

# Camino del Sol

lava heart

by Georgia Mihalcea

Her joy turned into a panic attack.  
Happiness always had this strange effect on her.

# camino del sol | lava heart

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## genesis

When your mind begins to fall, you don't hear a click in your head. You silently turn into words.

People tell me to move on. It is a collective reflex, I suppose.

Voices and voices.

Echoes.

Whispers.

I cannot understand the meaning of their words. There is no forward here.

Between my everything and my nothing there is no difference left.  
Between truth and its absence there is no empty space.

I am not dead.

I am not yet mad.

The only thing left is a question mark.

Is there a question I cannot see?

One that I never answered?

Or, maybe one that I never asked?

What is it?

Silence. Its music is deafening at times.

Is it me?

*I was born with the heart of a pilgrim, the pain of an orphan and the restlessness of a hungry demon.*

Shadowland is my home. What kind of faith did I expect?

We are billions living here, isolated from each other.

Unconnected living dots.

We cannot see light at the end of the tunnel.

Most of the days, we cannot even find a tunnel.

Seldom, when we crack the darkness, the shadow is the only light there is.

We climb hills hoping to reach mountains, but we only reach other hills. I put my foot forward in the unknown. This step is the only horizon I can see.

I do not know what light is.

I just imagine it.

Sometimes, I even dream it.

I look at the sun from space and I see it surrounded by endless darkness. Still, its light breaks through and reaches distant destinations. Is it me?

## **I dreamt**

For a long time of my life, I dreamt.

I was too green to know that one should not provoke love.

Raised by beasts and surrounded by their fathers, I could not see their mother lies in my arms. She was fragile as a butterfly, touched by a rooted sadness that melted my bones, had the joy of a spring flower and the smile of an angel.

She taught me everything about nothing. Then, she led me there.

A lifetime of dreaming turned into 32 short words.

## **I dreamt**

your love  
for me  
bloomed  
in your  
heart

it warmly  
melted  
all my  
walls

it softly  
lighted  
all my  
darkness

it tenderly  
woke  
me  
up

and then  
it took  
my  
breath  
away.

## childhood

Can rough childhood survivors beat the odds against a lousy life?

I was probably a happy embryo. Still, as a visible human being, I was a crawler in the depths of darkness and on the edgy sides of life. I have no knowledge or memory about my original wings and colors, if any. It is a mystery where does my bit of humor come from.

Have you heard of *Adverse Childhood Experiences Study*? The people doing that study worked up a definition of exactly how bad your childhood had to be before you pretty much became toast for the rest of your life.

They named ten severe risk factors, like divorce, an alcoholic or drug-abusing parent, sexual molestation, violence at home, as well as mental illness in a family member, and then, they followed thousands of children to see what the impact of these risk factors would be.

They found that if you had four or more of the risk factors, your chances for a happy life were low, and your chances for a lousy life were high, including having a short life.

I have nine risk factors according to this study.

By all books and voices, in any language, at any time, my chances to beat the odds are under the sea level.

However, in a mysterious way, if you bet against me, you will most probably lose your fortune.

I am another version of *One Million Dollar Baby*.

Tell me *This is it!* or *You're done!* and I will climb Himalayas naked.

Not to prove something, but to survive.

I am not scared of death.

I am terrified of wasting my potential and of living a worthless life.

However, this nightmare turned into a reality. It was a reality since its beginnings, I was just not aware of it. Awareness made my life unbearable. *Don't wake up! It might kill you.*

The details of my childhood are irrelevant.

You hear stories like this from dusk to dawn. They are common here, in Shadowland.

Mine is not a sad story, it is just another tale about madness, poverty, and violence. The kind that breaks your spirit from early beginnings and turns you from a potential good person into an evil creature. You never know that. Until one day, when karma comes to collect.

It does not matter who molded you, who poured venom at your roots or all the *Why-s* in between, karma does not care. It only cares about one thing only: who you are.

Usually, it starts like any other ordinary day.

I was a question mark that day.

## trapped

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*Wrong moment, wrong people, wrong place. A perfect imperfection in the mechanism of life. Or just another blind choice. She walks in circles. Smaller and smaller circles.*

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After working during my first ten years of my adult life like no one else I know, after being honest and always doing the right thing, when I finally signed the biggest contract of my life that held the promise of a ticket out of misery, I ended up for another ten years sitting on a chair and facing walls of various colors.

It went wrong at the same time the world went wrong.

I never imagined the possibility of my life to end on such a short notice. I was still noticeably young. 27 at the time. After consuming the best part of my youth trying to build the ordinary life everyone else was dreaming at, I did not expect imprisonment, despair, and nothingness. I did not see that coming.

It matters how you lose everything. You may lose it because you are an idiot, because you made a mistake, because you were in a troubled time of life and made a series of bad choices, or because someone else takes it away from you.

I ended up lower than any time of my life because someone else decided so. That client took not only what I had, but also everything I did not have by simply refusing to pay in the end. He did not choose that for me, he chose the shortcut for his best.

My worse came with his best and so did my awakening.

What could have been my exit ticket out of hell turned into my entry ticket inside my worst nightmare. I believed that my childhood stories are the nightmares. I did not know what I was talking about. I did not know anything about human nature and about the beasts of the world.

Until that day, everything was good because nothing was too bad. I was happy because I was not unhappy.

Who would have thought that my turning point will unravel in a beautiful field blushed with poppies, during a perfectly clear afternoon?

The end of my life as I knew it was signed with a Montblanc pen on an ordinary piece of paper filled with numbers. I never thought there is so much life and power in a piece of paper.

My last words were to God: *"Hey man, I give up. Do what you want, but don't count on me! Listening to you, I died. Good luck with the rest of the world!"*.

## reduced circumstances

*If I was good, moral, legal, and smart, then why am I here? What is this deadly lesson about? And now, that I am out of all questions, what's the point?*

Endless walking around the neighborhood and back again for the cheapest coffee in the park. I know all the leaves, birds and people, no matter the season. Back and forth to St. Mary church across the street, on Sundays. The only possible happening in my life. I know every inch of this road and the story of every brick from this building. More litigations in the company. The law around here is a big question mark. Endless days spent in court just to learn the judge mindset and to inspire from thousands of trials. Now I lost. Now I win. Now it's even. It never gets anywhere better. The more I do the right thing, the less I am and the less I have.

Everyone says to give up and to move forward. I say, *you don't understand, there is no forward here and no shortcuts*. One apartment evacuation order. The other apartment evacuation order. Countless trips to my parents' house in the country to deposit all things from the office and from the lost homes. One car gone. My father is not so well. The heart, of course. No way to reach him. The other car gone. We are like in prison here, a network of cages where we need to provide our own food and roof while at the same time we must fight with countless villains. As we are the protagonists, the others must be the villains. That's how we were taught, right? Now he is here. Now he isn't anymore.

I am falling deeper and deeper into the spirals of a life that I don't recognize and validate as being mine. There is no light in here. On the margins of life there is another life, different breeds of humans, new kind of stories and other rules. Here, all people turned into words. Though, it is the best place to live up to your values. That is a luxury you seldom see inside the circles of the ordinary world. I never imagined that words hold so much power.

I remember I judged the people who crowd and push each other in church to take away as many pieces of wafer as possible. A Black Friday kind of scene. Then, I abruptly changed my mind.

It happened that Sunday morning when I heard the bells of St. Mary's church. I woke up and I was hungry as I have never been before. I was raised in poverty, but it was my mother's poverty. She raised us alone and she learned how to make us forget about it. I never tasted my own.

That day I rushed to the church, waited restless for the priest to put an end to his preaching, pushed myself in front of everyone and grabbed the wafers. And then I stopped. *What am I doing?*

I looked around. Fallen and broken people everywhere. Different clothes, the same face. The face of poverty. Material, physical or emotional. Poor people look alike, if you noticed. I tried so much to escape it and here I am.

Wandering in the depths of the undergrounds incapable to see my capital sins.

*How deep I must fall for any of this to start making any sense?*

*How small am I supposed to become for my life to revive?*

**what if?**

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*I woke up again and I don't understand why.*

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'Why?' is a question useless to answer. A deadly spiral. A labyrinth where you can lose your mind. Whatever answer you find to a *why*, endless *why*-s pop up demanding new explanations.

What if there is no explanation? What if, whatever explanation there is, it does not matter? What if that what matters has nothing to do with understanding the way we expect understanding to be?

Falling so deep shows me something I never knew about myself. The measure of my power, of who I am, of my potential. If I could go so far towards minus infinity, then I should be capable to go at least the same distance towards plus infinity. It is a possibility I cannot ignore, especially now when I have nothing left to lose.

**What is infinity?** Its definition in the dictionary brings more light to it than Math does. *Expanding beyond.* Maybe I get it all wrong and I am not disintegrating. I am just extending beyond. Beyond of who I was not and beyond those parts of me that fulfilled their potential. In such scenario, this is, indeed, a crisis. I reached the highest point at which my level of interest and emotional response was achieved. This is the location where my depression unlocked the pain. It feels like an organ.

**What is depression?** What if it does not matter what or why is it? What if depression is not meant to torture me, but to guide me out of crisis? What if, it is my red flag, the best friend I never had? If I think about it, depression signaled this crisis long before it happened. What if depression is not a problem, but a vital part of the solution of my wellbeing?

How to awake or revive motivation when, flattened by genetic legacies, blind choices and a life that left nothing behind, my love for life faded away? **What if I say a new prayer?** Obviously, I lost my power to want naturally or maybe I've never had it. So, what if I need to build it?

I want to want.  
I want to want.  
I want to want.

'What if' is the only question that holds a promise. I need to believe in the existence of a chance. It would not be the second one as I always thought. If there is one also for me out there, it will be the first.

My life did not even begin. Will it ever? What are the odds?  
I am invisible. What if the only place I still exist is in my head?



## breaking point

My body can't take it anymore. It's cracking like a wall of glass hit by a rock. This morning I woke up just to find my teeth in the sheets. Four of them gone. Just like that.

I look in the mirror. I always had an interesting face. Now, a part of it will live at a lower level. Maybe I will do implants one day. I doubt, though, my bones will be able to take it so easily.

There are things growing and unleashing inside of me. I can feel them. They are strangers. They are my frustrations, my pain, my anger. I am eligible for heart attacks, diabetes, and the list can go on and on. This generalized inflammation can turn into anything. How resilient can I be? Who knows?

I must save appearances to get jobs. I must look digestible for society. Nobody should know I am not there anymore. People don't want to hear your problems, they have their own. Employers and clients don't need to hear you have problems you cannot solve. If you cannot solve your own, how will you solve theirs? You need to look great, fresh and in good shape. You need to have a clear mind and move like a panther. The truth is for books, speeches, and movies. The truth is your business.

My hair breaks very easily. It also changed its color and it is too long. It looks weird. I look older. I must do something radical with it to save my projection in the world. I call my hairstylist and schedule myself for Friday. I call a friend to borrow the money. A small fortune. She is the best in town.

There is a film production that hired me to do their locations scout and management. A high profile one with loads of A-list actors and producers from Americas. I have no clue what I am doing here. Neither the scriptwriter. In some mysterious way, he noticed I do not fit in. The producer has a crush on me. At the same time, I can see him struggling with guilt at the idea of cheating his wife and failing his children. His life is hard, always away from home. He is a nice-looking man. He also seems a good man. I cannot feel anything for anyone. I also have some values left. Observing is everything there is. I help him by minding my own business. *You are saved, for now. Against your will. Redemption is your punishment.*

All I have left is a pair of jeans, few T-shirts, my laptop and a pair of black boots. I don't even need a suitcase. I wear my whole life. It weighs no more than 5 kilos.

My boots are done inside. The small nails came to the surface and cut my feet. I use some napkins to make them bearable, but I feel my feet deteriorating beyond the blood that always sticks to my skin. My pain resistance increases from one day to another. I hardly can walk straight. I am not afraid of pain. I am just terrified at the idea, that because of it, I will not be able to recognize the good life, in case one day it happens. *How can you recognize the good when you never lived it? When you don't know what it is?*

I discovered an American online platform where I can solve problems for governments, businesses, and NGOs in return for money, but only if my solution is the best out of hundreds and thousands from all over the world.

My doctor told me to put myself first without any delay. What does it mean, exactly? I am at the borderline between to be or not to be. I have no resources to get out of here. I must wait for an exit door.

## good bye Romanian dream

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*The purpose of humans is to learn what good is. Mine, too.*

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I don't know what to do with myself and with my life. There is no life. Still, whatever this is, without me it wouldn't exist anymore and, with me going downhill, it would get even worse. This '*Be who you are*' thing is something I do not understand, it is not tangible, my mind cannot read, understand, or interpret things so abstract. I do not understand gurus and spiritualists. They speak a language I don't get.

At this level where I am not, I can feel my DNA changing. I can also feel that a part of it is not mine. It's my mother's, my father's and God knows who else's. Who are my ancestors? I don't know, and I don't have the time and the means to find out who they were and what the hell they did. Obviously, they didn't do a great job, otherwise why is all this on my paycheck? I feel I carry crosses on my shoulders that are not mine. I feel it organically. Maybe I am just going sideways. Who knows?

Let's imagine that my only shot to survive this is to copy someone else's behavior. What if my only way out is to find myself an idol? What if not having an idol is my deadly sin?

Who should that be? Who should I copy myself after? On what criteria shall I choose my idol? Beauty, magnetism, intelligence, power? What are all these, anyway?

I cannot find a single human being to follow 100% in behavior, as spiritual example. Maybe I haven't read enough. Or, maybe it is not a human I should look for. Maybe I should choose a saint, a prophet or a legend hero to follow. Who should that be?

Which example was the strongest in the history of humankind? How do you measure this?

Only one man was the greatest. The one who split time before and after Him. The supreme measure of power around these places.

Jesus. The son of God. We've been estranged from our ancient faith during communism. Maybe that's why I was a copy of a copy of a copy.

I will copy myself after Jesus. This time, I will be a copy after an original.

Whenever I want Him to listen, I will pray. Whenever I want Him to talk to me, I will read the Bible.

Maybe this way, I will get somewhere. Somewhere better. Maybe this way, I will find a place in this world, a purpose and a meaning. Maybe life will start making sense.

I must go to Canary Islands. I don't know why. Maybe because its climate can save me faster. I heard it does wonders. I don't have money, but I have an old friend there. I must borrow to buy the ticket. This is what I must do. *And then?* And then, I don't know, and I don't think it matters. Whatever will be, will be. *Good bye Romanian Dream! We failed each other like no others.*

## **breathe**

Flying against time feels like living against myself. I hardly can keep my head straight. Everything that composes me is in coma. My blood, my vessels, my brains, my organs, they all entered a phase of suppression.

It is the first time when I see the ocean. I always imagined seeing the ocean as a major accomplishment, like experiencing infinity.

Through the plane's small round window, I can see endless blue waters surrounding us. A perfect opportunity to die. We won't be dying alone, we will be a tribe in the air, people connected only by the plane's number and the necessity to reach the same destination on the map of the world.

A piece of floating land in the middle of nowhere. My ultimate destination. A perfect unknown.

*"Breathe! Can you feel the salt in the air? Its smell? Its taste?"*

The first words I hear, once I put my foot on the ground while my eyes are covered by a pair of sand-smelling hands. Her voice remained unchanged in the ten years that faded away in between.

*"You must be hungry!"*. I see her hiding something behind her back, but I thought they were flowers. Exotic island flowers. They are bananas. Unusually small and strong smelling very yellow bananas.

*"Canarian bananas. The best in the world. Something you never tasted."* And that was nothing but the truth.

She left Romania right after the '89 Revolution, with the first wave of emigrants long before we joined European Union. Before reaching this Spanish-African realm, she lived in many corners of the world. In most of them, she was illegal, and she experienced too many rough encounters and happenings. At some point, in a moment of despair, she closed her eyes and put her finger on the world's map. This is how she ended up here. With time, life became milder.

We met online, during a complicated time in our lives. For years, we kept each other company. It happened at the beginning of the internet. We spoke on Mirc and we used things no one remembers today. When she came to Romania, we met, and we planned my emigration to Canaria. We even bought a one-way ticket. When the time came for me to leave, I cancelled it. We never spoke since.

I named the memory of her Butterfly. She was everything I was not. She was doing all the things I always wanted to do, but I never did. Maybe I lacked her way of courage. Or, maybe I was not so in love with life as she was.

*"You gave me one month of your life. I imagine you came to collect."* She said one morning while having breakfast, after days and days filled with me sleeping.

*"I never thought of it like this. I did not think of it at all. I just did not know where to go and what to do. It is also true that I never imagined ending up at your door. Not like this, anyway."*

I must have scared her, I imagine. Something changed her irreversible during all these years. I could not put my finger on it.

## ray of hope

One morning, I received an email. My first solution in that American platform turned out to be a winner. It was about helping diabetes patients by designing an online platform to match their medication with food. They awarded me \$5,000. At the same time, after a crazy online confrontation I forgot about, the scammers who tricked me to buy a zero-value educational program decided to pay back the money.

*"I will stay here for a while. Will you help me find a home?"*, I told Butterfly, as soon as I got the news.

*"Don't get too comfortable. Once you put yourself together, you will go fly your flight."*

*"The only way left for me to fly is to crawl fast enough."*

*"You came to the right place. This is the lizards' world. They can teach you everything about crawling."*

*"What if I don't want to leave?"*

*"You never knew what you wanted."*

The perfect second month in my life began. With her again. This time in her paradise, a piece of the world that conquered my heart forever. The realm of Eternal Spring. At times, I felt I reached Atlántida.

Maybe that is why I could remember her, because she was the symbol of good in my life. Just be. She taught me to just be. She inflicted love for life in my system and the hope I can feel joy. At least from time to time. Enough to not forget it. I remember she loved nature, she could see I cannot see.

I lived with her and with her two *Podenco* dogs for a month and so, in Santa Cruz, the capital of the island. She had an old dog and a crazy dog. Her home was very tiny, it was a former shelter for chickens placed on the edges of a *barranco*. She turned it into a warm home. The bathroom had neither window or doors. It had a summer red curtain instead, and a hole in the wall instead of window. You could always talk to the moon and to an old palm tree bending from the breeze while showering. I always felt a pale of sadness in that tree, as if it witnessed too many stories. Or, maybe because it was protecting a hospital facility where the windows wore bars. Or, maybe because it was overlooking the tallest bridge in the city, one that I heard was the favorite spot for many to end their lives.

*"How can anyone end it in a place like this?"* I once asked her, feeling at the same time as an intentional or helpless naive. Couldn't decide which one.

*"This is the closest place to heaven you can get. If not here, where?"* she said, while her eyes slipped on the fridge.

It is the first time when I notice a piece of paper hanging on it under the weight of a magnet. A paper with a date. Tomorrow. The magnet reveals two flamenco dancers. They are happy. Someone else's dream.

I wonder what it means. If she wanted me to know, she would have told me. She comes with the idea to go on hiking to Semáforo de Iguete de San Andrés, a place she heard about. Before finishing my thoughts, we are out of the house heading towards another new corner of this piece of heaven. I let it go.

### **camino Igueste de San Andrés**

A rocky road. A long route where you cannot find a place to hide from the burning sun, a drop of water or anything to hold on to. We do not know how long it is or if we are going to make it to the top or not, we just go on and on. It is the breathtaking scenery that pushes us upper and upper. There is no one else. Just us and the dogs.

I feel the sun melting whatever is left of my former DNA. *What am I turning into?*

She is ahead with her thoughts. I am behind with my own. Dogs are patient with us.

From one point further, there are no thoughts left wandering in my mind. I feel easy. For a moment, nothing seems impossible anymore. I remember what one of our priests once said: *Thoughts are like helicopters. They fly around, it is what they do. Just don't grant them permission to land.*

The light. I have never seen the kind of light this island hosts. It is so healing and powerful. It goes directly to your roots and makes you feel at home. It has the power to drag you out of yourself. To help you see, breath and enjoy. It has the force to give life a sense.

Igueste de San Andrés. A faithful reflection of life.

*What am I doing here?*

### **the South or the land of castaways**

A crowded place built in a desert area filled with cactuses from all families. A symbol of the world I escaped from or from the world that spilled me out. One I cannot return to. One that is not a way, anymore. A former love story, the kind you don't want to remember.

Lost in new ways. Still, not in all ways. People who go South and me, today more than yesterday.

They smile by default for reasons I do not see and understand. They love to get high and drunk from dusk to dawn. People who invest everything they have in damaging their brains.

*Why are these people here? How did they choose this place and not another?*

Many are castaways or chronically ill and crippled, people who came here to help their body turn into a milder recipient. Many are also retired, people who live well here from the money coming in from their home countries. I have not seen in a long-time people reaching so old ages. They look immortal and suspiciously happy.

I understand hard or not at all their kind of happiness. It is too shining. It blinds me. It even hurts me at times.

They seem like coming from better worlds. Less frustrated, less hurt. They are happier, but they are not free as they think they are. That much I can tell. Freedom and happiness are two different stories.

The attachment of the ideas of *good* and *more* has roots too deep to set ourselves free so easily. This South is not about freedom, it is about the culture of weakness.

## Candelaria

Candelaria hosts the mysteries of the nine *Mencey* and the *homes* of pirates. Like the entire island, but here you can feel it deeper. The energy of the place is different. It lures you, while at the same time it makes you feel anxious. Maybe it is its closeness to the ocean and the sound of it. Maybe it is the black virgin holding a black replication of Jesus in her arms, Candelaria, the one who protects this small old city.

It is love at first sight.

It is also where I taste the Canarian cousine for the first time.

I feel it the place where I can write endless books in whatever language rises above first. I also feel that every stranger who collides with this place feels the same.

It is the way you feel here. Peaceful enough to wrap your thoughts into words.

*I could make this town my second home.*

Butterfly gives me the best she has and the best of her. She is serious about bringing me back to life and very creative and spontaneous about it. I feel my presence also helps her in some ways. It's like it gives her a purpose. The purpose to save me or to be a major part of my salvation. She sees more than I can see. She feels more than I can feel.

Her light presence helps me breath. She cannot live life without making a story out of each detail. Her imagination is extraordinary. I wonder what's on the other side of this shining coin. Something is missing from her eyes. I can see its absence. When I look at her, I see a Matryoshka. She knows that I know. She can see that I see. She also knows that I don't know what I know.

The sunset takes my breath away. A mother and her children look for crabs on the black beach.

She leads me to a table by the sea. My reactions amuse her. I cannot see myself from outside, but I imagine there are times when I am completely lost and clueless.

*"Not knowing what to do and say was always part of your charm."* she told me while savoring her cigarette.

*"Do you find insecurity charming?"*

*"Yours only."*

*"Are you trying to conquer me?"*

*"Am I successful?"*

We laugh. To fill in the blanks.

Maybe I should not interrupt her play. Her dance is so particular. Tempted to say special. I am too serious. It's the only way I know. Maybe I should let her teach me her way. Here and now, in Candelaria, the beginning of a new beginning may write its first chapter. The nine Mencey guarding the sea are the most inspiring witnesses. Why not? *I am so dead tired.* She says I am just wounded.

## the notebooks

"Do you remember this?", she asks.

She comes to sit next to me with an incredibly old notebook that I recognize. It is one of the two identical notebooks I bought ages ago when we travelled that August around Romania. We were supposed to write a one-page letter to each other, each in her own notebook, and to exchange them at my arrival on the island. I wrote her letters she never read until the day I changed my mind. She wrote me letters I never read until the same day. It was Christmas. A hot one in her world, very cold in mine.

One of her inner scars wears the signature of my hand.

*Is this why I am here? To heal her from my cut? To make things straight? Was it a painful one? Was it a deadly one? How many people did I hurt more and deeper than I imagined? Do I remember them all?*

Now that I am thinking at the notebooks, I find it both silly and romantic. *Am I getting too old? Or it is just my inner paralysis? I miss parts of myself from those days. Green parts. Lost parts. Irreversible lost? I wonder.*

"I can't believe you still have this." I replied, genuinely surprised. She caught me off guard, like always.

"I can't believe it either. Do you want to read it?" She looks at me with familiar eyes.

"Not yet."

I jump out of bed and leave the room. She does not understand.

The dogs don't wait for another chance to take my place. She speaks with them in Spanish, a language that pushed her Romanian out while time passed by. She looks, talks, and behaves like a native.

"What about you? Do you remember?" I give her my twin notebook.

She did not see that coming. Not from a heartless and predictable someone like me, as she labeled me once in a moment of frustration. Or, maybe it was the truth. Who knows?

"Why didn't you say anything during all this time?"

"I didn't want you to get it wrong. I waited to figure it out. Anyway, here it is! Now, can I have yours?"

"Not, yet!" She jumped out of the bed taking both notebooks. "We are busy this evening. Let's move!"

"Where are we going so late?"

"It's a surprise!"

I don't know my thoughts about surprises. I tend to resist them, I am a control freak. Even if I love them sometimes, I don't know how to manifest my joy. Insecure people believe they did a mistake. If I tell them this is not true, they don't believe me. They say I am just polite. There are no winners here.

Butterfly never goes wrong and she does not feel intimidated by me. She is always sure. Especially when she is wrong.

## supermoon

There is something mysteriously magic about the moon. It is a living creature. Here you can feel it more profoundly. *Who is the stranger watching it from the other side?* I wonder. *Will we ever meet? Why should we?*

It's beyond midnight and Butterfly drives slowly on a dark mountain road. I am very curious to read her notebook. A Spanish love song covers the silence between us. It reminds me of Penelope Cruz. Redundant thoughts.

"You always loved the moon!" she suddenly speaks.

"Always. And always wondered why. Don't you?"

"You know sun is my lover." She laughs.

She is a tropical lizard.

"Do you remember when I made you a princess in that castle?" she asks.

"You made me a crown of wild flowers. My first and last moment as a princess. I am not the type. What were you thinking?"

"The blue of your eyes. What if it was you the angel I've been praying for?"

"I know I was not."

"You were not, but you looked like the one I was dreaming."

"What was I?"

"Something in between."

"We were in between."

"Aren't we, still?"

"I don't know where I am. I feel the edges of the margins."

"If there are margins, there is a beyond."

The greatness of Mount Teide unravels without notice. This moon is its crown. The magnetism of this volcano tells a story in a language my soul hears, but my mind does not understand. Another creature living at 4,000 meters above the ocean. Billions of stars suddenly surround us under the mesmerizing light of this queen moon. I am sure I can touch the sky. That close it feels. We are close to Observatorio, one of the most notorious astronomy establishments in the world. Its alien architecture leads you to believe you are not here anymore.

I've never experienced moon nights this way. The meaning of light just changed its sense.

We sit on a rock covered with a blanket. The dogs can finally rest. I read her never sent letters to my younger self. She reads mine. They are so childish. She has not changed. I did. In ways I do not agree with.



### **an unexpected question**

There is not an electrifying chemistry between us. There is only a sweet inertia. Chemistry went out of my question and I was not there to stop its departure. I am no longer a human. I am a creature. Turned into ashes by its own fire. God may not even remember my name.

This evening predicts an emotionless human interaction.

She is here. I am here.

I can feel her calling. The other side of her fluid sexuality shows its full face. No make-up. No masks.

She wants me to hunt her.

I stopped feeding my hunger long time ago.

There is a gap between the 'Why not?' question and its possible answers.

I think too much.

"You think too much"

She is getting closer.

I am getting closer.

Gently. In my head. In her head, I attack her like a beast. She fears me.

She stops.

I do not.

In my head, I caress her.

In her head, I aggress her.

I do not understand her play.

I think too much.

"You think too much."

She is getting closer.

I don't.

She always had beautiful hair. Long. Rich. Generous. Red. It is the secret of her power. Once, she had to cut it. She suffered tremendously. She cried for days.

"What happened with your tenderness?" A gap filled with more words. She asks.

I did not expect to see myself in this mirror. I had no clue I am disabled.

## interrupted

Across the barranco there is a small wild church set in stone. There are always lighted candles there. Covered by cactus trees and flowers of colors I never knew exist, its beauty stays hidden. It is the only church where candles are not electric, where you do not get divine light in exchange for euro cents.

It is a light and clear morning. Spring is like winter. Time has no meaning here.

My sleep got milder, sweeter. I don't want to wake up. The heaviness of being awake is not something I want to face today. I hear the bells of the goats crossing the barranco each morning. It is a sound that reminds me of a distant childhood. One that I don't recognize as being mine.

The land phone rings hysterically.

She is an early bird. *Why doesn't she answer it?*

The dogs are wandering around.

The breeze dances with the red curtains.

The absurd ringing does not stop.

I open an eye and look at the couch where she usually sleeps. I can see her legs. She sleeps. She probably went to bed late, as usual and she is unplugged, out in the universe to recharge.

I get up and answer the phone. The loud Spanish voice of a woman makes a hole in my ear. I speak with her in English. It is not her thing. I can't spell a single word in Spanish. My brain cannot ingest languages.

*"Hasta luego!"*

*"Ok."*

I try gently to wake her up. She does not react in any way. I try the harder way. Useless. I am awake now. I get her up and shake her.

She is still here. Somehow unconscious. I give her water. She is a prisoner of a scary heavy sleep. Her words are bubbles. Beginnings only. She hardly breaths.

She left me a happy breakfast on the table. Drawings from fruits and biscuits on the plate, coffee and the usual message of the day written with chock on the black table. It makes no sense. Capital letters, symbols of something. Thoughts interrupted.

I don't understand. I don't know what to do. I light a cigar. I watch her for minutes. The calendar on the wall shows the same date from that piece of paper hanging on the fridge. I read it for the first time. I don't understand anything, but it seems it belongs to a hospital. An appointment or maybe a prescription of some sort.

I look in the garbage. I don't know why. Never did it. Nothing strange in the kitchen. I try again in the bathroom. I see a pill. It has a symbol carved. I look for it on the web. I find its name. I look for the hospital on the web. I find it. I connect more dots from more days and from years ago. Schizophrenia.

## answers to questions never asked

Pills abuse. Drug abuse. Sex abuse.

At times she needs a break from life. She says. It is not abuse. She says.

When voices step in, they tell her how many pills to take and how. She makes small groups of ten or more and each time she is awakening, she takes more. She sleeps with them in her pockets.

*How can I tell the difference between good voices and bad voices?* She asks me once.

She wakes up after two or three days, she behaves perfectly for another day or two, her mind is sharper than any mind I know, including mine, then she forgets everything, a void installs itself in her memory, and then, everything comes back to normal. Once a month, she is totally out, for a week or so. At times, she disappears. She speaks with people I never knew existed in her life, goes in places I have no clue about and does things I hardly can imagine. Her phone is overcrowded with dark porn, devils of many breeds and things that scare the shit out of me.

I call her brother. He chokes with tears while at the same time he tells me there is nothing to worry about. *It's how she is. It's how she handles it. There is nothing we can do.* He says. I want to call 112. He says they'll lock her up in rooms with bars, if I do. I don't.

*What if she dies?* I wonder. *Without me calling any emergency service? I'd look way crazier than anyone. I am crazier. If I leave, am I abandoning the 'crime' scene? If I stay, how can I survive?*

Teams of social assistants start to show up at the door from time to time. She fears them. When they come, she plays the role of the numb. *Is she faking the diagnostic? What is she fearing about?*

Money. She fears that if she doesn't look schizophrenic enough, they'll declare her sane and she will lose her monthly special pension. They fill up some forms and send them to the court of law. At first, they said she lost 50% of her mental and working capacities. This year, they say she lost her entire mental and working abilities. She does not think so. She is convinced she screwed the system.

This is it. The missing part of her look.

*I wonder what all this says about me. It does not look good. Am I, too, close to a similar outcome? Is this another mirror of my unseen disabilities? What am I doing here?*

She designed for herself a fascinating surviving system. She notes down every piece of dream she dreams right after she wakes up. She writes a daily journal on an extremely specific notebook she can only find in one shop. Annually, she makes maps and summaries of her journals to mark her pathway, to not forget.

From time to time, she allows me to read them. She paints. She draws. She has dozens of diplomas and certificates of endless courses and schools she graduated. She can be a nurse, a chef, a secretary, a travel agent, a real estate broker and anything else you can imagine. There is so much originality, so many unique perspectives and life angles. Colors you have never seen. She is not a lizard. She is a chameleon.

I see all my blind spots in her mirrors. I see and feel how she sees me. My twisted, dirty, and ugly parts are all amplified. She can see my darkness. I can see hers. *Are we in the same spot?*

## bridges

In her worst days, she parks her car straight. In my best days, I am not.

Melted by chronic stress, my brain floats randomly in its own juice. Rough extremes melted hers. The 'Why-s' don't matter. The effect is the same.

Looking from above there is no difference between us from the sanity perspective. She has a paper saying so. I don't. This is where the line stands between us.

Her paper protects her survival. She has her base covered. I don't.

I don't know how I reach tomorrow. There are no safety nets. In the meantime, problem solving filled in the gaps, but I only live if I am the best out of hundreds and thousands in the world. I win award after award. One may think I am a small genius. I know this truth. I am not. I am just a player desperate to survive. I don't get second chances and can't afford second choices. It's one shot, always.

*What if I wake up one day just to see I cannot rise above the crowds, anymore? How do I get out from these radically reduced circumstances? I can do so much for others and nothing for me.*

It is her birthday. I can feel in the air that our time is up. Soon enough, we will split ways and we'll probably never meet again. I just don't know what the trigger will look like and how intense the consequences will be.

I want to leave her something to hold on to, a bridge she can walk on in her worst moments. Her worst moments are beyond words.

*I don't take my pills. You must understand. She says crying her heart out. If I do, they turn me into a numb monster. You can't imagine their side effects. If I don't, unexpected hallucinations step in. She says. Tell me what to do and I will do it!*

It tears my soul apart. *"Try to figure it out how to have a good relationship with them. What if they are friends trying to teach you something?"* I say fearing of giving the worst possible piece of advice.

It is such a shock to meet a person today and years after, to meet that person emptied in inexplicable ways. The missing unseen can have a significant impact in ways I cannot wrap into words. I see an abandoned child imprisoned in a network of cages surrounded by demanding creatures from other worlds.

I am clueless. This story is way above my head. I hold no knowledge or wisdom. Witnessing is the only choice available. There are no saviors. Strugglers, only.

Years ago, I took a picture of her. A faithful mirror of her robustness and happiness. I turn it into a poster. I try to find a good enough spot to hang it on. I fail. She loves it.

She finds the place that makes the most sense. On the ceiling, above her bed. *"Don't you think this is where I should be?"* Looking at this whole picture from above, it looks uncomfortable and almost creepy. The only thing that stops any deviant sensation is the beauty of the picture and the intention behind it.

## the depths of light

She wakes up in a state of complete emptiness and sadness.

She goes out to walk the dogs. I go out to pray in that small church set in stone, across the barranco. I cry so much during this time of my life and I am not even crying for myself. I cry for a stranger I bounded with.

After enough pain, you turn into stone. You don't even know what to pray for anymore, you don't know what or how to think, what or how to ask, you don't know where to go or why. Our priests say endurance is a prayer on its own.

Being at the mercy of the Unseen is an awfully hard state of being. I have never imagined myself ending up in such foggy places. *Is there any way back? If so, what to return to?*

There is nothing backwards. There is nothing forward.

Everyone believed I will do remarkable things in life and in this world. Everyone was wrong.

Looking behind, I realize this journey is the natural outcome of my premises. An algorithm. I am part of a crowded statistic. The altered side of my nature led me naturally all the way.

There is no healing for this missing part. Still, I feel it as being the entire me. *Can I become someone else?*

I come back with a lighted small candle. She comes back with a dead dragon-fly. She turns off the light of my candle with her fingers, pins the dragon-fly in it and places it next to her other souvenirs.

*"Isn't it beautiful?"* she asks, speaking with herself.

She takes a hand of pills and fades away.

Days later, a friend of hers comes to visit. She is a homeless young woman, mother of a child and a drug addict. She lives with another woman in the home of a much older man who married her out of compassion. He does not have family, so he took them all under his care. Now, the man is dying. He was a colonel in the army, has a decent house, good insurance, and a small fortune. He leaves it all to them.

The woman does not see she is not here. Butterfly makes no effort to hide her recent pills overdose side-effects. She hardly keeps her eyes open. The woman just needs to spill her heart out and her advice in a variety of crucial matters. The imminent death of her paper-husband genuinely affects her. She goes to hospital every day and takes care of him.

Butterfly listens and speaks with confidence in a slow motion way. The young woman listens to her like a disciple listens his guru. She leaves vital parts of her life in Butterfly's hands. She cries, she stops, she cries again. She leaves with hope and gratitude. She promises Butterfly she will give her a part of the inheritance.

They are a family bounded by unknown stories and unimaginable depths. I can see Butterfly's purpose in the world she ended up. There are people much broken and lost than her. She is a ray of light for the tribe she found. *"Why did she come?"* she asks, while slipping into forgetfulness. I am just a necessary witness.

### **a man dies on the island**

The young woman's husband died. I have never been to the funeral of a stranger. Not at home and not here, worlds away, on this floating piece of land. If this man did not die, I would have forgotten to imagine that death happens also here. The island makes you forget about it. You seldom get ill, the climate makes you look the same for ages, and the eternal spring does not allow you to feel time passing by. Death is not in the dictionary.

Butterfly leaves a new life again this month. She drives us to a place where the man's friends and family gathered to mourn him. *"Last year, a truck filled with the ashes of the dead had an accident. The ash clouded the sky that morning. For weeks they lived on our shoes."* She says. *"They seldom bury them here, the land is rocky, we are on a volcano, so they burn them."*

I feel sick. A fugitive memory steps in. I was scouting a location for a film production back home and I ended up at an old crematory, an architectural masterpiece. The place was closed when I arrived, so I wandered for a while taking notes and drawing sketches. A tall beautiful window called me to look in. It was hosting a room with many shelves and urns of diverse sizes and colors sitting next to each other. We are Christian Orthodox back home and they bury us when time comes. I had never seen a crematory before, I did not know at once what those urns are, but the strange peace of that room attracted me like a magnet. *"They are the forgotten ones."* The guard who silently came near told me. *"This is the room where we put the ones nobody came to collect."* A pale of rooted sadness was ready to take over, when a thought reached there first. *If you survive long enough, longer than anyone you know, you end up here.*

Butterfly stops near a luxury small hotel. At the entrance, behind the reception, a nice-looking man dressed up in a black suit, welcomes us smiling. Above the desk there is an electronic board just like the ones you see in the airports. On one column there are names, on another column there are room numbers and floors. From time to time, new names replace existing names. I am confused.

My confusion fades away when I hear the receptionist telling us that our dead man lives at room 24, third floor. We are at a dead hotel. I did not see that coming. I expected a chapel or some sort of incinerator. *"People with expensive insurance get the royal treatment till the end."* She says. We take the glass elevator at the end of the hall. This hotel is fully booked. There are people coming in and out from the open rooms, talking to each other on the long corridors covered with modern carpets. Nobody is crying.

Room 24 is a one room apartment with all amenities. Kitchen, bathroom with shower, towels and slippers for the guests, a small living room where family and friends have a snack and a drink while sitting comfortable on a couch. And there is the 'bedroom'. The place where the dead man lies in peace, a place surrounded by walls of transparent glass, a temperature-controlled environment. You cannot go in. The room is perfectly sealed. His young wife and relatives say good-bye from the other side of the walls. I find out they have 24 hours left to close this affair. When their time is up, some folks step in, take the man to the incinerator and bring a new guest in. It is an industry with a highly efficient operational flow.

I cannot see the coffin. I imagine we are not supposed to see it. It is a symbol that may damage our positive thinking. From time to time people forget where they are and why and start talking about their daily lives while having another drink. The man's wife struggle with herself to feel what she is supposed to feel. Suppressed emotions against her will put a mark of guilt on her face. I miss my 'barbarian' homeland.

### **good bye, Butterfly**

Her quality of life is much better than mine in so many aspects of life. She found a home. She has close friends, she has a stable revenue from her pension, she does whatever she wants, she does not need anyone, there are no limitations in her life, and she does not perceive her fallings as dramatically as I do. They are necessary lateral steps. I was sad for her, she was not. She lives more happy days than I do. Most of my days are flat. She is free in ways I am not and in ways I do not want to be.

I feel good in my skin. I would not trade my unknown with her known. I suppose this feeling is mutual. On another note, she taught me schizophrenia may not be the problem we think it is. It may not be a problem at all or, it may be part of a solution.

The brief time our lives intersected made me realize one difference between me and the people I could not choose. I never stopped.

We split ways on a Tuesday at midnight.

The dogs were sleeping, she was writing down something on her notebooks in the living room and I was reading in the bedroom. Our Venezuelan neighbor was playing at guitar the same old songs he plays to his wife each Tuesday evening. The supermoon was up, filling the night clouds with its light.

I was slowly falling asleep when she stormed into the room yelling and saying things that made no sense. She was so upset and so angry. Her blue eyes were stoned-red filled with tears and white shades of something covered her lips.

I did not say a word. I was just sitting, watching, and listening.

The more I sat there, the more she went sideways.

When I began to wrap my things, she stopped. She did not say another word. She was just sitting, watching, and listening.

A blue green small lizard crossed the room from one side to another, climbing on the wall and letting herself out of the window.

Time was up.

I sat down on my blue suitcase and lighted up a cigarette.

She opened the door, sat down on the entrance stairs and lighted herself a cigarette.

Surrounded by smoke, we were staring at each other.

I left without looking back. I have not heard her closing the door, but I could feel her watching me leaving.

Walking down on the streets of Santa Cruz on the soundtrack of my suitcase rolling. The light of the tropical night led my way.

Passing by the theatre, its iconic grand mask standing out at its entrance unraveled a new feeling.

I am free.

## **the Valley of Orotava**

I headed North. It was greener, and I loved it more.

Sitting on a night taxi, a piece of Canarian folklore was breaking through an improvised CD player. There is so much happiness in the way these people sing their hearts out. Their lives are not easier, but in some mysterious way, they know to handle life better. Few got any education and have good jobs, the rest are struggling to make their way out through farming, fishing, and tourism. They never complain. They only celebrate.

There is nothing as mesmerizing as the Valley of Orotava at night.

Guarded by the pick of Teide volcano on one side and by the ocean on the other, no other feelings or thoughts shadow your heart when passing by. It is only a silent happiness that fills it. For a few moments you feel complete, you feel you are enough. The millions of lights signaling hundreds of thousands of people from all cultures living in this valley remind you of your own light.

No fears. No anxiety. No shadows. No hardness.

Life is milder here.

It is one of those clear nights when the stars fall where we live. A wonder of the skies that make you feel like you are seeing God at work. You can imagine thousands of eyes watching this night show. You can feel no one is sleeping.

The Spanish driver hears my wonder and stops the car in a mirador.

Two strangers standing by each other to watch the sky showering with the stars over the valley. The voice of the ocean calls for admiration.

I do not know this man's name. He does not know mine. It does not matter.

We just are.

It is how this island is. A realm where strangers meet to go with each other for a mile or two. To witness each other's existence. To remind each other they still are.

I do not question life. I do not question my future. I do not question myself.

Not tonight.

A feeling of ease fills my heart.

This is how happiness begins. With the dissolution of hardness, I dare to believe.

This easiness of heart brought back the memory of my first night out with Butterfly. She took me to the Carnival. The one that takes place each January in Santa Cruz and the biggest after Rio. It was my first Carnival. My first happy day. The first time I was able to have fun. We were pink pirates. I have never been a pirate before.



## **Puerto de la Cruz**

Edificio Luna, Plaza del Charco, a small studio at the fourth floor.

It is where my life waited for me for another year. In what was once the port of Orotava city.

A vibrant cultural place on the edge of the ocean. It is also where Agatha Christie wrote some of her novels and where many titans ended up at some point in their lives. Today, a tourism hot spot. The names of the buildings and the commercial logos and slogans seem to be signs I follow without knowing.

Edificio Luna is right in the heart of the most popular spot in the city. It is what I needed. The sound of life at full volume. I rented it out from some real estate agents who happened to trust my face. Trust is a challenge on this island, a bigger one than anywhere else I know. Life may be milder here, but the jungle is wilder.

I stopped wondering what I am doing here and how long I will be staying on this faraway place. There are not too many things I can do to turn my life around. I don't know Spanish, remaining here was never part of the plan.

I feel captive at times. There are days when I feel like Papillon from the film with the same name. Each time I reach the end of the land, I reach an end of myself. I am aware God sent me in a milder prison. To catch my soul, to put myself together, to refine my thoughts. Maybe even to choose my way. I am isolated worlds away from the world. Here, life has a different rhythm and meaning.

I read somewhere this sensation has a name *the island syndrome*. Now that I feel better, there are days when I want to leave. The repetition of this feeling makes me realize that I always wanted to leave from where I was, that I could not settle anywhere.

Maybe because I did not find my purpose, yet. I don't understand my meaning. I cannot find any single reason to leave. There is no home I can return to. The bridges are all burnt behind.

Puerto teaches me patience. Something almost impossible to learn with ease as a human being.

There are days when I imagine the universe as a mechanical clock, crowded with wheels of all dimensions. I feel they need to finish their rotations and once they do, my pathway will unravel itself. There are lives I influenced, things I altered, people I hurt, orders I troubled. Some of them I do not even remember. I am not aware of the dimension of my influence on the mechanism of life.

All these actions have consequences. They need a time of their own to resettle. Probably. I cannot prove it scientifically. My life must wait for this process. Or, maybe it is God who hasn't decided yet what to do with me.

In the meantime, I do whatever I can, from where I am, with what I have at hand. Myself, a laptop, and internet. I learn, I write, I solve problems, I explore, I wait. I take an English-speaking job and work whatever. Puerto does not let me suffer in any way. I feel protected, it makes my solitude bearable. Its nature is silent. I know it is winter because the roses in my garden left a few petals on the ground. Change is not brutal here and nothing is radical. Nature teaches me different lessons in this place.

### **an unexpected encounter**

I dreamt my father for the first time after he died. We were wandering around the island. He was peaceful. I was peaceful. We sat on a rock next to each other and watched the ocean.

He never saw an ocean before and neither had I. We never travelled together anywhere. We were just dreaming of it, separately. It was too late when he was better with himself, but not too late to let me know. He died quite young at 59 in a beautiful spring morning. I remember nature blooming. Soon after that, I left the country and reached this island.

“What are you thinking of doing in this place?” he asked without talking.

“I don’t know. I wait to find out. How are you on the other side? Did you find your place in heavens?”

I woke up before his answer.

I had a shower, my morning coffee, and the thought of going up on mount Teide slipped in. The magnetism of this volcano had a strange effect on me right from the beginning.

That morning I heard its calling.

I rented a car and before knowing it, here I was. Above the clouds walking on lava from past eruptions in a spot that resembled nothing from Earth.

Surrounded by my own sound and by what was once fire only, I found myself on top of the world, above all things and places, between clouds and beyond, in a place where not even birds can fly.

Time and space seemed illusions and their dissolution revealed all versions of who I am. Everything I ever was in this life and others, everything I am and everything I will ever be appeared as one, as if I was between mirrors and my reflection was endless in all directions. I could feel my core falling together, my mind, my heart and my spirit falling into line. Meeting myself in such an unexpected way was something that kneeled my pragmatism.

Weeks later, I moved to a new building called Edificio Bellaterra. A friend from abroad came to visit for the first time. He is a therapist. Years ago, during his youth, he had been diagnosed with bipolar syndrome. Now he treats patients alike. He fell in love with the island and before leaving it, he wrote this poem.

“It is about you.” He said.

It is about you. I say.

### **Lava heart**

Lava heart is a symbol. It could be yours. When it was born, it was liquid, it was soft. Heat, fire, tightly embracing everything it found. On its way, it had to learn to fight violence. Still has. It needed hardness, that kind of toughness that made it survive. A brilliant warrior. It made it who and what it is. Moving on its cycles, it realizes its capacity to be melted again. Melted not to be soft and accept everything, but fire to fight and fire to heat its own heart.

### **falling for a stranger**

When we met, the whole world burst out. The trees were burning, good men, women and children were burning, and we were the same. Only our eyes were not.

Two devils from different tribes, meeting at the crossroads.

You got closer. Playful. I got closer. Curious. Intrigued, you wanted more.

We kissed. I touched you with my fingertips.

You hungrily grabbed my hand and wrapped yourself around it.

Shall we move together, or shall we say good bye?

We pushed each other away.

We were still hoping we can become angels.

We freaked out, baby. That's all.

Falling for a stranger was never part of the template.

### **born to doubt**

I'd feel better with myself

Saying loud the holly words

I...

don't know how to break through

doubts and thoughts that settle in

each time I...

love

or not

I never know

God! Push me in!

or out

but don't keep me here.

### **Canarian dream. the beginning of a different story.**

My first job on the island. A real estate agency run by a family of nice middle age Belgians. I was hoping to learn more Spanish by having a local job, but that was not the case. Only English, French and Dutch. Welcome South! The place I never wanted or planned. And hold on girl on a daily commuting of 200 km from North to South and retour for three days a week. Small salary just to cover my transport expenses.

During the interview I said with confidence that I am ready to come to work immediately. In reality, I borrowed money to go to that interview and I needed to borrow more to hold on until the first pay check. There is where I found that the first thought of any new comer was *"I want to live here forever! I want to buy a house!"*

It was Wednesday and everything seemed normal until I found myself running in front of an overweight family of noisy Italians, trying hard to keep up with a half drunk Irish lady in a red evening dress.

The south of the island was volcanic that day. Overcrowded with half-naked tourists speaking languages from all corners of the world at over 35 Celsius degrees, I could hardly hear my thoughts, if any. I did not have enough napkins in my pockets to wipe out the sweat I was drowning into and nothing to chill out the burning redness of my cheeks.

When we fast turned left towards an older neighbourhood, the Afro men selling souvenirs winked at me and showed some drugs. As usually, I pretend I haven't noticed. He didn't seem to have a problem with that. His experience told the story of persistence. Sooner or later both tourists and residents do give up and try something. All he needed to do was just to be there. I was neither a tourist or a resident, I was in between.

She was not in the mood of real estating that late morning. Judging her rush, she wanted to get rid of us as fast as possible. Maybe the Italians were the reason, after all. She had enough experience to know they often come with small budgets, want to see everything over their possibilities and eventually to buy whatever they afford from another agent, most probably Italian, too.

Anyways, I felt like a punished horse. From fifty to fifty meters she told us there is less than a minute until our location, and this is how this journey took half an hour of fitness against our will.

*"What is she saying?"* the biggest of the family asked.

*"Right after the corner. Just a few more steps."* I replied with a fake smile that always made me look as if something went wrong at my birth.

*"I hope it's worth jogging there!"*, the wife replied almost choking.

We finally got there. I was crushed instantly at the realization there will be no sale for me that day and after that day, probably neither that week.

It was the most ugly and dirty complex from the entire resort. We climbed stairs after stairs and went through a complex network of twisted corridors, just to end up in the same place over and over. She

needed about fifteen minutes to remember how to get there. There was no elevator and the building itself was a maze.

The reflection of her old red evening dress into the green dirty water of the community pool reminded me about the itchy eye of water in the countryside where we used to wallow as children. *What kind of childhood this woman had?* I wondered. She seemed born pissed off.

Ending up on the last floor, we finally reached the apartment. An old wooden door with a fragile lock was standing proud in front of us. After arranging her dress and long messy hair, she began to try the keys. One after the other, none of them worked. The door was still there, closed. And we were still there, desperate.

The Italians began to speak louder and louder on their language, as if they had a mass breakdown. It was enough to give her a brilliant idea. To throw herself into the door like a rugby player.

The door hit the wall. With our eyes popping out of our boiling heads, we all turned mute.

She arranged her dress and said forcing a smile: *"Please, come in! Feel like home!"*

We entered in turns, one after another, walking on the top of our toes. We pretended to look around while bumping into each other each time one of us turned around. On fast forward, we went out the same as we got ourselves in.

She closed the door with confidence. The Italians pretended interested and in a sudden rush, at the same time. They all headed with small fast steps towards the exit, while I remained behind to process what kind of happening was that. Probably also to ask myself once again *"What are you really planning to do with your life?"*

An unexpected deafening noise scared the shit out of me. The old door hit the floor.

In slow motion, a thick cloud of dust rose above. The sun rays breaking in hardly through the dirty windows hit me between the eyes, making me see a scenario of my nearest future with perfect clarity, scene after scene.

*I'll get back even more depressed in the office. They'll fire me, eventually. Pushed by new adversities, I'll start doing great things, probably I will even find my way on the way. Sooner than expected, all my struggles will be rewarded and I'll be very happy. From time to time, I'll laugh at the memory of the Irish woman in red dress who decided my entire future with just a push.*

Well, I am still laughing at the memory of her.

## **grow old along with me**

*"Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made. Our times are in his hand who saith, 'A whole I planned, youth shows but half; Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!'"* – Robert Browning

Happy and restless humans pop up out of nowhere in the agency. They talked as if they knew us from a lifetime. A couple of seniors more alive and vivid than anyone I know. She was 78 or so, and he was more or less on the same page.

They fell in love a few days ago on the continent and decided to relocate here in Wonderland, to live the rest of their lives and fulfill their blooming love story.

What place is better for such a beautiful purpose other this fairy tale realm? I wonder.

These two knew exactly what they were doing despite our concerns for their temporary insanity. The only insanity worth living for and turning your life upside down, if you ask me. But don't go there!

They entered our office dressed in beach uniform, singing Spanish songs and speaking freely about their feelings and plans. And like any respected fresh lovers, they wanted to share their joy and happiness with the entire world.

Willing or not, trusting their rationals or not, here we were, wrapped up in their story without having enough time to think about it or to hesitate.

What charmed me the most was their own way of communicating with each other and with us. She was the speaker. He was the listener. But the only words he could hear were her words. Each time we told her something, she repeated it to him like an interpret. In very rare occasions he troubled to say something. In a mysterious way understood by them only, they agreed or not on one thing or another.

She knew exactly what she was looking for. Once we made eye contact, I knew she won't stop until she finds the right one. It was all about that for her. When she did not like it, she firmly nod *"No. This is not it. Let's go to the next one!"* It had to be the one, the exact home she envisioned it.

Love at first sight. Settling for less was out of the question.

We found it for her. Once she laid her eyes on it, he decided on spot. In a couple of days, they bought themselves a property against the despair of their children from previous lives and marriages.

How I loved watching those two and being part of their film! For the first time I felt hope again.

It seems love is never late. This island inspires people in the most unexpected ways.

After this encounter, I needed a song to make my heart remember its dream. I listened for weeks La Paloma by Andre Rieu live in Mexico.

### **a stormy walk in Garachico**

It is a tropical outside and we have already rented a car. We did it yesterday when it was sunny. A very unhappy old white car that needs pushing to move uphill.

A friend from home came to spend a few days here. When they come, I miss going.

The wind almost washes out of the highway, the car is shaking from its core and this surrealist image with the car turning into a plane, and then again into a boat sinking in the stormy ocean waters pops up in all my thoughts. Some palm trees fall down the road, things fly away randomly, it's showering and there are no people outside other than authorities who are trying to fix things around. And a jogger who does not seem bothered by this apocalypse.

It is just us, wet to the bones, the nature unleashed and a group fixation: to smoke in Garachico. A place to be for the first time.

I turn on the windshield wipers. One is damaged. It goes with the wind. No more wipers. Now, we are much slower than before. Much much slower. It rains in the car and all over me. I opened the window to get a sneak peak of the road. To just make sure I'm still on the right side.

I haven't experienced rain in over a year, now. It feels like fresh autumn and there is no autumn here. Eventually and thankfully, here we are in Garachico! A small village from outside this world. Completely magic. But hey, don't take my word for it, I see magic everywhere.

The city had been washed out long time ago when the volcano erupted in 1706 and it had been reconstructed from bottom ground. You can see the lava traces of different nuances printed on the mountain that rises above this picturesque city.

While wandering around you can bump into papaya trees, banana plantations, a gorgeous 17<sup>th</sup> century restored mansion transformed into a romantic hotel, old beautiful houses, tight and twisted streets. A proud standing old cathedral in the central square, Plaza del Libertad, the old rebuilt church Santa Ana, Castillo San Miguel – the city defense against the marauding pirates in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Church of San Francisco, the tiny Museo Carpinteria Antigua. All these things push you into a story from another time.

Garachico makes me long for something I have not known yet. This village has an air of its own. A familiar warmth. Something that the soul recognizes instantly and makes it thrill with unknown joy. Its overwhelming sense of calm combined with the continental Spanish style, unspoiled wild coasts, and very particular history. It is like you crossed the lines and reached somewhere beyond the limits.

It makes me feel in between.

This time it is nothing wrong with it.

**one of us is wrong**

We were perfect for each other. We just loved imperfection more.

Don't you find intriguing that another way of saying imperfection is weakness?

We should have resisted it. We did not, and all our ends came together in a perfect match. For me it was the answer to my questions. For you it was disturbing.

The light of passion turned into a shadow of love.

We fell for each other in a beautiful canvas, one that broke through our night dreams carrying flashes from our unborn story. We felt everything the same way, as if we were two bodies sharing the same heart. We probably still do.

Was it because we were so far away from home?

Maybe we never fell for each other, but only for each other's truth. A gospel living in both of us. Our gospel.

Maybe it was a redundancy, an artefact or the force of our inferior nature.

Maybe it was just another perfect imperfection in the mechanism of the universe.

"Welcome, my love!"

"Good bye, my stranger!"

Or maybe, one of us is wrong.



**love me first**

Don't look at me that way  
Hold your beast  
Don't tempt me.

When I am weaker  
Be stronger  
Look away.

Freeze  
Be silent  
Don't let me fall.

Don't set us on fire  
Love has no mercy  
If provoked.

Be wise  
Pray

There is no more time  
For painful lessons  
We are too old  
To make a mess.

Don't touch me  
Love me first.

**it's the fire**

it's the fire

that troubles your fragile peace  
and corrupts your hopes for happiness

that brings back hearts and minds  
you once fell for and never faded away

that forbids you to forget  
the eyes you surrendered to

that makes the story you avoided  
to repeat itself over and over again  
in some parallel universe  
you wrongly believe  
it is just your imagination

that makes you stand in your way  
when everything else is finally well

that haunts you at times  
pushing you into battles  
that no one else can see  
but you

that makes you fall under yourself at times  
blaming the other  
for who you are  
and for who you are not

that makes your dreams  
unfair and sweet like hell  
but the awakenings painful  
and the air hard to inhale

it's the fire, darling  
it's the fire.

### **that day in May**

that day in May  
it's all I can remember

the sun was still up  
and I was still.

that's what I remember  
from that day in May.

### **wounds without a cure**

There are some days, strange days, metallic days, when you wake up feeling anger inside for no plain reason. Or, days with you happy and well until one moment when, suddenly, anger strikes and turns you from small to smaller.

You keep yourself inside and nobody knows it, but you know it. You always know it.

You are an aggressive animal. Those damn unimportant things betray you in the eyes of connoisseurs. The way you drive, the way you smoke, the way you walk.

Your life got better, you got better, things started to fall into their places. Also love happened to you. But there are these days happening against everything as a reminder of your littleness and of your wounds.

Wounds without a cure.

Unhealed burns that make every touch and kiss to hurt like hell, no matter how well the other one masters the art of touching a wounded one.

It's just how it is. Love doesn't heal you, it just gives you a chance and the strength to live a better life the way you ended up.

There are times when I feel like the autistic woman, Temple Grandin, who learnt to deal with herself and with the anxiety of life by inventing all sorts of things and ways to push her forward against herself.

For such twisted days, it is the sea only that calms me down.

Run to the sea, Spartacus!

Run to the sea.

## **The day when I first left the island forever**

It was a day like any other day.

A new morning when the eternal spring made me feel strong enough to live life for another one hundred years. That's the trap of this island, it makes you feel the passing of the time less brutal, until one day when you totally forget about it. Years go by, you look the same, everything and everyone look the same, and in the absence of a strong enough vision it carries you away.

I went eating in my favorite spot near Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Peña de Francia, I threw coins in the ocean with my eyes closed in exchange for the same old wishes to come true, I thanked the place for its generosity, and finally I asked God: *Please do not forget my name!*

I packed my things, sure like hell I will never come back.

This strong belief was a good enough reason to also cry a bit in the airport. Flying from the ground I whispered, *Fare well, my love and savior!* Yes, too drama queen also for my taste.

The island taught me many things, but this one was crystal clear: I knew nothing about the future and my feelings were wrong more often than not.

The future brought me back many times since that day, each time for a different purpose. I have no clue what made me bounce so far from the truth.

Like any immature relationship, it took many forever comings and goings to finally realize this is home in more ways than I can be aware of.

A place of mystery.

A mirror of the unseen parts of who I am.

Sometimes an answer to the question: *Why?*