometimes my classmates make fun of me. Sometimes someone hits me and someone betrays me. But there are still beautiful things around me. Anna was one of them! Anna was beautiful! Not anymore. You took her away from me..."

In a blink of an eye, the Dwarf transformed. His eyes burst in flames, the skin molded, hands turn to claws, mouth filled with sharp teeth, his whole body twisted, distorted, and shrunk. The Garden of Eden moisturized, the roses changed into twisted tentacles of tubes ending in sharp needles, sunflowers became egress, daisies turned to hair, swings to exposed guts.

Anna stared at it and laughed. David reached to the ground again, pulled a handful of beetles out, and threw them into his mouth instead of sweets. He chewed and looked like a little angel on a cloud.

The sight startled Martin. "What did you do to them ?!" he cried.

"I took the worries away," the Dwarf hissed. "I freed them from pain. I gave them happiness. What's wrong about it?"

"You put them in bigger suffering," Martin retorted. "Pain has its meaning, you know? It is showing us something. The hardships are helping us to grow. There is no development without pain. What did you rob them of? About their eyes? Reason? Senses?"

"I'll get you," the Dwarf hissed instead of answering.

"You won't. You can't move. I'd have to come to you myself – and I'll never do that."

He looked at his friends for the last time and turned to leave.

"Are you leaving them here?" Dwarf yelled at him. "At least I tried to help them!"

Martin stopped. "Neither one of them asked me for help," he replied. "Who doesn't ask for help doesn't want it. I don't want to help anyone who doesn't ask."

Martin looked up and looked at Dwarf's burning eyes:

"Neither fairy-tale granny gives you three wishes unless you give her a cake first. Until she sees you're worth it."

# The Monster

By Ionuț

A long time ago, in Transylvania there was a werewolf family that over the years had learned to master the werewolf instincts. The werewolf family lived in peace with other people, but one day a hunter heard a rumour that there were werewolves in the depths of the woods.

The hunter had searched the area and set traps to see if the rumour he had heard was real, so he waited to catch werewolves. At midnight, when the hunter thought the rumour was false, the werewolf's family appeared.

Werewolves had realized that someone was there, but it was too late because their son had stepped on a trap. Parents tried to save their child, but this led to their death – the hunter killed them once he saw them, but the child had escaped. The child had gathered, crying that his parents were killed in front of him. The little werewolf was traumatized, and he promised to himself to find that hunter and take his revenge.

Years had passed and the little werewolf had grown up, but because of the trauma he had suffered as a child, he had started eating people. Even though he knew that what he was doing was not good, he was no longer interested if people were suffering. Not to be suspected, the werewolf had begun to behave like a man. In the meantime, he had met a girl, they had fallen in love with each other. He did not know that the girl he loved was in fact the hunter's daughter.

One day the girl had offered to go to her house. The werewolf had suddenly seen the hunter who had killed his parents – to not seem suspicious, he had behaved normally, as if it was the first time he



saw the man. After the werewolf spent a lot of time with the girl and her father, he realized that he didn't want revenge anymore. Unfortunately, that didn't last long because the werewolf showed to the girl that he was a werewolf and she was afraid of him, saying "If I knew you were a werewolf, I would have killed you immediately because you monsters don't deserve to live."

At that moment, he could not control himself and killed her. Even though he loved her, he told himself that he must not care about people at all. The girl's father had found out what had happened. Traumatized by the fact that his daughter had died, he went hunting and searching for the beast but the werewolf had been ready for this day for a long time.

When the hunter finally saw him, it was already too late because the werewolf had caught him in the trap. The werewolf told him with tears in his eyes, "A long time ago, you killed two werewolves in this forest and those werewolves were my parents. Now it's time to pay."

Then the werewolf had killed him without blinking. From that moment on, his human part had disappeared. After killing the hunter, he went elsewhere killing people because hatred of people had become commonplace for him.

# Ways of the fate

By Fiammetta

At the time of the Roman Empire in the North of the Italian peninsula, called Gallia Cisalpina by Romans, there was a little village. Close to Cortemilia, a Roman camp, between green hills covered with woods, paths and some lakes, a group of Gauls had built houses and lived raising sheep and growing fields. Every morning, a fresh wind flowed by the West while the sun was waking up the village.

There lived a father, Othan, with his three daughters. Kalua was the eldest. She had mixed blond and red hair, always braided and freckles. She was tall and loved to run and to hunt. With her sisters, they shared a piebald brown and caramel horse. Taxalin, the second daughter, was blonde and tiny. She loved to sew and to cook. She also had a large knowledge about plants and their benefits. Aua, who was only six years old, was the youngest girl. Like her father, she had dark blond hair. She spent all her time with him, a shepherd, because her sisters had to care about the house after the death of their mother the preceding winter. Without the mother, who helped with fields, food was scarce.

Apart from that, every year the Roman Army claimed a tax from each village around Cortemilia. If someone couldn't pay, one son or daughter was sold as a slave. After the death of his wife, Othan was terrified from the first day, that was the first day of Spring. He feared that they would soon take one of his girls. So he gave the order that they don't go out to the house if the thing to do wasn't crucial. Taxalin one day persisted in asking her father to go to the market. She needed plants that she didn't find in the wood. At the end the girl managed to convince him. At the same time Kalua was out hunting. The previous night, it was raining so wild animals went around into the forest more quietly. Nobody went into the woods after a storm because there was too much mud.

The day passed peacefully but, at the beginning of the evening, when Taxalin was the only one who didn't come back, the family started to worry. After a lot of time looking for her, Othan discovered that, while she was wandering around the market, a young Roman kidnapped her. Caio Lucio Antonio, an insolent and snob soldier, had noticed the girl and had decided to take her to his tent in Cortemilia. Othan almost died of fright. His first thought was to attack the Roman camp and to have his beloved daughter. Luckily Kalua was able to convince him to do everything with a smart action plan.

Kalua spent some nights studying how the men of the village could enter the Roman camp. During this time she discovered that her sister had given herself to the general to save her life. The Roman soldiers when they were drunk loved to speak, or better, to yell so she could catch news easily. Back home it was hard for two reasons. Kalua wouldn't have wanted to leave the sister alone, even if she knew she was very smart. She knew Taxalin'd stayed alive until the attack of the Ghouls. Furthermore while she was coming back to the village, she met a Roman's flap. Luckily she managed to hide in a bush just in time.

The night of the attack was hot and peaceful, too peaceful. Kalua, who was staying at home with Aua, wasn't calm. In the air she felt a weird presentiment. She tried to convince the dad not to go but anybody could block Othan's anger and will of revenge. That night was the longest of Kalua's life. She couldn't sleep. More hours passed and the father didn't come back, more she accepted the idea of his death. But she didn't have time to waste crying over him. Now she was the boss of the family, or what remained of it.

When the sun rose the first thing to do was to hide Aua in a far wood with other children, old people and women who wanted to escape. Soon Romans would come to punish the survivors for the attack. While Kalua helped her people to run away into the woods, Romans caught her. She became Claudio Elvio Giulio's bait. He got the order to burn the village, to build a temple to Mars, the god of war at the

place of the rubble, to spread salt over the fields as a warning to the other barbarian villages around Cortemilia and make everybody left slave. At the same time, he had kind and polite manners with the people.

Kalua's only thought, now that she knew Aua was safe, was to discover if Taxalin was alive.

Aua saw from the woods that the village was on fire. At the Roman camp, Kalua became a slave but could stay with her sister. This was a good reason for the Gauls and, most of all, for little Aua to look for a future revenge. In fact, just before the Druid saved her, she swore revenge for her family and her people.



## ... just a little magic

By Lucie & Bàrbara

*This story was created on the basis of drawing random cards with the use of the hero's journey technique by two young promising women from the Czech Republic and Mallorca.*

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful young girl named Flora. As a matter of fact, she was not an ordinary girl at all. Her family has long been one of the most powerful clans of magicians in the whole universe. In course of the time, magicians were forced to hide their powers, so the true origin of her family became a hidden secret for safety reasons and even Flora had no clue about it.

When she turned eighteen, she was already fed up with a boring life in a small village in the English countryside, so she decided to move to the capital and experience her own 'big city life'. Plus, she has always seen herself in the shiny red-carpet lights because she's had a dream of becoming a world-famous actress since early childhood (you know, that *kinda-Jennifer-Aniston* style), and where else to try to pursue the career than in London? At first it didn't go as smoothly as she imagined, but after 2 months, 3 days and 12 hours of intense effort, she got the opportunity for her first role in '*Magic Moments*' film studio.

When the fateful day came, Flora spent several hours preparing for her life-changing moment and went to the studio, full of excitement and anticipation. What was her surprise when she couldn't find a living thing even after almost an hour of searching all the premises. Suddenly, she saw someone standing directly below the stage in the main hall, near the video camera no. 2. He was tall, with light hair and skin, mysterious eyes, and perfect teeth – the type of dangerous guy that every girl is falling for. He didn't give a sh\*t about her, cause that's what the *I-wanna-be-so-cool guys* do.

Hard life in the countryside made Flora a brave independent girl though, so she didn't hesitate and approached him. Although he seemed a little withdrawn at first, they understood each other very well and basically could not tear themselves apart. No wonder – Flora was very charming cause she was a *fairy-one*, you remember.

Long story short, they fell in love with each other after some time. And as is the case with today's youth, they soon wanted to continue to the next step, when he invited her to visit his home. Well, she was a bit surprised that he has not been living in some house in the suburbs, but on a freaking tree which, moreover, was freely levitating in the air (*what the actual f...*). On the other hand, the whole situation reminded her of her favourite childhood tale, and in the intoxication of these Tarzan vibes, she decided to spend the whole night with her chosen one.

However, our male hero without a name had completely different intentions. I will not keep you in suspense – the breaking news are, that he was actually not light-skinned but transparent, because (eureka!) he was a ghost of a dead director who just loved movies and appeared from time to time in cinemas and film studios. He was attracted to her not because of her appearance, but because of her royal magic roots. They met by chance, because always-clumsy Flora confused the date and time of the audition, but as soon as he saw true powers in her, he wanted to bring her back to magic.

In the end of that night, she did receive a stick (*not the one she expected tho, lol*), but the one that allowed her to practice witchcraft. Eventually, she could use the new magic wand in her private life for other purposes as well (*if you know what I mean*), so everyone was satisfied and happy. Flora and the ghost remained in contact purely on a friendly level. And the ending? Magic is inside of you all if you have the right tools.

## A ti, que me diste tanto

By Vicky

Querido Bergolo,  
He vuelto y hay algo distinto en ti, en tu olor, en tus caminos, en tu luz...

¿Qué estás planeando?

Desde hace un tiempo veo una manta que te tapa y que protege los pedazos de los artistas que viven aquí, tus huéspedes más salvajes se han ido a descansar un tiempo y mi niña interior ha salido a jugar. Ahora te cubren los copos, pero hace poco te habías teñido de colores cálidos y poco a poco te desnudaste por completo frente a mi. Parecías vulnerable, sobre todo porque cuando te conocí eras del color del sol y cada fin de semana me cantabas algo distinto a través del sonido de las piedras.

Has sido coqueto conmigo y me has dejado ver como te sonrojabas, incluso me has mostrado tu corazón alpino desde la ventana del sitio al que ahora llamo hogar. Y yo sé que te ha costado enseñarme como eres, me dijeron que durante el otoño te volvías tímido y no podrías verte, pero no ha sido así, me has regalado los rayos de sol más brillantes. Aunque he de admitir que a veces no te entiendo, espero que te hayas divertido enviándome todos esos seres voladores a la habitación.

Tus senderos llevan a Roma, a un lugar de fantasía en el que ha ocurrido la sinergia más bonita entre tú y yo, en un momento en el que la vida está patas arriba. Aquí el tiempo se ha parado y la ola de la que todo el mundo habla parece que no llegará nunca.

El resto quedará en nuestra mente y ya está.

Hasta siempre Bergolo.

Con amor,

Vicky

# Our tables

By Bea

The tables were empty. Day by day we filled them with all our stuff. Stuff that represented people, people living together, quite intensely.

A cracked boiled egg, a mask with spilled coffee on it, notebooks, tobacco with the same old sentences we all know but some in languages we couldn't read.

The first days it was easy to clean those two tables, to keep them empty. But it soon became an impossible task. We were all over the place.

A paper airplane, a magnetic pocket chess set, lots of cups filled with coffee in the morning and with wet tea bags at night.

A Rubik cube that sometimes was done and sometimes not, sometimes it was missing a piece and one day all the pieces fell apart, turning it into a puzzle that someone managed to put back together.

We were all over the place and so were our feelings, our thoughts, our pens, our activities of the day. The table had flowers the day we were walking in nature or a green soft ball on the days that someone had gotten enough sleep.

A collection of very original ashtrays: a melted chocolate bar, a bag of chips, an empty ice-cream jar, a glass bottle, a bitten apple in a piece of paper.

The chaos of 30 people on top of two tables. A chaos sometimes unified by a guitar that came and went.



Things got lost on those tables and reappeared without even moving. Who has seen my notebook? Who took my rolling papers? In the morning it was cold, but it soon got warm and under our hoodies could be hidden all sorts of belongings.

A red bucket, a knife, a fanny pack, lip-balm that became a loyal companion for some not drinking enough water or talking too much.

A way too big and way too heavy alarm clock, that ticked way too loudly and that with every tic made the tables become more ours. More us.

We left those two tables in the dark, like we met them the first day. We didn't sleep that last night and we left our pillows and bed sheets on the tables. Maybe they could use them to finally get some rest, because holding the intensity of the week we lived sure isn't easy.

## **můj životní fet'o-fetiš**

By Lucie

Poslední kruháč, zatočit doleva a jsem tady. Nemůžu uvěřit, že se sem zas tak moc těším, když ve výsledku jediný, co fakt pocítím, je o tisícovku lehčí konto.

Adrenalin se mi dere až do morku kostí, takže si raději i nahlas opakuji: neutrál, ručka, vypnout motor... tohle fakt nezkaž tyvole, nechceš tu zakládat táboráky nebo vypalovat vesnice.

Otvírám dveře, беру do ruky hadici (až po několikátý kontrole, že to vážně není nafta – *že s tím furt tolik nadělej a ve 21. století konečně nevymyslej motor, kterému je jedno, co žere, ne?*),

odšpuntuju kanystr, takže je vše připraveno a silně mačkám spoušť, abych uvedla tohle veledílo do procesu.

Uf, nic se nezměnilo.

Najednou se vzduchem začíná linout opojná vůně.

Jak něco tak moc chemického může připomínat dětství?

~

No, to nevím, každopádně se propadám časem a před očima vidím samu sebe, zapásanou v dětské autosedačce, s džusíkem s malou mořskou vílou v jedné ruce a bárbínou v druhé.

Jedeme asi z výletu v ZOO nebo od milovaných příbuzných ze severu Čech nebo, v nejhorším případě, od zubaře.

Zastavujeme zase na tomhle místě, které může na první pohled vypadat dost stroze a nepřátelsky, ale já už mám v očích čertíky. Mamka ztišuje rádio, táta vystupuje a já už skoro automaticky otvírám zadní dveře a okna co to jde.

A je to tady. *B E N Z Í N*.

„Ježíš, Luci, zavři. Vždyť to je puch, to je hrozný!“ Mamka natahuje k salvě nadávek, ale stačí krátký pohled na moje malý šťastný chemický já a rozesměje se.

„Ty seš vážně malej fetišek. Po kom tohle můžeš mít?“

*English version “it’s a kind of fetish” available online*

## Εκείνη

By Eleni

Η Κατερίνα είχε τα πιο όμορφα μάτια που είχα δει ποτέ, μια γαλαζοπράσινη λίμνη που μέσα της χανόμουν και γαλήνευα. Ακόμη και όταν τα έκρυβε πίσω από μαύρα γυαλιά ηλίου, ήξερα ότι ήταν εκεί και αναζητούσαν τα δικά μου. Επικοινωνούσαμε με τα μάτια μας. Ήταν μέρες που γελούσε σαν μικρό κορίτσι που της έδωσαν παγωτό, αλλά ήταν και μέρες που κλεινόταν στον εαυτό της και προσπαθούσε να κρύψει το μελανιασμένο της πρόσωπο και να περπατήσει χωρίς να δείχνει τον πόνο της. Εκείνες τις μέρες την έπαιρνα στην αγκαλιά μου και ένιωθα τις καυτές σταγόνες των ματιών της να βρέχουν τον ώμο μου. Δεν τη ρωτούσα τίποτα. Είχα σταματήσει εδώ και μήνες να προσπαθώ να την πείσω να φύγει. Είχε πάρει την απόφαση να μείνει για τα παιδιά της. Έμενα δίπλα της, την άκουγα όταν ήταν έτοιμη να μιλήσει ` αυτό ήταν που χρειαζόταν και αυτό της έδινα. Ποτέ δε μου ζήτησε κάτι παραπάνω.

Τον τελευταίο καιρό το σώμα της είχε γίνει ένας χάρτης πόνου με μελανιασμένες πεδιάδες και κόκκινα ποτάμια που όλο και πληθύναν. Οι γωνίες του χαμόγελού της χαλάρωσαν, ώσπου εξαφανίστηκαν εντελώς. Το βήμα της βαρύ, έσερνε το αβάσταχτο φορτίο που μόνο αυτή ήξερε. Μου ζήτησαν να αναλάβω τις υποθέσεις της για δύο μέρες, πήρε άδεια μου είπαν, για ποιο λόγο τους ρώτησα, να μη με ενδιαφέρει μου απάντησαν.

Είχαν περάσει τρεις μέρες χωρίς να τη δω και το μυαλό μου κυριεύτηκε από χιλιάδες σενάρια του τι μπορούσε να είχε συμβεί. Εκείνο το βράδυ, το τρίτο χωρίς φεγγάρι στον ουρανό, τα πόδια μου με οδήγησαν στο σπίτι της. Έπρεπε να τη δω, να δω τα μάτια της, να μου πουν ότι είναι καλά. Βρήκα την πόρτα ανοιχτή, την έσπρωξα ελαφρά και μπήκα ήσυχα μέσα. Εκείνος καθόταν στο πάτωμα δίπλα στον καναπέ, στηριζόταν στον τοίχο και με τα χέρια του έκρυβε το πρόσωπό του. Η βέρα στο δεξί του χέρι φώτιζε,

αντανακλώντας το φως από ένα πεσμένο φωτιστικό. Το σώμα της ακίνητο στο χαλί, ο λαιμός της μελανιασμένος, τα χέρια της ακανόνιστα πεσμένα εγκατέλειψαν τη μάχη. Τα μάτια της χωρίς τη μοναδική τους λάμψη, ήταν η τελευταία φορά που τα είδα.

Η Κατερίνα είχε τα πιο όμορφα μάτια, μια γαλαζοπράσινη λίμνη που έχει πια στερέψει.

*English version "She" available online*

## **A dream**

By Vicky

Millions of years ago, there was a sleeping dream. It was a huge one, always in silence, always resting, always observing. Waiting for a sparkle to light up it's path. This dream felt comfy surrounded by the darkness, that state, that place, was simply home.

One day, a thought went for a visit to the wandering mind and found the dream, an old friend. The thought was confused and asked, "what happened to you?" But the dream didn't answer.

"Hey, I'm talking to you". And again, no answer. And so the thought decided to touch the dream and with a disturbing movement, the dream, after so long, woke up. "Oh, dear thought, it's been a long time, how are you?"

Then the thought looked at the dream with a strange face and replied: "I am good, but what happened to you? There is no light in you anymore, and when I touched you before, you were freezing!"

"Oh dear," answered the dream, "I am waiting for a sparkle to light up my path".

The thought couldn't believe what the dream was saying. "But dream, you used to light up the whole wandering mind. If it's not you brighting it, then who?"

And the dream, for the first time in a long time, felt lost. Before the dream could reply, the thought asked again: "If you wait for the light from the outside, you will always be like now."

And the dream was even more confused. "So then, what can I do? Thought, I need your help."

The thought looked around and after some time it said "I am not sure I have the answer, but maybe, if you start walking around, you'll find the path"

"But it's so dark!" replied the dream.

"Dear friend, I trust you can do this, if you are lost it means that you found yourself and that you can continue."

And for the first time in a long time, the thought felt like a ticklish movement inside of itself and PUM, a little sparkle lighted up inside.

"You see? You already have it."

# Time

By Simão

*To all of the people I will always be sharing time with, but not (anymore) space. I wish you well.*

Time won't stop for anyone. Not for me, not for you; and while time is relative, its role in destiny is absolute. Mountains will remain still for years to come. They will experience the passing of successive generations, each of which having spent, in our own perception, a long time – a lifetime, we call it – on Earth.

As humans, we tried to control it through intricate instruments as to try and play God. A clock will obey the absolute laws of time while still, as a man-made object, respond to our impulses. If we try and go back four hours on it, we can, and it will have the same effect if we try to put it four hours ahead. Time will not budge, as we can't relive the past or predict the future. All we have is now.

I don't like to change the time on my wristwatch because of that – my own perception of time is whatever I'm living at the moment, my own relative perception; and while I know time is absolute and will eventually catch up, I like its other half. Time being relative, for me, means I get to choose how I deal with it.

If time won't stop, neither will I.

*“O coração não mente, e*

*A mente ouve o coração*

*Mentecapta não é mente pura*

*E não mente somente quem não ouve a razão*

*A razão para tal é simplória:*

*O pizzicato dos ponteiros*

*Que tenho na minha mão”*

# La verdad última

By Nazaret

Te miras al espejo, un día más no eres suficiente. Las horas pasan entre el olor del té y el sonido de las teclas del portátil. Borrando cada poco el rastro de lo que haces, porque lo que haces no vale, no es bueno, no alcanza. Sintiendo que eres un pez en un mundo de pájaros, que te quieren comer y tú solo quieres huir al fondo del mar dónde nunca más te puedan herir.

Pero allí no está tu felicidad ni tu sosiego. Allí en el fondo solo te sientes un pez solitario con miedo a subir a la superficie y que otros peces te vean. Llevas tanto tiempo en las profundidades que no recuerdas tu color, pero tampoco quieres descubrirlo porque sientes, que como siempre, tu apariencia no será suficiente. El mismo mantra se repite día a día y en tu fuero interno sólo tiene cabida la soledad. Entretenida entre el ajeteo de la rutina vas a la deriva en un barco al que no recuerdas haberte subido. Hasta que un día algo te llaman lo alto es un reflejo del sol o quizás sea una luz. Lo cierto es que no lo sabes, pero quieres descubrirlo.

Empiezas a nadar, encuentras en tu camino otros peces que al igual que tú van a la deriva y de pronto sientes que no estás sola, que nunca lo estuviste. Juntos empezáis a mirar vuestros colores algunas partes más bellas que otras y descubres que todos tiene una parte bella, con colores del arcoíris y reflejos. Aun así, sigues vacía, sigues sintiendo que siempre podría ser mejor, que nunca te podrían querer así. No entiendes porque si has subido a la superficie y te has enfrentado a tus miedos aún no has encontrado ese reflejo que viste brillar en lo alto. Algo en tu interior te dice que ese reflejo que viste es la verdad última: una verdad que sana, que te regenera, una verdad que sabes que es verdad porque te traspasa es más grande que tú y más potente que cualquier otra verdad que hayas oído antes. Tras mucho nadar y explorar te das

cuenta de que todo el tiempo estuviste mirando en la dirección equivocada, siempre pensaste que lo tuyo no era suficiente por eso siempre mirabas fuera.

Pero si la verdad que buscas es la verdad última debe estar en cada parte de la existencia, en cada brisa, en cada brizna de hierba y en cada sonrisa. Por lo tanto, también tiene que estar en ti. Empiezas a mirar adentro en ese lugar que siempre ignoraste, pasan los meses y poco a poco te sientes más cerca de encontrar la respuesta, esa que tu corazón anheló por tanto tiempo. Un día cierra los ojos y sientes que el universo finalmente quiere revelarte que después de todo solo hay una cosa cierta: eres válida.

## Remembering light

By Raquel

Once upon a time Light appeared and all the creatures were created. They were alive and happy and animals, water, human, trees, were coexisting together in complete freedom. Lots of years passed in a full sunrise where there was only brightness.

There was a day in which humans decided to be closer, to long together and cities and houses were accommodating them. They lived happily; communication was fluent – they didn't even need words most of the time. Peace was a realm of calm. People enjoyed sharing happily what they got and felt strongly connected to the environment, which was plenty of trees. Their mother tongue was Silence...

Centuries passed and suddenly one day the sun wasn't there anymore. Butterflies, birds and all the animals were so confused. People started to feel afraid of whatever or whoever had taken the eternal light they'd always been seeing filling all the spaces and objects.



So, the fear was born in the heart of humanity, and they tried to protect against each other all their belongings.

People were tired of darkness but at the same time they were reinforcing themselves in defending the things that reminded them of the ancient sun. For example, the painter didn't barely sleep in order to protect his paintings, that gave a calm relief to his heart. There was a jealous gardener picking all the roses to collect a bunch for his bedroom...

Wherever the sun had gone, this fact had surely brought misery in human hearts. The plants were also suffering, and their inner cycle was completely altered.

As much as this happened, the more humans asked themselves how to return light. At the end of the day, it had always been like that until then, so how to make it come back again if no one knew where it had gone?

People slept and ate and played in darkness, but despair was definitely filling their hearts...

Thomas wasn't like that. He was just feeling very focused to find light whatever it cost. People stared at him and doubted his sanity, and he himself was doubting too, but anyway he just dedicated himself to the reading of books about light and astronomy, books from ancestral and modern cultures too.

So light was missing. People lived in complete darkness and nature, even if it was trying to get adapted, was suffering the consequences. Thomas remembered David Hume, the philosopher, who had once said: "What if one day the Sun didn't appear anymore?" Thomas felt sorry Hume was already dead because he surely would have been somehow a source of help or inspiration.

Thomas went for a walk in the lightning starry permanent sky, and he thought about the stars: they were always there, no matter what, but the Sun had totally disappeared. While walking he meditated

about the reason why the other stars remained but not the sun, the most necessary, the most needed for them. He even wondered what if they just let it be like that for ever more...

He lit a candle and felt relief. At least there was some light. But they were so fast consumed...

He just kept on investigating books and did some trials of older experiments of intending to bring the light to the houses.

He asked the people to do one favour to each other on the coming night of New Eve. He was sure that this would somehow change the mood of the people while waiting for him to reach the solution. He had one idea in mind...

Everybody claimed and advised others to follow the instructions of that man who had claimed he was about to bring back the sun. They had nothing to lose, so on the 31st of December the painter was doing an Art Exposition and giveaways of his paintings, and every woman was wearing a rose in sign of Gratitude to Gardeners, who were minding beautiful gardens instead of keeping flowers for themselves. The farmers that had lots of milk and food storage because of darkness and the consequent famine of animals, were now being hosted at neighbours' houses so they would not feel the cold given by their empty stomach. And so, every single person was opening their heart and Giving the best of them.

The ambiance was excellent and Peaceful, and after midnight someone claimed: "Light! There is Light!". Every single person of the area was reunited around Thomas house. An object was shining so bright, and some called it magic. But its name was actually another one: it was a Lightbulb.

For once in life, a revolutionary invention was about to change life in humanity: Thomas Edison had invented the lightbulb. Some hours later people noticed some kind of brightness was appearing in the horizon, a shine was becoming more and more notorious until finally the Sun could be clearly seen again. Some called it a test of God, some called it magic, but a blessing had happened, and peace was finally restored.

# You wish to shine like the Sun

By Elian

*"You wish to shine like the Sun, yet you're afraid to burn."*

It's another cold morning, nothing changed. My body was deeply rooted inside my sweat drenched bed. I got used to waking up with all my limbs in pain, 12 hours of sleep yet I feel like I didn't rest at all. Nightmares of killing myself, but to me they were dreams of sweet relief.

I was addicted to those moments of sleep, it was the only time when I could disconnect from this corrupted reality, this hell we call life. But most of all, they were the only times when this ominous, raspy voice inside my head would shut up. I was intoxicated by its continuous mumbling, I could only make out certain words like "her", "it's your fault", "you deserve this". I don't know who you are, but I didn't do anything wrong. That night I didn't do anything, the drugs calmed me down that night. There's no way I lost control. Just shut the fuck up already, I'm tired of your existence already. Its annoying chatter never stopped, "never forget what you did", "they want you dead, all of them". I was never so close to bashing my skull in just to stop it from speaking to me. What does it even want from me? I didn't do anything wrong.

After 2 hours I finally got up from my bed to go to the bathroom. Silhouettes all around me, this cold breathing on my neck, faces in the walls. I felt like everything wanted to kill me, I should've just let them, I couldn't fight it anymore, I was tired, so tired.

I placed my hand on the cold knob of the door and entered the bathroom, I was mortified. A pool of blood on the floor, the mirror broken and its shards scattered all around the room. As I looked in the little piece of mirror still stuck on the wall, I saw myself covered in scars and fresh wounds, some still bleeding.

- "You still don't remember anything, don't you? "
- "I took my pills last night. I didn't do anything "
- "This is all your fault."
- "I didn't do anything."
- "She's not here anymore, she's gone."

I didn't trust that voice. It was teasing me, maybe it was just the drugs, I probably slipped and hit the mirror, smashing it and getting cut, nothing more. "Everything is okay, it's just some blood, I'll make a coffee, have a smoke and then I'll clean it up. "

I slowly went to the kitchen and turned on the stove to boil some water. That little flame was really warm. As I was staring at it and holding my palms close to it to warm them up I was starting to feel hypnotized. I felt like every inch of my skin was tingling. In that moment the voice stopped, finally calmed down by this weird moment.

I felt so attracted to it, like I was falling in love for the first time again, something felt different this morning. I started to lose control in my body, the fire was moving so gently, dancing in a slow and seductive manner. It was keeping my body warm, I felt loved in that moment. I lit the flame even harder, giving it more gas and making it grow even bigger and stronger. I needed to help it grow, give it a hand, show it my respect and gratitude. I felt teary-eyed, my love was blooming, the one I fell in love with was growing, more gorgeous, even warmer, even more mesmerizing.

It was slowly taking the shape of a woman and as I stared deeper into it, I was seeing her. Her eyes were charcoal black, her hair the colour of crimson roses, her soft warm body and her angelic voice calling for me, telling me she loves me, that she's finally here again.

In that moment I bursted out crying, bawling my eyes out and screaming until my lungs were collapsing, falling on my knees, scratching the wooden floor. Her warmth, her existence, her whole being was everything to me.

At last, I felt safe, my room was feeling warmer and cosier as she grew and was approaching me. As she got close my body was violently shaking, every inch of me was getting hotter. I was aroused, addicted, desperate, alive, happy. As I slowly got up, she pressed her flaming body against mine, slowly caressing my face and kissing me gently. I grabbed her waist and pulled her closer as I pressed my lips against hers, feeling a strong fire inside. I started to finally relax.

Our connection was so strong, it made me feel as if I was burning inside and outside as if my flesh was melting. I held her even tighter as I felt my body decompose. Everything around me turned red and I couldn't see anything besides her. I was finally free. I was complete.

She laid with me on the floor and carefully placed my head on her warm lap. She told me to close my eyes and relax, that she's there with me. My flesh was disintegrating, burning and getting charred, I could see my flesh separating from my bones and my skin boiling, bubbling up as my blood was boiling... She was liberating me of this rotten carcass, setting me free. As I closed my eyes, I felt that my pain was finally over, I was finally saved. She put my head down and cuddled next to me, embracing my entire body. As we went to sleep together, I couldn't breathe anymore nor move anything.

As she was caressing my inanimate body she whispered:  
"You will always be my sun".

# Curry

By Raquel

*Searching for inspiration is stupid, don't search for inspiration. Inspiration flows and gets you, and not the opposite.*

Taking a coffee on the 25th level of a New York city building, I was smelling curry. Lunch was almost ready, and my stomach indicated hunger. I just waited for the curvy girl that didn't know she was beautiful with those lovely eyes, to serve my lunch. Actually, I felt guilty. Why? I don't know. But I would have loved to say it to her: Hey, you are beautiful.

In front of me I saw the carrot, potatoes, meat, and that smell that was heart melting. I just melted and felt as if there was nobody there, there was nothing else but me and my dish. I was afraid to look up because the feeling was so intense.

When I heard that sound it was unavoidable. Arabic flute and a snake were dancing on the other side of the square, it was full of life and the young waiter men were serving the tables.

I was amazed but at the same time calm. That hair... That hair kept me sane because it was familiar, lovely with its dark brown waves. Her arms were strong but still feminine and were carrying a big dish with food. I remained still and suddenly I realized the music was over, no noise. Everyone looking at me and the waiter boys had disappeared.

-Would you like some salt, hun?

I looked up and replied "No", while my heart, my freedom and my dream vanished.

Lunch was ready on the 25th level of an important building somewhere in the city of New York.

# My mind is fucked up

By Simone

Two intense years.

I don't remember such a hard time, from the psychological and mental perspective.

Two years.

Two years in which everything has changed, the smallest things, the biggest ones.

I can tell you about how I was living in peace, my travels, my overdoing's, the walks, the games, the laughing, about the nostalgia. The kisses, the caresses, the goodbyes were getting harder and harder. "It's a habit, sooner or later it's gonna finish".

The confusion, sometimes, brought me to think I was not capable of concluding anything in my private life. Only the job has always been my safe place in which I could place my anxiety, my fears.

At a certain point all changes, so suddenly, without notice, no time to reflect, it is going up to the end. A painful separation, maybe necessary, maybe I will never know that. And then bullshits, and again bullshits. With the hope to solve this missing with something else. But what?

I've never knew what I was facing, I only followed the flow I was passing through, I didn't want to stop myself. In order not to think. "I don't think, and I go forward with what there is, with what I have." I though. And so, I've put myself in complicated situations as it was nothing, believing that was the way.

And I followed it obsessively. I pretend everything goes well, staunch. Until the sudden awakening, a kick on my face so strong I can still feel it right now.

“Why?”

Why is the question I cannot give a proper answer. I did it wrong, or maybe I didn't. Don't know. Again, I go forward on my own way, full of obstacles, finding a big one, deciding to go for it, again I believe in something that could not exist. I hurt me again, I heavily fall, I think I won't stand up anymore.

But I am here, after last fall something has been changed, evolving inside me, giving me new vital lymph. I don't know what.

I'm not sure whether the last periods are happy, or it is what I look for, but certainly those times are finally more soft.

I managed to stop myself. To be able to think about me and myself. I try, I do, I know, I can.

This summer is either tiring or full of news and experiences.

BERGOLO, my arrival point, about the consciousness regarding what I've managed to acquire.

BERGOLO, my departure point for what is going to come. I'm ready to know and recognise the better version of myself.

Sharing, emotivity and empathy – the weapons I always have with me. With an armor that sometimes is hard, indestructible; sometimes very frail.

Every day I wake up, I don't know if it will be strong enough to protect me.

But what I know is that I'm learning to welcome my emotions, to give them a name, to have them on a table, to talk about them, to explore, to LIVE them.



## One year in, keep dreaming and other traumas

By Ella

“Dear, I need to run. Have a great weekend,” usměju se do kamery na mexického kolegu, když v tom se pode mnou země otřese. Ještě než stihne Santi odpovědět, vypadne mi telefon z ruky. “What was that? Are you okay?” Slyším ve sluchátkách, zatímco se pevně držím zábradlí a shýbám se k zemi, abych mobil sebrala. “Yes, I'm alright.” Zároveň mnou ale projede mrazivé uvědomění, které mě vytrhne z virtuálního světa nekonečných pracovních callů do reality toho, odkud to vlastně volám.

Vím, že něco je terribly wrong. Stojím uprostřed aquaparku, zrovna jsem se chystala vystoupat točité schody k jednomu šílenému toboganu. Někdo z mých nejbližších byl v momentě otřesu uvnitř. Rozhlížím se kolem sebe a svírá mě panika. V bazénu na jeho konci vidím plavat Lucčino bezvládné tělo. Mozek mi jede na plné obrátky a zcela chladnokrevně kalkuluje mé další kroky. Na druhé straně areálu leží mamka, nehýbe se. Čas běží a já se musím rozhodnout. Odhazuji mobil a rozbíhám se k bazénu, přece nenechám Lucku utopit, určitě se praštila do hlavy a plíce se jí rychle plní vodou. Zvedám ruce nad hlavu do tvaru šipky, odrážím se, hop...

“Ty ses rozhodla pro tetu?” reaguje ségra, když jí druhý den ráno dovyprávím sen, který mě minulou noc vyděsil. “Vlastně nevím, co bylo horší – pocit, že v jedné chvíli ztrácím celou rodinu, nebo jak rychle moje hlava přepnula do módu vyhodnocování šancí pomoci bez jakékoliv špetky emoce.”

# The salty emergency

By Anna

The number is 1-0-8. He should not forget.

108.

These kids next to him are afraid of the dark. His mother tries to calm them down.

108.

It is important to use it exactly at the right time.

He had never used this kind of number before. Maybe once when he fell off the bicycle and had to go to the hospital. This was the first time that he had seen his father crying. The second one was when he decided to send him away. With this man.

108.

He tries to stay focused but feels a bit dizzy now. Everything is moving and he is not familiar with this sense. He is also tired. They had been walking for 15 days through the mountains of Afghanistan and then traveling for three days by bus through Turkey...

108.

That number. In a few minutes he should call it.

Why they are all people around him so fucking quite? He can sense their agony although he cannot see their faces in the dark. The moon in the sky is not very bright today. There had been hiding many days on the shores of the Aegean Sea waiting for the night to get darker.

108.

That 15years old girl next to him is the same age as him but her life is in his hands now. He will do his best for all of them.

108.

They are approaching this rock that was seen from the shore. They are in Greek territory now.

108. The Greek Port Police Emergency Number.

He calls it and gives directions to the dull voice that answers. Then searches his pockets. That man, whose parents paid him €3000 for this journey, has given him a big sharp nail. He holds it decisively in his hand. Kids are looking at him straight in the eyes. The girl has stopped crying. The families next to them are hugging each other. Waiting. He uses the nail to defloat the boat. Only in an emergency the Greek port officers are obliged to rescue them.

When he was dreaming of swimming in that Sea that he was watching in the movies, he didn't expect it to be like this. To swim for his own life. But there is no way back now.

The boat will sink in exactly 10 minutes. It is enough time for the Greek police to come. It has been tested before; the smuggler had said to him.

Refugees around him are screaming and fighting to swim. He doesn't care anymore for the panicked faces around him. The sea is holding him now. It's so weird... In the movies no one has ever mentioned that the sea tastes salty. This is the first thing he will say to his father. If they talk again.

# It is what it is

By Mariana

Once upon a time in a long distance city a heart was born. It was a little heart full of colours, like blue, red, green, orange and so many more.

After some time, he started to grow, and he got a lot of different friends. When the time to go to school arrived, he discovered that there were so many hearts there to learn about everything so they could be intelligent. Days were passing and he understood that some of the old friends were gone, some stayed, and he also made new ones. The years started to move on, and the heart could see how he has this beautiful life full of love, family, friends, school, extra activities and he felt good for real.

But you must know that life isn't always that awesome and sometimes it can be hard. So, one year of his life, summer holidays ended and this little heart went back to school.

At the beginning everything looked the same, however after some months he started to feel very bad inside because some other hearts who were supposed to be his friends began to treat him in a way he couldn't understand. The ones he used to call friends were making fun of him in a bad way, they even spread bad and wrong rumours all over the school. They were so mean to him that he wanted to leave the school. He cried alone for a long time.

There is something you need to know – when you are loved by someone, they will, perhaps, notice your change, that you are more sad than ever. That day came and the mother of this little heart spoke to her son, and she realized what was going on. The parents after talking to each other decided that the heart would continue in

the same school, but they supported him in so many ways that we cannot imagine.

It was a difficult time but nowadays, he can tell that he is a better person and a strong one now.

Do you remember when I was describing the number of colours of this little heart? Well, while this happened, he had changed... Right now, in that time of his life, he became a black and white, he didn't believe in hearts anymore. For a while, he didn't want to meet anyone else. In fact, he just wanted to be with the ones he already knew who stayed with him and supported him. But I hope that you know that life always moves on... ah, it is a process of you all to understand what I'm talking about.

When this little heart grew up, he started to study what he really wanted. He went to medical school so he could help other hearts. He realized, with time of course, that sometimes hearts can be mean and sometimes they can be amazing to other hearts. Each heart has a history, and maybe for some reason they can't be good.

When he was younger, he fell in love for the first time, he thought, but not for the right heart and he discovered that it is ok to have heart breaks and difficulties in life.

This heart also knows that he has a dad who is the dad of all hearts, and he loves him so much that he gave him the best heart possible. He really feels like this is the love he never had it on earlier, or maybe has been there all the time, he simply never had seen it before.

Until this moment, this specific heart has learned that sometimes hearts die and it's okay because they are still alive within us, and we keep all the memories inside of us. He started to understand

that sometimes we can be sad and happy at the same time. He is becoming a grown-up heart with capacity to create a family and teach new hearts what life is and how beautiful it is. He is now full of colours again.

He is prepared to continue living and take every step on the way until the end of the road.

Because you know what?

*LIFE IS WHAT IT IS AND IT IS AMAZING.*

## **Gato**

By Simão

*To my wonderful cat, Bu. I love you more than you may ever know or feel.*

todos os dias passo uns momentos a observar o meu gato. o meu gato é um maluco, é um gato maluco, um Gato. não deve saber que é um gato, visto que gatos não estão geralmente cientes da sua própria condição, da sua gatidez. à natureza, pouco lhe importa a consciência felina, e a genética toma as rédeas daquele que é o seu processo de maturação emocional. o meu companheiro é, sem sombra de dúvidas, um grande gato, e como gato que é, tem uma personalidade forte. mas há uma diferença fundamental na génese da sua e da minha.

a gatidez não é equiparável à humanidade, e embora gatos não sejam imunes a que a sua pessoa seja moldada pelas suas experiências, não passam pelos processos de socialização

primária e secundária a que nós, humanos, somos obrigados a passar. não obstante isso, e mesmo que gatidez e humanidade não sejam análogos, por breves momentos, aparentam ser. eu e o meu gato partilhamos muito mais do que os 90% de genes que a natureza tão carinhosamente nos doou. sextas, abraços, momentos tristes e felizes, brincadeiras: companhia. não sei se é ele que incorpora a humanidade em si, ou eu que personifico a sua gatidez; talvez ambos.

a natural resposta para isto está presente em algo tão pouco orgânico como os nomes científicos de cada um. felis catus significa, de uma forma simplista, gato gato (por muito que eu desejasse que significasse gato feliz), e homo sapiens significa homem sábio, como que ser simplesmente Homem não fosse suficiente.

eu passo algum tempo a observar o meu gato e aprendi com ele que, às vezes, é bom desligar-me da minha humanidade. ser uma pessoa é tão complicado; existir não o é. antes de sermos “sábios”, somos “Homens”, animais, primatas glorificados com a sorte de ter polegares e uma cabeça demasiado grande até para o nosso próprio sistema reprodutivo. o gato, por outro lado, antes de ser gato, é novamente gato.

a nossa sapiência liga-nos à gatidez felina, cuja consciência (quicá instinto) se conecta à nossa humanidade, num ciclo infinito e mutuamente benéfico. o que nos une é tão primitivo como complexo, e mesmo que humanidade e gatidez não sejam homólogos, complementam-se; e assim, o ciclo continua.

# Elf

By Vojta

Sevilin hasn't eaten for five days.

Just like ten others similar to him, he wanted to cross the borders hidden in the wagon with the salt bags. One of the elves was infected with dysentery; before they reached the borders, he fell into delirium. He started to rave and rumble in the worst moment possible. Somebody threw himself upon him and strangled him but soldiers were already stabbing into the sacks with halberds.

Someone cried out. Blood sprayed next to Sevilin. He quickly forced a plank in the floor open, tried to crawl through, got stuck, and for a minute, he felt like a genie sneaking through the throat of a lamp. First, he pulled out his hands, then the body but his hips jammed.

Another cry.

He squeezed the ass and fell to the ground.

Through the gap between the wheels, he saw dozens of legs. Other shouts, chaos, everyone was trying to escape. He rolled to the edge of the wagon and saw the guards fighting the fleeing elves. Sevilin waited for a convenient moment – and sprinted to the other side, away from the road, over the ditch, into the field and forests, to the mountains. He hasn't looked back once, either when an arrow cut the grass next to him. He had to escape.

He stopped only half an hour later and knew he was perfectly lost.

When darkness fell, he ascertained the direction by the stars. He walked all night and all day and one more night. Then, he curled in an alcove in the rock and rested all day.



He was awakened by rain and cold. He was soaked through, struck by fever, delirious. Yet he rose and persistently continued in his journey. Behind the next range, he found a small villa. He crept into the stables, hid under the pile of hay, and fell into a sleep as heavy as dirt on the grave.

This is where I had discovered him when I went to greet the horses in the morning.

I patted the Peas on the neck and noticed his nervousness. I started to calm him down but out of nowhere, he kicked the wall. Out of the empty stall next door an exclamation arose. It frightened me and as my glance met with the pitchfork, I grabbed them and pointed front. Through puttering horses, I couldn't have recognized any other sound. So I slowly crept towards the next booth...

Elf was half-buried in the hay; he sat and stared at me, a turbulent face and eyes full of fear.

"Who are you?" I asked.

He pointed at himself, saying: "Sevilin."

"What are you doing here?"

Wearily, he gesticulated with his hands. Then he fell back to the hay. When I looked at his skinny, fever-burned body, I realized he posed no danger to me. I put down the fork, opened the booth, and offered him a hand. He accepted it distrustfully, neither fear had disappeared from his eyes as I was helping him.

I cut a good slice of bread for him in the kitchen. He gobbled it up as a rat.

It took two months to put him together. In the meantime, I have taught him enough of the Dutsinian language to hear his story.

"You're from Cumhuriyeti, right?" I asked him once. "You're running away from the war."

"Money. Work here, send home," he replied.

"Do you have a family at home? A woman, children," I indicated by gestures what I mean.

"One ..." he lifted his thumb, "baby."

"And a woman?"

"Woman."

"Is there misery?"

"Misery," he nodded.

"And you think it'll be better here?"

"Not misery here. Munch not misery. Munch gold. "

"Gold. Don't make me laugh. If you want, I'll take you to the Munch. I – to Munch. You – with me. Do you want to? But what are you going to do there? Munch! What – you – do – there?"

He shrugged.

"What I ... let ... do." His tongue was twisting.

A month later, we saddled a horse, and I left the villa of my master unattended. I didn't risk much as I knew he was sick and probably won't recover. I was right. He died two days after we arrived in the city. His descendants sold the villa and I have never returned there. Together with Sevilin, I settled in my sister's house. She didn't like the Elf at all.

"What rabble have you brought here?" she flared up. "Send him back where he came from. Crappy outlander. How he is watching me. If he only touches Erna, I'll kill him!"

"Don't worry, Elsa, he won't touch your daughters," I assured her.

Neither his customs didn't win Elsa's heart. She was perplexed he was rinsing himself at the well before the sunrise and offended he is doing that at noon and the evening as well, half-naked, carefully cleaning his feet, face, ears, neck, hands, armpits, and legs. His bad Dutschinian was making her furious. She could never forgive him he burped at the supper. Little Erna was entertained by it, started to laugh, and tried to imitate him. Her mother slapped her. "Don't act like a pig!" she shouted, and Erna burst into tears and ran away to hide behind the furnace. Then, Elsa turned to Sevilin: "Now listen to me: I don't care that in your backwoods you are living in manure, but here, you either behave or scram. Got it? I will send you where you came from, bum!"

Sevilin looked sorrowful. "I ... I wrong?" he looked at me. "I praise food."

"Praise food?" I repeated.

"Food good. I ... praise the che... chiif."

But we haven't managed to explain it to Elsa. She almost ousted him the first day.

But then, he cleaned the house, repaired the furnace, chopped the firewood for the whole winter, and chased a bad dog away from Erna. So he earned a place to sleep for the rest of the week.

Neither I have slugged. I have earned a spot as a scrivener at one unnamed highly situated entity of the Stace security office and found a street sweeper job for Sevilin. What's more, I have got him a bed in a billet and found an apartment for myself.

In his homeland, Sevilin used to be a painter. Here, he had to satisfy with less qualified work. He earned little but the expenses

were even smaller. He didn't go to pubs, didn't go to church, but he had found a second job as a cleaner in a manufactory. He was sending most of his money to the family. The only thing he ever bought for himself was a dictionary thanks to which he gradually learned to speak the Dutschian language. I had been seeing him rarely, but it was always a nice meeting. He was a good man.

Two years later – almost one year since our last encounter – he knocked on my door. There was a small elven boy in between his knees. "This is Muge," he told me. "Waterlilly."

I invited him in. Clenching the bowl of soup, I had offered to them, Sevilin had spoken a great plea to me: "I want to ask you to teach my boy to speak, read, and write. I wish to send him to the school but before I can do it, I have to be sure he understands what teachers are saying."

Muge was a sad, silent boy. He left all his friends at home and came to the land where nobody liked him. They laughed at him, bullied him, attacked him, chased him away. He didn't fight back. He learned there is no point in resistance – it would cost him life in the place where he came from. So, he suffered all injustice of the new world stoically.

"Why do they hate me?" he asked me once.

"Who?" I wanted to know.

"All of them. I walk the street and people are spitting on me and throwing rocks."

"You are an easy target. You are small and can't fight back."

"But why me? There are so many other kids around."

"You are different from them. People don't like anything different."

Kids learn quickly so in one year of diligent studies he learned everything he needed to be accepted into the church school. Abbot agreed to take him if he will get baptized together with the whole family. They all did it. They didn't believe in Christ, of course not, but who knows if they believed in the god of their own country. If they continuously prayed to him, they did it out of habit. Everything around them had to be so strange to them. They needed something they understood, a mundane refrain that was providing them with certainty that even if all will fall apart, there will still be a prayer. Beings of reason cannot live without the feeling of safety. Not fully.

"People are offending me and attacking me, they are pulling out knives and axes, but it is enough to show them the cross, enough to start to pray to Jesus, and they leave me be. I feel much safer here than I have ever felt in the Cumhuriyeti," Sevilin explained to me once.

His countryman had to have a similar feeling as more and more elves were coming to the city every day.

People didn't want them here. They forced them to the edge of the city, just like the dwarfs, so the ghetto was created. Elves had to live in overcrowded billets, even fifteen heads in a single room you could cross with five steps.

Sevilin wasn't happy about it. Unlike his neighbours, he had money and work and felt the need to support the ones with less luck. But there were too many of them.

Once, they found a raped, murdered girl at the square. Instantly, the blame was given to the elves. People with torches charged the ghetto and the whole quarter was swallowed by fire. Only a few elves had died, most of them had run away... but Sevilin was not among them. Nobody ever found out who killed the girl.

Muge was saved from all of this; he lived in the monastery far away from the city. But his mother Neylan had to pay the tuition. Because she couldn't find other jobs, she had become a prostitute. In five years, she had changed beyond recognition. She lost both teeth and hair; her firm body melted to folds of skin, and she was barely able to find a hustle for a few fennels. But she had survived long enough to let her son finish the education.

"I will take care of you, mama," Muge said. "I will find a job, and all will be good."

But he couldn't find a job. Nobody wanted to accept an elf for a qualified position even though he spoke perfect Dutschian. I sought him out at that time. I took him to a tavern for a cup of mead and gave him the most delicate offer.

He got furious. "You want me to spy on my own people?" he shouted in Franksian because he knew I had known the language, but barflies didn't. "To betray my own blood for the ones who didn't offer me anything else but punches and kicks?"

"Didn't you run away from your homeland because of the terror?" I objected. "You were hungry, the wartime was full of uncertainty, and the one who is sitting on the throne now is not a king of your father, but a usurper. I am not asking you to betray your nation, only to spy on one king. There is nothing wrong with it, is there?"

"Why would I do it?" he hissed at me. "For whom? For what?"

"For the money," I replied. "For your mother."

"My mother is a filthy whore! Fucking for money!"

He took my breath.

"She was doing it for you! So, you could finish your studies!"

"I didn't ask her for it!" he retorted. "Her purity would be far more pleasant to me than her filthy money. I didn't ask for a monastery nor education! I was forced to have it because my father believed it would change something! But the hatred of your people cannot be mollified!"

"You are still just a boy," I replied coldly. And his cup runneth over. He took it, swashed the remains of his mead to my face, and ran away.

I was foolish. It was my unwise words that tilted the scale on the side of hatred. Don't ask me how I found out what happened afterward. Man in my position deals with a lot of paperwork and my employer has more eyes than a fly. More than a whole swarm of flies.

There is no way to know what was running Mugen's through the head. All we know as he was rushing through the night, he accidentally poked into a young girl who recompensated by words: "Filthy beast." And he, who stoically endured all offenses raining on his head, lost his temper.

"So, I am filthy?" he retorted. "I, who is going through the ritual purification three times a day? But how about you?" he grabbed her hair, sniffed them, and drew off repulsively. "You are pouring a cheap perfume on yourself to cover your fulsomeness."

"Let go, you pig!" she squeaked. "Or I will scream!"

He blocked her escape route with a hand. "And now I am a pig as well," he repeated after her. "What else am I? A rapist? A murderer?"

"Step aside, scoundrel! I will not be wasting my time with such as you!" the girl shouted senselessly. "You belong to the stake, you slaughterer!"

"Let me deserve it, then!" he shouted, tore her dress off and raped her. The girl screamed. People had to hear her. They had to know about her. Nobody came to help. And I don't believe it was because they would be afraid of Mugen. They hoped that something would happen. They needed a reason...

The next day, the guards came to arrest Mugen but he was already gone. So they took at least his mother. She died in prison.

Mugen hid in the tutelage of *hujjat* who was searching for God's sheep who lost the right path in Munch. They followed him by dozens because he was returning them their culture, childhood, he was giving them love and preaching hatred towards the ones who were torturing them for many, many years. Three years ago, a Holy Empire attacked the Cumhuriyeti pretending they were bringing peace. They conquered a whole region but then got stuck in a war with no victors. One region was enough for the Empire, so it was attempting to secure the borders. Yet the enemy answered in a way it did not expect...

That afternoon, I saw Mugen for the last time. Hidden under the hood, he stood in the middle of the square, raised a blue shining ball to the air, and with a martyr's roar, he flooded the market in a fire. The shock wave hit me as well. I scrambled to my feet from the debris of the stand of the fish-seller, and in the dust and screaming all around, I tried to recognize any wounded who could need my help. By the leap of fortune, it was an elven child I had found first. The explosion burned half of its face. I held him in my arms, helpless and clueless about what I could do for him – when some woman rushed towards me and started to stomp on the tot.

"Murderers! They are murderers!" she shrieked as the kid's head cracked under her heel. I couldn't prevent it. "Do you see what they brought to us?" she shouted at me.

I saw. I saw what our hatred brought to them.



## You woke up?

By Anna

Ξύπνησες;  
Άντε ξύπνα! 11.00 πήγε η ώρα...

Να σου κάνω γάλα; Να βάλω μέλι;

Που θα κάτσουμε; Σπίτι ή στο μαγαζί;  
Κάτσε να σου φέρω τα τσιγάρα σου.  
Άντε, εγώ πάω μέσα να διαβάσω...

Τι έγινε; Δεν θες να διαβάσεις τίποτα να περάσει η ώρα σου;  
Τι νέα από τον κορονοϊό; Δεν ξέρω... Κάτσε να δω στο κινητό.

Πάμε να φάμε; Μια πήγε...  
Άντε, καλό μεσημέρι.  
Αν θες κάτι φώναξε, στο δίπλα δωμάτιο θα' μαι. Θα διαβάζω.

Σηκώθηκες; Να σου φτιάξω καφέ;  
Πάω να δω αν έχουμε και τίποτα γλυκό.  
Πού θα κάτσουμε;

Αυτός που περνάει χωρίς μάσκα ποιος είναι; Από το χωριό;  
Σήμερα, είχαμε 20 κρούσματα.

Πάω μια βόλτα τα σκυλιά και έρχομαι να σε πάρω.  
Όχι, δεν πάω στα σκοτεινά, θα γυρίσω γρήγορα.

Πάμε σπίτι;  
Στις 8 έχει ειδήσεις, όχι ακόμα.  
Να παίξουμε κανένα χαρτί να περάσει η ώρα;

Το τελείωσες το πακέτο;  
Ε, πάω να πάρω κανένα τσιγάρο από τη μαμά.  
Όχι, όχι, δεν θα με καταλάβει...

Τι θα φας;  
Έχει γιαούρτι, κρέμα, τραχανά.

Θα φτιάξω τσάι για μένα, θες;  
Να βάλω μέλι;

Τι να αφήσω στην τηλεόραση;  
Α, να έχει ελληνική ταινία.

Να φωνάξω τη μαμά να σε αλλάξει;

Πάμε για ύπνο;  
Άντε καληνύχτα, καλό ξημέρωμα.

Εγώ μπορεί να κάτσω λίγο ακόμα να διαβάσω, κοιμήσου εσύ.

Τον Φεβρουάριο του 2020, επέστρεψα στο σπίτι μου για να περάσω την καραντίνα με την οικογένειά μου. Έμεινα στο σπίτι των παππούδων μου, εκεί όπου ο 98χρονος παππούς μου, μόνος του πλέον, ζούσε τα τελευταία χρόνια τη δική του ιδιότυπη καραντίνα. Δεν μπορούσε να περπατήσει χωρίς βοήθεια και έκανε μόνο μικρές αποστάσεις από το σπίτι μέχρι το διπλανό κτίριο, το παλιό μαγαζί του.

Τους επόμενους μήνες τους περάσαμε μαζί δίπλα δίπλα, εγώ γράφοντας νυχθημερόν τη διατριβή μου και αυτός καπνίζοντας και κοιτώντας έξω το δρόμο. Μετά από μια αδιάκοπη, ξέφρενη πορεία

που δεν μπορούσα να ξεφορτωθώ τα τελευταία είκοσι χρόνια αφότου έφυγα από το σπίτι με αφορμή τις σπουδές, ήταν για μένα μια απολαυστική παρέα, μια ανακουφιστικά ίδια καθημερινότητα σε έναν κόσμο που άλλαζε ραγδαία. Αυτές είναι οι φράσεις που επαναλάμβανα κάθε μέρα, την ίδια ώρα, μέχρι τον Αύγουστο του 2021. Τότε τελείωσα τη συγγραφή του διδακτορικού μου. Εκείνος, λίγες μέρες αργότερα, πέθανε από εγκεφαλικό.

*English version "You woke up?" available online*

## Landscape

By Elena

On the top of a hill the sun was going down, and the clouds were ready to catch it. Silence all around, just the dogs barking from far and the crickets waking up gently. They were making space for the night that was coming.

It was a long one and full of stars, no touch of the moon in that darkness.

My voice was gruff for the smoke of too many cigarettes and the taste was still in my mouth: sweet tongue as a hairy peach. I set my teeth on the edge as when the last sentence was said.

*It was intense.* I felt my thoughts in my head making room for another speech. But I was speechless.

*It wasn't perfect.* It was intense. It was me and you; the time had come for us to be there. It was unique. It was us.

## Misleading hot summer days

By Alfonso

A consciousness feels its surroundings, it's not nothingness, but an ethereal darkness, a comfortable void. It becomes self-aware, starting to make the distinction between itself and its context, when a crackling sound marks the egg starting to break, the beginning of a life.

With this newly found body, she hatches through the membrane that separated her from the world, and having become a duckling, she breathes for the first time. Her mother's beak helps her, and she finds, clumsily crawling, a new home under her wing, knowing now the cold sensation of the breeze, the humidity of the ground, and the softness of a feather's touch.

Being with her flesh and blood during that morning, and with her eyes still shut and a trembling body, she is protected by her mother's instinctive hug from the freezing wind outside, that is, until the loud sound of a shotgun from afar makes the flock fly away, leaving her, having this unnatural echo as the starting point for what will be a short and lonely existence.

Perceiving brighter shades of red through her eyelids as the sun went slowly up, the cold gradually disappeared, and while she just laid on the sand near the lake, she started chirping as her only tool to call for that only known comfort her now absent mother had given her. She didn't fear the predators nearby, she didn't have the experience to know about them and the pain they could inflict, but it did not matter, because nothing came, no danger, neither the nurturing guardian she briefly knew and lamented for, only the heat transforming into scorch, making her almost naked skin more aggressively pink, dry, and hurtful with each second.

The high and inconsistent sound of her cry for help that ended up hurting her insides went on for hours and turned into a rasp exhalation. With pain as a teacher, her instincts adjusted to the absence of another being protecting her, fading away the need to call her kin, making her chirp just a statement for her suffering. With a boiling sensation throughout her body, she tried to move to find any kind of refuge from the sun rays that were torturing her directly from the sky above in that hot summer as a punishment for being alive.

Every cell in her body alerted pain, and became her only knowledge of existence, and every movement she made transformed into a sharper and harder input as this ill-fated creature was breaking her own never healed scar tissue that became her skin with every friction, every stop, every contact with the ground and with her own unformed feathers as she progressed blindly towards nowhere. Her destiny had been already sealed to have an agonizing death just with the torment her being was being subjugated to by that beautiful summer day without clouds, but she couldn't possibly know that, so even without the possibility for denial about her chances to survive, she continued stumbling, cracking her own skin, making herself more broken with each pathetic step.

By mere luck she arrived, having gone in a circular way, to the lake nearby. As she continued moving, she fell into the water, the frogs behind the water lilies stopped their croaking, and for a moment her affliction seemed to be counteracted with this primordial psalm while her natural swimming instincts kicked in, making her afloat. Her amphibious hidden neighbours resumed their monotonous chant, as if they didn't even care to witness her next following damnation.

Her body was instructing her to move in a way she couldn't possibly execute. As her skin tried to heal back while burning constantly

during those abrasive hours, it bonded some of her junctures together, and with the exhaustion of these few hours of existence, her energy was no more. The little splashing her minuscule figure could perform didn't provoke almost any waveforms in the water, but as her frantic movement became more faint, the surface of the lake was slowly turning back into its usual steadiness.

Each movement to stay above the surface to be able to breathe became weaker with each repetition, and the frogs' sound was the only thing that provided her some context besides tiredness and ache for those irrelevant tries her body commanded her to do for an impossible survival.

The last gasp of air already put some water into her lungs, and then, feeling heavy, she started to drown.

Each attempt to inhale frustrated her senses as only water flowed in, and still not being able to see, now every sound was muffled, anticipating her soon next state of being. Even in this desperate latest adventure, her beak opened, and other futile endeavours to breathe made her go even deeper down to the bottom of the lake.

Couldn't breathe, couldn't chirp, couldn't hear, couldn't even open her eyes at least once in her lifetime. Surrounded by water and sand and dirt and shit, the microscopic fauna awakened, and her body began to be consumed by parasites while she was experiencing another new form of agony with an acute pain itching from its insides and her ears, anus, mouth and every pore that wasn't sealed like leather from the scorching.

Her consciousness started leaving her, the pain surpassed being something that could be felt anymore, and while she was becoming just another corpse going back to that ethereal darkness, the void wasn't comfortable anymore.

The hunter that wasted a shell from his shotgun wasn't aware of the repercussions of his discharge when he tried to shoot that fox. The fox was ignorant about the flock that lived near the lake and wouldn't have hunted them. The flock couldn't know that flying away, leaving their offspring, wasn't necessary at all. And if this torture porn story made you sad at some point, find some solace knowing that it could be worse, and remember that you could have been born a duckling.

## V září mi svět znovu leží u nohou

By Ella

Hanka naposledy kontroluje popruhy na postroji, ověří, že funguje vysílačka a dává mi zdviženým palcem signál, že můžu vyrazit. Zhluboka se nadechnu, rozběhnu se a po dvou třech krocích cítím, jak mě sedačka nechce pustit dál. Zaberu s hlavou sehnutou, pak tlak povolí a nohy mě nesou dál prudce dolů z kopce. Ještě kousek a pak už se odlepuji od země.

“Bacha na ty ruce, máš v nich vlastní život,” slyším ve vysílačce.  
“Ve vzduchu je Eliška.”

To už se mezi mýma třepotajícima nohama a sjezdovkou, ze které jsem odstartovala, zvětšuje vzdálenost. Přede mnou se rozprostírá krajina Beskyd a já si s překvapením uvědomuji, že ačkoliv mě od země dělí na 500 metrů a nad hlavou mám pouze změť šňůrek a látky, zažívám naprostou euforii a iracionální pocit bezpečí. Vždyť tady jsem nedotknutelná.

## Gas station diners

By Francics

*Dedicated to the only businesses, and their brave employees especially, that, at odd times in the night, kept their doors open and greeted us with cigarettes and alcohol, as the world's end wore on.*

Among the shorter aisles with higher prices and less variation in products, save for pop novelties and car essentials and tangentially towards the counter, the cashier sitting as if spacing out, behind barricades of power bars, gum, and last-minute almost-forgot-about, or that's-a-nice-idea-for-a-long-ride items, its back against the wall of cigarettes, multiple brands, the same price as in other stores, minus the tobacco packs whose prices can range and thus be raised via some small legal loophole that every seller or small shop-owning feller exploits. Pay with card, or with a glide of your cellular, more specifically, and leave the employees behind, in their drab tiredness that makes the bags under their eyes seem permanently a part, and not just an occurrence, nor even recurrence of their physiognomy. Too exhausted to really seem nice or polite, but this – not beyond or against the policy, as these mean the same when referring to a lack and not a plus, an extra, an effort. You shouldn't condemn. Through the diner section of the gas station, among puffy yet rigid yet not so sturdy corner synthetic cover couches embedding tables fabricated en masse out of plastic and, if you go into depths, as in dig in with your nails, filled by wood conglomerate, ready to punish your curiosity with a splinter, around the café ark, with commodes and kitchen counters that go waist high, and three-color mosaics going for some shoulder-, for others chin-high and beyond, as far as the chrome-tinted, fingerprint-tainted napkin dispensers go. You open the common door bearing two gender hieroglyphs, only to choose your own in the next hall and you take a right, making the door creek, toilet paper and ominous stains on the walls and floor, tracking the trajectories of an



event unexplained, unsayable, the carelessness of both customer and maintenance staff, or perhaps just an unfortunate lack of synchronization of the two. You shouldn't condemn. You sit down, not before turning the lever, as its sign indicates, slowly but thoroughly, and the linoleum crawling along the seat's curl only to disappear with the other's smut and be ready for yours.

You grab your phone, reflex, as no attention can be spared, you never did understand people's toilet occupations, the dissociation between doing and, to put it nicely, disseminating. You do your part as best as possible, evacuate, and close the door behind, but not entirely as not to trick the next guest, wash your hands under the chrome beak of the sink and insist upon the visibly broken soap dispenser – tied to the wall with duct tape – then renounce and rinse, and dry but still shake your fingers freely in the air afterwards. The terrace is next, you take a seat on the wood that has become smooth from use and uncork the cap of the cheaper bottle that was your entrance ticket to the bathroom. You decide to enjoy it, yourself, and available facilities.

As you write this, a middle class, well-groomed yuppie, with a buzzcut, a five o'clock shadow kept, but also kempt and cared for, well after its hour, and blue pants of a fabric uncertain and a white button-up mostly folded, but in parts profiling his physique sits down two tables away from you, with two older folks. Bulbous, with eyes and features bulging, the man's arms protruding from a plain shirt, with curves reminiscent of a strength that is no more, jeans and sneakers, nonetheless. The woman – her hair tied, straight and tightly on the top and loose and looping in excess beneath the bake at the back, cheap polyester shirt with stylised floral patterns, and long, some would say, ethnicity-indicative skirt of a different Persian rug pattern, ending, not at the ground, but round the thick calves, strangled by ankle-high beige stockings worn as ankle-length socks, and glittery sandals, the end. He asks for their order, they

answer, he enters then returns, they do not have decaf, the old folks adapt their desires. He leaves to correct the order. The two start speaking in their language, in his absence. Once he returns once more, they have a small chat about the benefits of coffee and the dangers of caffeinated soda. The one you sip from. Documents on the table, they could mean many things. He answers his wide smartphone, promises his interlocutor a good laugh and proffers an anecdote about his parochial priest, it is Sunday, not a profiteer, neither a prophet, but a spiritual fellow.

Unclear if his promise has been fulfilled. He returns to the matters on the table. He inquires about kids, but not for small talk, the woman reminisces about the current location and social state of her children, all denoting a well-off status, at least as seen from beneath. He interjects with a country but misses by miles, the parents correct, he recommences. He speaks in a down-to-earth manner, with all the common man dialogue mannerisms, all-encompassing, no-nonsense, and unsubstantial aphorisms included. The talk flows, they call him godfather religiously, he only uses pronouns – singular, direct – and preaches about how bonds should last beyond fancy and if she, maybe their child, doesn't like him, spouse possibly, anymore, they should work through, withstand whims. He has anecdotes, he speaks about his youth as if it was further and fuller than theirs, remembering or reminiscing as if to ground his present-day say. They smile, naively, that polite naïveté, at times, she, the mother laughs copiously, her lapsed breasts and protruding belly heave up as she bellows a grimey laughter, from her grimacing face like mortuary masks only have.

The father is restrained, almost defeated, yet attentive, with fallen shoulders brought to the front, caving his chest above his perfectly rotund paunch.

He – younger man or godfather for them, in name at least – is fully in control of his and their speech, correcting and reassessing their utterances, he knows when they misrepresent or misremember, he speaks and quotes and goes on tangents, they stare with pudgy eyes although he only fixes the male with his straight gaze. His back moves constantly and consistently, they remain transfixed, only correcting posture when it pains. A nuclear family enters the terrace, omelette sandwiches in hand, the mother tends to the girl singing her onomatopoeia. The father inquires whether she wishes to have a taste, as she's probably at the age when eating is not pleasing and only steals from playtime. The man offers his outlook on relationships to the old couple: atomised and reified, the what's-mine-is-mine, what's-yours-is-yours deal, a literal deal. You feel the need to use the bathroom once more, while the tiny girl excuses herself repeatedly, only having learned to do so. The father is entertained. Across the diner, beneath hanging bulbs with sweet yellow sulphur light, you enter and exit once more, fully knowing what's there to be found and done. You exit but do not sit down, and under the dead but present observation of a security camera looking as if turning its neck, you leave while the old woman remembers an instance when they, meaning her extended family, you interpret, took legal action against the police itself, as they had evidence and motive.

Only they could know how such an action unwinds, develops, and turns out, and as if in agreement, the young man gets up inviting the two to do the same, and they leave, and he pushes gently in his direction.

# POETRY

## The closure

By Kristiina

a delay what leded u to obscure  
two layers of clouds are embracing the sun

echo from the light

this time noticed

peak  
pure  
Crystal clear closure.

## Undressing

By Elena

Eyes  
close enough  
to see you soul

Smile  
wide enough  
to whisper laughs

Skin  
bold enough  
to peel your doubts

Shame.  
Far enough...

# Guernica

By Βάσω

Blue, red, green neon lights,  
I'm once again in the same decadent bar.  
Crystals hanging from the ceiling,  
Brown, dusty furniture decorates the main venue.  
There is a fireplace in the second hall that offers its warmth,  
only on December nights.

I can spot the same three bartenders that keep me company  
in the last three months.  
I'm approaching the bar stool and ask for my ordinary whiskey,  
Neat, with some ice.

I have this inner need of becoming a waste of space,  
an existence without purpose.  
I want to reach that point of numbness,  
where everyday thoughts turn into colorful dreamy places.  
There, your body may not function as it's supposed to.  
Its movement changes through space and time.  
The control of the mind over this new and odd silhouette is lost.  
I am dancing to Irish folk.

Every time I cross this fine line that separates the wonderland from reality I meet my alter ego.

This one hour that both of us coexist and act cooperatively,  
I feel more powerful.

I am not afraid anymore.

I have counted the kilometers I need to traverse to reach this place.  
In total, five glasses of whiskey away.

While experiencing this intermediate phase,  
My body is kneeling towards the bar.  
My elbows, like a cornerstone, are supporting my overall poise.  
I turn my head to the left.

There, on top of a freshly painted wall,  
an imitation of a well-known tableau marks the bar.  
I'm slowly fading into the shapes,  
Black and white otherwise,  
Colored now by the neon lights.

My main, unanswered questions make their presence noticeable.  
Is there an end to all of that?  
Where is my mind?

*with a song Rose Tattoo by Dropkick Murphys*

# For my lover, the moon

By Elian

The moon shines bright in the lonely night,  
Her light gives life, for her I write.  
The one I love with all my soul,  
The one who always heed my call.

And when I felt the most alone,  
She was there to guide me home.  
In the universe, the realm of stars,  
A divine connection shown in the psalms.

She kept me safe, showed me love,  
And in her arms I cried and screamed.  
Her celestial body that stayed above,  
Was everything I could've dreamed.

Her slim white body, the colour of milk,  
Her long white hair, soft as silk.  
Her eyes were black, and always shined.  
Her luscious lips, the colour of wine.

Every night I go outside to see you shine,  
I'm stuck in awe when I see you smile.  
It clears my mind when it's all dazed,  
Our love's so strong I'm still amazed.

I'll go to sleep so you don't fret.  
I close my eyes full of regret,  
That again I sit inside my bed,  
With all of you stuck in my head.

## **Habla el cuerpo**

By Bea

### *Pulmones*

¿Se han dicho nuestros pulmones algo que nosotras no hemos hecho?  
Cuando respiraban a la vez  
Y chocaban en el centro del abrazo  
Cuando lo hacían desacompañados  
Para buscar el pecho de la otra –  
Que puede que estuviese lleno  
Pero que tenía los pulmones vacíos



### Manos

Mi mano izquierda, la suya derecha

Con cuidado se han agarrado

Apretar un dedo

Pellizcar la piel

Arañar la palma

Y se han soltado

### Pelle

Qualcuno davanti a me condivide ciò che io non so dire ad alta voce

Brivido

Qualcuno mi dice: “we were hearing you think very loudly”

Brivido

Il mio corpo si muove con la musica e mi fa capire i suoi bisogni, o i miei

Brivido

Quando mancano le parole, forse basta guardare la pelle

Brivido, forse fa anche freddo o frío, escalofrío

### Eyes

“Couple up by finding the person who has the most similar eyes to you”

Ours weren't the same

But with a look

We both decided

That to our eyes, they were

## Smells

By Claudia

The smell  
The sea  
The sunset  
The calming soul  
An awakened Laugh  
The Poured wine  
That was not mine  
A aching heart  
Ready to explode;

We follow smells to prove out experiences  
so, when will the smell follow us?  
Does it have its own experiences?  
hmm  
i don't know...

*WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF A SMELL?*

## És un secret

By Bàrbara

Que quedi en un secret.  
Que hi resti amagat.  
En un petit poblet,  
no vaig veure ni un gat.

## **From Summer to Winter** *(Fra sommer til vinter)*

By Βάσω

Green leaves touching my hair.  
The sound of a river crossing a village.  
My cheeks are sun-burned,  
I don't mind.  
My body is screaming,  
you'll never be mine.

Nordic music is playing down the theater,  
I am looking up at the sky light.  
Blood is flowing,  
out of your veins, slowly.

I still can't quite describe,  
Your taste feels like red wine.  
I am frozen.  
I feel nothing for the first time.

*with a song Fehu by Wardruna*

## The Escape

By Άγγελος

Sometimes she appears with the shape of a beautiful memory.

Like a dream you never lived.

Like a big wall you never tried to cross.

Other times as a sunrise in a well-known place.

A small boat without a driver

is going to take you when the sun goes down,

to drive you closer to her.

To observe her a bit more,

to spell her for a while.

“Don’t leave, I’ll be back soon”, she told you.

The small boat drives you back to the coast.

Now, she is far away from you.

You node the same usual “I love you”.

May the full moon is not next to you right now,

but you know that she will come back soon.

*Greek version “Η Απόδραση” available online*

# Forgiveness

By Βάσω

I'm not here,  
This isn't happening,  
After my brother's call  
That's what I keep on thinking.

His trembling voice,  
Gives away his inability to hold his tears.  
"He passed away, come home"  
"he passed away", he shouted.

I'm running,  
I'm crossing the village's square,  
Faces staring at me,  
Do I even want to reach my destination?

I arrive,  
I'm entering the main venue  
The body is there, in all nude  
The life circle is closed,  
Inundated by the worst smell a human could offer.  
I'm not dressed in black,  
A floral shirt is covering some parts of my body.  
Besides shock, guilt starts knocking on my door.  
Could he ever forgive my irreverent guise?  
My last memories of him make their appearance in mind.

Five hours earlier,  
in the exact same room,  
with his eternal love,  
holding hands.  
Asking forgiveness of one another,  
for every tiny mistake that was ever done.  
"I accept you as a whole", he whispered.  
I am safe, I imagined.

*with a song How to disappear completely by Radiohead*

## DIAMONDS

By Nazaret

Even if the scars of my past come knocking on my door,  
even if I feel like a small child scared again,  
you are safe now, child,  
I am here for you,  
you will find those who shine in the middle of the dark,  
cause no one has more power to hurt you than the one you give them,  
and those who support me will never make me doubt,  
cause I found true diamonds in a coal mine,  
I finally understood where I belong.

*Dedicated to all people who do not feel like they belong.*

# Weather-beaten

By Eleni

Here I am  
Standing still in the middle of the woods  
Watching the world moving,  
Floating around me

A humid embrace is trying to wake me up  
The trees are chattering  
With the rustling of their leaves  
Let it all be as it is

My heavy disposition is laughing  
I lay on the ground  
It does feel soothing  
Doing nothing for once in my life

I became part of walls  
I have seen wars  
People have carried me around  
Or abandoned me

Now I need this time to rest  
Standing still in the middle of my world  
And I will go on for sure  
When my time is to come  
Looking forward, just forward  
And smiling

## since when...?

By Claudia

Technology came to us  
did you ever decide it was time to leave it?  
what else did you know?  
when you run  
you feel your hurt pumping,  
when you have your phone  
you see darkness.  
If you can't feel happy without it  
what's the point in having it?  
We are more asleep than awake...  
when will we wake up?  
Reality needs us  
since when did we stop needing it?

## Demons

By Ionuț

How empty it is in balance  
You can see colours in the stars and trees,  
I feel more diluted and simple;  
I get lost in the red of poppy petals.



## Bergolo

By Fiammetta

Il vento tra le foglie  
Le api che ti ronzano attorno  
Il silenzio fresco e, improvvisamente,  
Le risate calde di mille paesi  
Amicizie leggere, ma conoscenze profonde  
Il rumore assordante di mille pensieri  
La delicatezza leggera come una nuvola  
Le cene in comune che mai scorderai  
Momenti infiniti in settimane fugaci  
Sorrisi inattesi che ti scaldano l'anima  
La natura che ti stringe in un abbraccio materno.  
Grazie ragazzi. Vi ho voluto, vi voglio e vi vorrò bene per sempre.  
Non potrò mai scordarvi.

*English version available online*

## Tornare a casa 08/09/2021

By Davide

Dalla montagna alla pianura  
Una sensazione di serenità che perdura  
Al nido ritorno  
Scortato da ammicchi della mia natura

A casa c'è la certezza del blu  
Di fogli stropicciati che usano il tu  
Di nonni e nipoti uniti dalla coltura  
Di preteriti piani di vita futura

Tra l'amicizia ch'è cultura  
Chi si chiede se una passione dura  
Chi sogna un'avventura  
Chi tuttora giura

Ma il saper dove stare rende casa un piacevole sostare  
Lì dove la luce del sole non cattura e il calmo mare non cura  
Con la sigaretta che brucia una scura e confusa paura  
La penna è sicura

## **Coming home 08/09/2021**

By Davide

From the mountains to the plains  
a feeling of serenity endures  
to the nest I return  
accompanied by the winks of my nature.

At home there is the certainty of blue  
of crumpled sheets that stare at you  
of grandparents and grandchildren united by agriculture  
of obsolete plans of future life.

In the place where friendship is culture  
where people wonder of everlasting passion  
where people dream of adventures  
Endless persistence

If you know where to stay, home is a comfortable place  
Where the light of the sun does not reach  
and the calm sea does not care  
The cigarette burns a dark blurry fear  
And the pen is poised.

## 8 days to fall in love

By Elisa

*I have eight days to fall in love*

The first day is an arrival  
And together a beginning  
I sit and wait  
By looking around me.

The second day is a first approach  
Shy and awkward  
An analysis of  
A little distant.

The third day is an exploration,  
I learn new things  
I try new things  
And I'm almost lost.

The fourth day is a game  
and sometimes you have to improvise  
Even when you want to stay still  
Sometimes it's better to dance.

The fifth day smells of freedom  
It's made of unexpected things,  
but also of sharing  
and has a music in the background.

The sixth day is for me  
Because to fall in love I have to know myself first  
I bring out all I can  
With an immense effort.

The seventh day is dedicated to him  
To us  
To what we are  
And what we want to say

The eighth day represents the end  
But it will never be a true end  
It's another departure  
That must be celebrated.

*I had eight days to fall in love.*

## **The lion's den**

By Elena

What that I feel – inside, deep  
What that I hear coming from near  
What that I seek – I get  
What that I want to bring to success  
What that within cannot be expressed  
What that without would bring just deny

in it – it out  
in it – how?  
However it changes again.  
The leash too lightly swing  
Where is the perfect ring for this music?

“The lion's den” – the champions  
standing the throne at the end of the race  
Top prize – hurray  
all free.

# Giù

By Davide

Giù mi affeziono alla gleba,  
nel mondo di storie slegate  
e chiacchierate vicende passate.  
Al principio la levata del sole è nemico  
pertanto da degno rivale  
divien' presto lembo dell'individuo.  
Dove è regola esser presenti,  
e non si ammettono fallimenti.  
Dove il tempo è celere  
e si impara celermente,  
ad osservare e a saper' godere  
non di meno a sperare  
regolarmente in un irregolare temporale.  
Alla fine di un giorno  
birra, fornelli e il solito sogno  
perché Giù si coltiva aspirazione  
oltre che il bisogno.  
Come un direttore d'orchestra con il primo violino  
lo con Giù son' vicino  
sregolato vago e sincero  
Amante col vino.

*English version "Down" available online*

## **Not a Poem**

By Raúl

Find the treasure  
once, two, more times  
Infinite times  
You can be always surprised  
searching inside of you  
Let the journey be exciting  
feel all kind of emotions  
but put your focus always in joy  
let the suffering be outside you  
pain is necessary, acceptance is a rule  
Answers are not always found  
in the moment I want  
Patience is the ally  
Optimism in the way  
Keep the focus, don't forget Yourself

## **Ali aperte**

By Eleni

Sotto il tramonto arancione  
non ascolto le maledicenze,  
non potete ormai giudicarmi.  
Preghiera devota al denaro, inchinatevi.  
Parlano codardamente e deridono  
la mia voce che sveglierà la luna.

Scusatemi, la vostra scatola non mi sta,  
un venticello caldo mi conduce.  
Batterò le mie ali e volerò,  
dite alla gente che io volerò.

Con le loro ali atrofiche  
un futuro grigio mi fanno vedere,  
ma la levata ha i colori più belli,  
in cui desidero vestirmi.  
La mia bocca è chiusa da mani sporche  
e temo di perdere i miei colori  
Ma chi ha mai misurato le stelle  
e chi ascolta i canti degli angeli?  
Un giuramento che va prestato,  
sempre stare nella propria via

Malgrado gli occhi bagnati, gli ossi rotti  
arriverò in capo al mondo.  
Diventerei il cielo  
tutto il mondo per abbracciare.  
Diventerei il mare,  
portandoti,  
finchè trovi la tua terra.

## A muse

By Katka

For all the beauty in your eyes  
I would let your smell caramelize.

To taste your skin through all my senses  
and throw away all pretences.

No more living in these lies –  
Thank you for bringing me to my butterflies.

## Goodbye, Moon

By Άγγελος

But how do you say goodbye to the moon?  
and let a sun shine on you forever?  
But how do you say goodbye to the moon?  
and you lose that all-white light in the darkness?  
But how do you say goodbye to the moon?  
Are a kiss and a goodbye enough?  
An “I love you” and an endless sea.  
An unfulfilled night in a foreign country,  
far away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.  
Nothing will be enough, not even her.

*with a song Because you love me by Kaz Hawkins  
Greek version “Αντίο Σελήνη” available online*



## **If I'd be a thing**

By Raul

I'd be a Start Up  
where all dreams fit  
being in a point with a previous baggage  
wanting to share something new  
confident of past, present and next future  
This ship is issuing a statement  
Put your best clothes on you  
Excitement for adventure, desire of discovering new worlds  
Take place and relax, be ready for the start

## **ALTERNATIVE poetry**

By Simone

Like an angel in the sky,  
overviewing everybody, protecting.  
They supported their ideas  
Watching us with strong feelings  
Open up our minds and hearts  
We will join in a book project  
Let's the work begin

# Travel

By Ionuț

You left  
Towards a green silence  
or to a half-awake bird.  
Happy are your steps.

Take a picture of the road,  
with the stars when I go out to play.  
Open your suitcase and throw out all the cold,  
keep in it a pair of pebbles,  
a handful of sea echoes,  
a few feathers lost in salt.  
Enjoy this journey on the wet shore of your soul.  
Happy are your feet.

You will not return.  
You left the door hanging on a scream.  
I'm waiting barefoot,  
if they find traces.  
Send me a memory,  
in an envelope,  
the sand that suits your eyes.

## Walk with senses

By Katka

I hold your hand  
and you hold mine  
I touched the land  
and it was fine

The sun was dancing  
on my skin  
I threw away  
my every sin

Now, I don't know  
what to say  
I am alone  
but the feelings stay

We found a place  
where the nature  
connect us  
in the purest  
expression of love.

*Dedicated to Raquel*

## Senses overload

By David

I'm eating the plastic  
Off of your body,  
I'm looking at you  
to see myself better.  
I'm all that you're craving,  
for me you are aching  
you're all that I want –  
I'm becoming yourself now.  
I'm drinking your mind,  
I can hear myself scream  
you're here in my dream  
it's all intertwined.  
The heart in your chest  
its beating is fast,  
darling, you're blessed  
to have me inside you;  
you don't have a clue  
of what will come next.  
I will devour  
your heart and your power,  
you have my last breath  
inside your lungs.  
Because of me you're alive,  
because of me you'll survive –  
I'll be your death.

I gazed right through you,  
the candle you blew  
kept me inside your head.  
Because of you I have bled.  
Now I'm going to come back,  
eat you until you turn black.  
And then you will see  
that I hold the key  
to your salvation,  
to your damnation.  
The deathless awaits  
for the word that dictates  
the torture of your soul  
which is black like coal.  
I hope you are starving  
cause I brought you a flower.  
I'm coming inside you;  
I'm sucking your power.  
You are my sweetest  
and darkest desire,  
I am your inner  
and hidden sinner.  
I am eating your skin,  
twisting in your grin;  
it feels just like heaven.  
I'm inside your body,  
controlling your thoughts;  
I'm connecting the dots.

You should look away now  
cause it's gonna get worse  
but if you're not moving,  
I promise it won't hurt.  
Here comes the hearse,  
you'll sleep there inside it,  
starving and blinded,  
carved up, divided.  
You are delightful –  
a beauty, and frightful.  
I died there inside you.  
You'll have to cut through,  
crawl here beside me  
and tear the walls down  
from around this ghost town.  
I'll tell you a story:  
it's pleasant and gory,  
its words are unknown –  
engraved on your tombstone.  
You ate me alive.  
It's your turn to die.

# Inner soul

By Mariana

We started this project naked,  
And now I am inside of it,  
Now I feel protected.

Many different minds and stories,  
But we are all the same in the end,  
With connected needs and worries.

Worries seemed to get smaller in Bergolo,  
Maybe it was the peace of the mountains,  
Or the shared tea into the night all day in our refuge.

All without phones, and all without barriers,  
We share our stories, our pains and our greatest achievements,  
We stopped being what we were and became one.

Could I be able to return to my life equal to what it was,  
Honestly, I don't know, perhaps this is bigger than me, I will see,  
And I am going to tell you in another story.

# Project presentation

**The Decameron youth exchange was born out of a need to create a learning context for youngsters** who have experienced social distancing worldwide, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many young people had to face a radical change of habits (on a social, emotional and environmental level) and did not have the ability to channel their energies and resources to cope with the new reality. This often plunged people into a state of distrust and loss. Therefore, Decameron created a context in which youngsters could meet again, talk about their experiences and transform them into stories.

We took inspiration from “Decameròn”, by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), one of the masterpieces of Italian literature. The book contains 100 short stories told by a group of 10 young people who took refuge in a secluded villa just outside Florence in order to escape the Black Death that was afflicting the city.

**The Decameron project brought together 35 young people from 7 European countries** for 7 days and, just like in “Decameròn”, we used story writing as a tool to explore the visions, fears, ideas, desires and needs that emerged from each individual.

**Why did we use story writing?** Stories enable the reader to identify and empathise with the characters and plots presented, while listening and writing enables one to gain awareness of their own narratives.

The spread of the virus has forced all of us in an extraordinary era of fast change and increasing complexity. To do our part in improving the situation, we have decided to leverage our book in order to make donations to a cause aimed at alleviating COVID-19's impact.

**We decided to donate all of the income from selling the book to SAVE THE CHILDREN**, an organization operating worldwide.



They act in the interest of children and champion their rights. Having 25,000 dedicated staff across 122 countries, they respond to major emergencies, create and deliver innovative development programmes and organise campaigns to ensure the children's voices are heard and listened to. To respond to the consequences of the pandemic and to protect children no matter where they live, Save the Children has launched a \$100 million appeal - the biggest appeal in their history.

**The youth exchange was co-funded by Erasmus+ programme,** which supports education, training and youth mobility in Europe. Thanks to this opportunity young people from completely different social, cultural, environmental and personal backgrounds can travel and cooperate on a shared theme. Through non-formal education, youngsters have the opportunity to experience good practices and actively contribute to their education and life goals.

# The Organizations

## Organizers

**Associazione Frazione Mondo – Italy.** The association was founded in 2015 in Caselle di Morimondo, a village in the surrounding area of Milan. It's focused on social and cultural promotion. It's main aim is to foster the practice, production, enjoyment and spreading of THEATRE, seen as a necessary form of art for each person and for society. Frazione Mondo is new in the organization of Erasmus+ and could develop "Decameron" thanks to the support and collaboration of Vagamondo APS.

**Vagamondo APS – Italy.** Social promotion organization based in the south of Piedmont region. The NGO is focused on European mobility and non-formal education. It provides learning and growing opportunities for youngsters and youth workers.

Vagamondo's keywords are: TRAVEL, DISCOVER, EVOLVE. Young people often face confusion about their path in life and themselves. The approach is to give them the chance to get out of their routine and travel away, discovering something new about themselves and the other people's worldview. Out of that new awareness, they can create a positive change in themselves and evolve.

## Realized thanks to our PARTNERS from European Union

- **Asociación Dinámica – Spain.** Focused on the importance of building affective and effective networks and in the power of a creative community.
- **Be Visible Be YOU - Greece.** Its main field of action is social inclusion through lifelong personal development and creation of opportunities for every kind of person.
- **Embaixada da Juventude – Portugal.** Focused on promoting development and growth through national and international projects that bring a series of experiences, opportunities, and knowledge both to young people and local communities.

- **INSpire – Czech Republic.** Focused on the diversity of perspectives – inspiring to look at things from different points of view, by promoting personal, social and professional development of groups and individuals through programs that use non-formal education.
- **POINT OF VYOU – Romania.** Intercultural youth center created to complete and balance the lifestyle of youth that are willing to develop and achieve their potential, through multilateral development, sustainability, and global responsibility.
- **Risti-Rästi – Estonia.** Aims to provide international youth mobility and personal development opportunities to young people and youth workers.