

Dreams I
Have
Since I've
Died

by Mars



“In those dreams of mine, I am just a presence. I barely do anything or change anything that hasn’t been changed so many times. Like a piece of paper in the wind that never stops, paper with just a few words written on it (always different words, mind you), I am skipping from one part of a dream to another, forced to relive those experiences over and over. Since, in there, the time has no meaning, I go back and visit those places many times, and the only thing I can do is watch them deceiving me, tricking me, trying to confuse me. And that doesn’t concern me a bit. As I am getting used to living off those dreams, I am also starting to feel good in that situation, understanding that not having any power over my circumstances is something that was missing from my old life. I don’t have to decide anything anymore or try to fix things or look for satisfaction. I just go with the flow, trying to enjoy it as much as I can. But do not misunderstand my position. As much as I feel powerless, I also don’t see or feel any other power that controls my dreams. The more I experience them, the more I realize their anarchistic nature, their pure coincidental structure. I used to play musical instruments like that, producing highly dense noise, which no one, even me, could understand, nor listen to for longer than half a second. Luck of technical knowledge, pitch, or any theoretical background in music couldn’t stop me from enjoying making noise.”

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2024.

“We must do our utmost to remove those antinomies that are the cause of great mental anguish, because they imply a servitude even more profound and permanent than the temporal one: that suffering should not – any more than the other one – find man resigned. Those are the antinomies of being awake and sleeping (of reality and dream), of objectivity and subjectivity, of perception and representation, of past and future, of collective sense and individual love, even of life and death.”

— Andre Breton, *Free Rein*

CHAPTER 1

*What was your dream
when you left this shore
Did you dream of a raft of the stars adrift,
did you dream of a golf of condor?*

— ARP

I didn't even notice that I'd died. There was no light I went through, and for sure, there was no darkness I sank into. I never closed my eyes or stopped breathing. Communicating speakers develop a nasty skin rash. As a matter of fact, I was sitting in the central room of my pentagon apartment filled with everyday stuff and air, the mixture of natural and artificial light, and the smell of kerosene. The only semi-unusual thing in the room was, beside me, a patch of sand on my left side with a small sun umbrella stuck in the middle. It had all the rainbow colors on it. It had all the colors of the rainbow on it.

Although I was not an oral surgeon, at that time, I was sitting in my space chair and was servicing my mouth. I had noticed lately that my pronunciation of the word "clitoris" was a little off, as well as the sounds of "V" and "L." So, I was deeply involved in fixing my jaw and three of my teeth when I noticed that my enthusiasm is somehow lessened in intensity. So to say, I was slowly

forgetting what I was doing and why. It happens, sometimes, when your attention is drawn from what you are doing to a naked lady in the window, right above the cemetery. Unless the thing you are doing at the time is masturbating, and your main sexual interest is naked people. Then you will, for sure, concentrate more on the task at hand. At the said moment, though, I was a little confused about what I was doing. It may have been minutes, hours, or even years since my death occurred; it is very hard to say for sure. The curious feeling started spreading from my left ear down to my right big toe, one that didn't have a clue (it was in the infantry for a long time, so it was out of shape). I wondered, not what is happening or why, but what is happening somehow connected with the thought I had while repairing my jaw, a thought dark and disturbing, unexpected, and previously unthought-of. For some time, which could have been a long time, I discussed the matter of the thought and change that occurred with my eyes, but no conclusion has been made. I still wasn't aware of my death at that time.

Shivers, yes, some kind of shivers went up and down my spine, but I thought it was just a reaction to the late summer breeze that was visiting from time to time. Maybe it was from it. I remember that my attention was slowly shifting from my mouth to the details of my pentagon apartment's central room. Dark thought came, burned a little, became a pebble in my throat, and got coughed out and rolled under the small to the medium table, to

be remembered and talked about later. I looked around: and all of the familiar things were there. The stump table, polished to perfection, with its root legs and glass top, was standing and thinking close to what I called the Air wall, the wall with all the windows. On both sides of it were two stomp chairs, sleeping. There was a sofa with burned wings against the Earth wall, whose bricks were naked and in all shades of red. The sofa looked a bit sad, which is understandable since it missed the appointment with the cloud-shaped as another sofa, possibly of the opposite sex. Who knows what it was expecting... Close to a Fire wall, there was an old-fashioned fireplace, a black one with a spiral flue that was disappearing somewhere close to the ceiling. It was on, but it was spreading cold, laughing air instead of the heat.

The fourth wall, the Water wall, was wet. I was sitting in my space chair close to the middle of the central room of my pentagon apartment, right under the enormous white umbrella that was collecting light from the windows, as well as from the invisible light sources hidden above the umbrella. It was a day, although I could not say which day and what kind. Aristocracy always tries to screw with our minds, and you are never sure what is on the program for you. They pick the channel for you. That is why I was not sure if I was alone in the house. The silence was a usual one, soft and comforting, with a global angle of 42 degrees. The kind of silence that makes you feel at home, even if you are at home.

The difference between being alone in house silence and not being alone in silence was... I couldn't remember what it was. And there was the clue! That is how I started suspecting that something is not quite right, that I might not be so alive. I stopped caring if I am alone or not. It didn't make any difference to me anymore. Spontaneous emission of cortisone made some hidden bulbs explode. And by then, it was too late. I was dead. Tiny grains of dust knew it, and with that knowledge there was no going back. I was not very sad, nor confused, nor surprised. My mind was blank for some time. It was like it was adjusting to a new state, a new relationship with the universe. Vacuum. No sounds, no thoughts, no pictures, no smells. The air was still breathable, though. And, as it started tasting more delicious, some thoughts were becoming thoughtable, some colors visible, some smells, well, smellable.

Some kind of new reality was forming around me. And I knew I was adjusting to it, starting with it. I was so happy. It was like those lights on Jupiter when you are about to land. Just a little bit less dramatic. You know that the life you know is gone, but because so many things are happening around you, you have no capacity to mourn it or even think about it. You know that you have to be present in the birth of a new life, or no-life, and you have to take it altogether, without hesitation and reservation. One, please.

Welcome to the Life Station Death. Please leave all your worries and your joys. Dinner at 6.

At this station, everything was looking the same as before, as anywhere else. Only my feeling about things was different. The surrounding air was tasteless and without the exact temperature. Like it wasn't there at all. The central room of my pentagon apartment was looking the same as before. Same size, same furniture, windows... All the walls were there. But it was all different to me. If I had to explain the difference to somebody, I would say that everything, every object around me, was a prop. Like I was in the middle of making a movie, and everything around me is fake. Not fake, but it looked like everything had lost its use, its purpose. For example, the chair I was sitting on was not a chair anymore. It was an object of a specific shape that could be anything. It only depended on my knowledge and my decision about what it would be for me. But, since I didn't have any of those, I couldn't care less. Anyway, I was the one whose actions were defining the surrounding things. Little by little, it came to me that, in death, I am the master of all things, and I am a God. How come I didn't think of it before? Or was the dying necessary to understand the actual relation between me and my surroundings?

But initial excitement disappeared when I understood that I would never again NEED my chair, my toothbrush, my favorite shirt. From now on, I won't be able to receive any satisfaction from the goods I was using before. Like a nuclear submarine that defected into the deepest rims of the ocean, never to be able to go back to the surface, I was

forgetting my purpose and surrender myself to the miracles of the unknown world around me. No, I didn't see a giant octopus or twelve meters long two-headed shark or any other deep-sea monster, but I was sure that monsters in my vicinity would be even more exciting.

One of the first symptoms of being dead I've noticed was a loss of anger. I was not overly angry before, but now it was gone entirely. It was like having a hole in my chest. And it is not a good thing. Not a good thing. Unless someone wants to use my chest as the seventh hole in a game of miniature golf, in that case, a person should fill in a form, get it soundproofed with detergent, and close the window on a moving truck to prevent a bird attack. Yes, like in that story, when the TV explodes and paints the house pink! You know, *lasciatemi cantare*. You are asking me if I was sad about losing my anger. Off cause I was! First, I don't enjoy random golf balls flying around like it was some creepy summer or even afternoon at the local marketplace, where potatoes and artichokes were learning Italian. Second...

Immortal sadness, are you my pillow in the string of endless nights, are you my guide to understanding the language of life that I dispossess, my muse of reversed notes as I hear the familiar voice of my childhood telling me to answer with steps, with a blink of my eyes, to open the door and let the twinkling light of some long-lost dawn enter my heart and make me wonder again, like a newborn hope on the road of petals, on the road

of thorns. It took me a while to understand: anger was gone, so was love, and so was joy. The excitement of living is gone with life itself. And the sadness is all that was left. Sadness, like a poem that continues without regret, without looking in the mirror of things, making curtains out of silk of the day, out of sateen of the night previously unknown words that are streaming from that spring, uninterrupted in making love to the air, in its bed of pearls, in its mind of adjectives. Sadness, daughter of suffering and knowledge, growing in strength and sharpness, like a flying blade in a weightless conspiracy, last of friends in the era of losses, a magical flower that opens whenever I think of you as possible life in an imaginary world. I blame sadness; I envy it; I despise it, but I cannot live without it, since it is the only guide I have left in this box of the universe I see, that I'm forced to see, from the inside.

Ha! Three millimeters of grass and my backyard is done. I do understand the protective mechanism of thoughts. They save me from my ringing feelings, like some wind-up clock that saves the life of a hero by moving one second forward at the moment when he clearly enough and surely enough sees his end and himself turned to stone, in a very particular and eternal moment. But I can go without it. I am dead, remember. My thoughts and feelings are not there to eliminate each other or explain one another; they are here in my huge transparent head just to make the vacuum a little more hmm, interesting. Just enough to enable the scene to

exist. Otherwise, *pompidorance* – I am completely gone. In that case, I wouldn't be able to tell you about me being dead, and about all those dreams I've had since I died.

To be honest, it takes courage to say those words: I am dead. I couldn't tell them for a very long time. For how long I've been waiting for the door to open? Denial mixed with a strange kind of alcoholic optimism didn't allow me to accept my new condition fully. I watched the color on the door getting darker from the amount of time passing by, I was watching the dust-making cities on the threshold, and I was watching the handle losing its polished shine to a gloomy, endless afternoon. The door didn't open. Then I remembered that receiving wasn't my best quality, even when I was alive. I'd forgotten how to receive it when I was no taller than a bottle of soda. The yellow one, with a clown. I've given up on receiving. Not that I dedicated my time to giving, I didn't have much else to do. So, that is how I've lived my life since I was a bottle. Or tall as one. Sitting in front of the useless door, I understood.

No receiving, so nobody will come through that door. The meaning of that knowledge, though, wasn't so easy to get. But it went through some logical chain of thoughts: If 4 is wind and cosines is a runaway, then the table of contents is empty plus 2, where I consider myself "with heart," but nobody ever writes to me. Then, the compass is crazy, and cannot find the North, so everybody is turning away, thinking no one is living there,

so I don't exist! If I clearly remember existing at one point, then something happened between my existing and non-existing. And that can only be – death. So, I've died at one point! Hurray! I've got it. I am dead. Cool. I can say it.

Say it? To whom? Nobody is here. My pentagon-shaped apartment was sitting in a tree. Or anywhere else you like. Oh, the view I have! It is like I can see into the soul of the world through my windows. The sea mixed with trees, with clouds, with exploding airplanes... The stars were invading the daylight, like a colony of liquid bugs, multiplying on blue canvas. Children's drawings were flying around, representing dreams from little heads, dreams innocent and scary, purple, and transparent in their lunacy. Giant ladies were carrying elephants to the shrink, and I could see some boats crushing into paper rocks, so loud, like in '60. The air smelled like chamomile. The bronze man was reciting TV poetry. I could see the beach, full of screaming mothers and plastic children. Because of the stars that were eating the blue sky, it was always night and day simultaneously. While walking their suits on a leash, people were counting the adventures abandoned beds had in their longevity. You could be thrilled looking through my windows. But I couldn't. I've just remembered a bad thought under my small to middle-sized table.

With a lick of a tongue, I have released a thought. Its thick, black smoke momentarily filled the room so much that I found myself in absolute darkness. Couldn't see my fingers, save yours. It was so dark

that it hurt my skin, the way heat would do, or acid, or a look from someone we knew from our nightmares. Or a cold, cold air on top of the iceberg ready to explode. I thought of screaming, but if I did, it would rather be from the content of thought than from the pain on my skin. It is dead skin, full of dead nerve endings. It is like a book of seven hundred pages, but not at all like that. Memories of bicycle repairman, vol. 3. It was only a feeling. Then, as I enjoyed being blind, in the full spectrum of magical blindness, my space chair started acting up as an airplane seat, and soon I was sitting in the upper position, all buckled up and with a bag of mind-buttery popcorn in my left hand. Some light started coming in through the Air wall (with all the windows). First, I didn't believe it, but as it was becoming stronger and stronger, I accepted a possibility and opened my mind to it. After some time, if any, the Air wall started looking like a movie screen: a perfect rectangle with one exception: it had a dark dot or a hole in the middle, the purpose of which eluded me.

A half-second movie was about to start, with me as the only audience, me, scared and shrank to the point of disappearance, me, dead and forgetting. Since Labrador became a planet, there were no surprises in local newspapers. Just a slight possibility of a doubt. Hey, Banana, said the cricket. They warned me that there wouldn't be an intermission since the food stand wasn't open. Ok, I've thought I could survive half a second without food. At least, I have a mind-buttery popcorn to cheat the

hunger. But what about the thirst? Or a bathroom break? I've just changed into brand-new boxers. I quickly reversed my body functions and continued enjoying my movie experience. I have wished that they will show some porn or some comedy since I needed some tension relief. And the first frame that came on the screen looked like the beginning of some love scene.

There was a naked woman on the screen, with only her crotch covered with a sky-blue towel. She was in half sitting, half lying, almost impossible position, on some kind of sofa. Her tits were pointing up, toward the tattooed ceiling, right at the place where hummingbirds were, well, fucking. The whole scene could have been described as pornographic if there was not another body on the flickering screen. Although I could see only the back of that other body, it was, without a doubt, a male body. The shoulders were narrow, but something in there was telling me it was definitely a male. Another reason for the inability to precisely say what it was: The head of that body was missing! Where it was supposed to be the head, there was that big black hole in the screen. It was right below the woman's belly. There was no movement. It was hard to see any movement in a half-second movie. And I knew that it would be shown to me only once. So, I've focused on the woman's body. Nothing. She was perfectly still.

At that moment, I figured out what the thought was about, and I started freaking out, not in. Poetry is a mess. Out of all possible shapes it might have

come out in, the thought came out in the form of a question. Dreadful question! If I am dead, what about her? Did she die? Did I take her with me in the smallness of death? No, no, no! Wait a half-second! I want to see it again. I want to relive it. I want it to last half a minute, half a year. Longer. Long enough so I can see.

And for real, it slowed down. It stretched itself in those half-seconds, so much that its behavior became unacceptable. Twitch-twitch said one of my facial muscles. In the beginning, there were four lights. In his clown suit, the prince jumped around like a library rabbit. The vibrations of the scene became unbearable, and I had to open my eyes more for a while. Long enough, you would say. And the green net was correct: there was movement on the screen! For a hundredth of that overstretched half of a second, there was a movement of the middle finger of the woman's left hand, one that was high in the air, like it was trying to balance the impossible position of the body. No, not a body, a woman. She is alive. She didn't have time to open her eyes or dance the rumba on an invisible night table somewhere in Orion, but she moved the middle finger of her left hand. And it was enough for me to leave the cinema and start my rumba in the toilet, very close to the river. It was a very calm river, as rivers can be when they forget their destination-oscillation. If you put your poorly made paper boat in the river, it would go nowhere, but it will start shaking like crazy, as much as boats can be crazy, which is irrelevant to our commitment to a story. What story

you would ask, without a question mark, so there will be no answer.

So, she is alive. A strange feeling called concentrated happiness in the tetra pack started working through my body of sand, a body of glass. Potato-potato. English literature remembers smacking very young children with a giant wooden spoon. That was AD to ADD. But, at the very end of those dead nerves tickled with happiness, there was something else there, something of a unique feeling, something of a different color. Just like some magic potion that you might mix, when you add some new herb, some unexpected and unwanted flavor to the mix, and the thick liquid suddenly changes color; that is how my “feeling” changed. That metaphor is old. Don’t you know that? Good for you. At the end of the next leap year, you will take a few short classes in astrology. That is all I have to say about it. Although I couldn’t remember her name, I was thinking of it and felt it like a stone on my dead chest – some heavy name. I was happy but also sad. My eyes were green. The white of my eyes was green, to be precise. I remember loving that woman, giving her everything I could, dragging her down the gravel football field, and cutting her hair with toilet paper. We were very close. Lovers, so to speak. I just couldn’t remember when and where. I was caring for epaulets on my cringe shoulders. She was waving her hands like she was trying to fly, and I was wearing a skirt and a black ribbon over my eyes. It was such a pleasant picnic. We shared a loaf of blue bread. Some instances

are deader now than they were before I passed the test in criminal negligence, pulling my nails with clamps. Sophisticated morrow, you would say, and an echo would rave through the air, like a swallow in the dead of night, losing its head in the process. Dead or alive, she was mine, but she was alive, and I was courting her into the house of Mastodons, just across the street. Careless sex was dripping down the walls, and neither of us could come any closer to the conclusion. Lehvah! That was NOT her name. And she was alive.

So, as it shows, being dead is a very dense occupation. You would understand that I had not and could not have memories. It was all part of the package. And then, in an inflatory sense of magic, that could be enough to occupy me for another millennium. Horses never say, even if you torture them. I knew one personally, in the third grade when the world was green. It was like a green box or a green stage, some unfinished *coulisse*, and everything else, all the people, all the details, were sprayed on out of gigantic, invisible spray cans. That was how it was for most of my childhood. A horse? What horse?

It may be interesting for you to know that I was very close to death several times during my life. But I was, so to say, lucky to stay alive. Multiply that with a hundred goats, and you will have a perfect radio station. The first caller who guesses how long the coitus that conceived marshmallow will get the exclusive right to breathe for a full minute.

Once, a *congalomaniac* held a knife under my throat while yelling: “I have to kill somebody tonight; I have to kill someone tonight!!” I was not scared, just a little annoyed. He, the congalomaniac, had bad breath, and I thought for a moment that that breath would kill me. The knife was a small kitchen knife, and it didn’t smell. The result of that commotion was that no one got killed, and the mentioned attacker on my life had extinguished his anger with pizza, olives, and muchachos.

Other times, on the ships, where I spent my punishment of luxury, about a year-long snake with two heads, someone threw a hawser for a tugboat but forgot to untie a small rope attached to it. As heavy hawser sank into the sea, it pulled the long rope, in which coil I was standing. The rope started whistling through the air, some old song whose words are long forgotten, and, what was more important at that moment, it wrapped around my left leg. If I hadn’t seen it and immediately started yelling at it (I can’t repeat the exact words because I don’t remember them), I would have been pulled down into the dark mass of the sea. It was night. Those things always happen at night or something similar. Yeah, it helped a little that I had pulled my leg out of the clew. But, at the end of the rope, there was a very heavy and firm ball of rope, called monkey fist, attached! That ball, an ultimate test of sailors’ skills, hit me and split my shin bone in two. Or I thought so. It was excruciating, like milk.

And another time, this one as real as a marching orchestra washing their feet in a fake fountain, I was in a daydream state, and I am still not sure which one of me, the dream one, or the so-called real one, was playing with a gun. For one of us, it was a squeeze toy. And that one was squeezing. The other one was daydreaming. In the soup that was cooking, there were 6 ounces of day, a soap opera on a 1963 TV set, and a handmade metal bed, with no other purpose than to imprison me in a dream state. It was spring, and one swallow repeated itself, so it was for real. I was sucking on a spicy cigarette, but its product was not smoke but spirits of all shapes and origins. I saw my childhood girlfriend and a fish I was talking to on a fishing trip with my uncle Hammer, two centuries ago. I saw my favorite razor and tomorrow's paper with my obituary. And lots of other shapes and pictures, but I don't remember, because my memory defected with the next moment. Squeeze toy talked! It yelled. Short and to the point. The next thing I remember is a smoke (real smoke) filled room. One of me was standing in front of a bed, and the other one was lying down, with half of his head missing. I've never found out where it went. I just knew that the dreamer was gone.

But the worst case of a close call, or a meeting with Aunt Death, happened earlier, when I was about six years old, on the street where I was born, if that is even possible. Playing by myself in some ruins, close to the factory fence, I was talking to a vertical block of concrete since no one else

was around. Critical thinking, firm as a tomato. I probably got in a fight with that slab of concrete cause the next thing I knew, a chunk was falling on me, furious. It was taller than me and probably weighed around a tone. All I could do was try to push it away since, for a moment, I had forgotten how to talk. But pushing didn't work either. I managed to move out of the way, but the block fell on the inside of my left leg. Slob probably wanted to make it look like I was riding it. It didn't work that way. I screamed in Hungarian, and Attila the Hun came to my rescue! Six adult people somehow lifted the angry slob enough so I could pull my leg out of that ride. Attila shaved his mustaches. My leg, thanks to the soft ground underneath, was not hurt at all.

But all those regular encounters with Blah-Blah Death didn't scare me at all. Somehow it was expected, nothing strange, nothing interesting either. Cyrillic letters on the forehead of a nun. She had no panties, and everybody knew that. Crash-crash, who's there? Narco cartel! Narco cartel, who? Narco cartel that had sailed the sea and wrote a poem about being hungry in a supermarket. I hate crush-crush jokes.

There was (or IS) another reoccurring dream that is being projected on my window's wall. Since it is also limited to half of a second, it seems like a *kitten cough* to tell it, but it had many things happening in it, and many characters of all kinds appearing in it that are impossible to put it in a story. It has to be more like a chant or a con-

tinuous ringing of cathedral bells, so early in an eternal morning. If you can see my eyes now, it will amaze you: my eyeballs are turning in my eye sockets horizontally, making full circles. And each of them turned in a different direction at a different speed. They are caring for the dream, but each circle shows a different stage in that theatre of madness. While living, I always imagined movies just like that, short and full of all kinds of action, subjects, and perpetrators, aiming nowhere. The thing was just happening, no beginning or ending, almost no story, just moments in somebody's life of death, comfortable, calm, and with no message. Unpretentious. In Latin. *Alealactaest. Bonus penis, pax in domus.* So, if you can just follow me, those segments are happening quickly, way faster than you can read them, or even faster than my recording of it.

- There is a man masturbating at the beach full of people, with sand as the only obstacle.
- A thief involved in robbing an old lady, all tangled in a spider web he found in her purse, taking a shaver in a nearby prison.
- Same old lady, whistling her wedding song between her only two remaining teeth.
- Artificial kangaroo silently punching his pet dolphin.
- Couple making love; he is ejaculating deep in her vagina while her hair changes color.
- I am running while my left leg turns out to be my penis.

- Two kids, connected with their hair, screaming obscurities toward the big metal can.
- Three musicians are fighting on the street.
- Their instruments are burning in the sun.
- The cat is chewing on somebody's tongue.
- Geometers are throwing dynamite.
- Apocalyptic images dancing in front of telephone users.
- Hundreds of pink pigs running through nice business streets.
- Mother choking on her own milk.
- Aforementioned thief dying of moon overdose.
- There is a train under a young girl's pillow.
- Camel with an enormous erection.
- Some birds are carrying bad news.
- One city just implodes.
- A comet buzzes around the president's head.
- Boys are running home with their middle fingers up their butt holes.
- Girl and a boy singing about tasty semen.
- The construction girl is telling me about the Mahabharata Bridge.
- And there was she, in a very erotic pose...

All these things are happening simultaneously, among many others, and I am very conscious of all of them. If I said it was a reoccurring dream, I might have misled you: Although it was the same dream, the emphasis is always on a different group of incidences, so to my conscience or sub-

conscious, it still looks very dissimilar. You can imagine a movie with all those pointless scenes, and watch it thousands of times, paying attention only to what interests you in one particular moment, and you might understand what is happening to me. Like some kind of TV soap opera, where various stories are developing at the same time, but my attention is switching randomly, and there is no time for anything to develop. But, again, I am dead; you are not. Not yet. Although, after an experience like this, you may start wanting to be.

I wished for all six walls of my apartment to become screens so that I could watch more of those half-second movies. Give it an idea; it will happen. Abandoned by time and want, imagination is the only tool that can make any difference in my, well, existence. The universe is the stomach of a lady. And the rain. Like a Gulliver, I am stepping with my micro thoughts into the land of yet another nonsense. What color are slaps around here? Would I be able to marry my shadow? How many horses take to unlock the forest? Or anything else?

CHAPTER 2

*Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there,
wondering, fearing, doubting, dreaming dreams
no mortal ever dared to dream before.*

— Edgar Allan Poe

Memories

Memories? What memories? Think of it this way: I remember nothing from my life. Just a drip of green water on my clergy dress. There is a disconnection between my present state and a life that ended. The facts I've mentioned from my "life" are not pure memories but extracts from a notebook somebody left on my side table, one that wanted to fly away so many times, together with half-functioning soap. Anyway, even if we are sure of their authenticity, memories are partially a product of our experiences and partially a product of our imagination. We "remember" what we like to remember, and sometimes, more often than not, those memories have little imagination in them, parts that are implemented by our wish to make them more bearable, more in line with what we want them to be, or wanted them to be. Maybe the main difference between the two states, life, and death, lies there: memories start to look more like dreams, and dreams become actual experiences. Take that slab of concrete, for instance,

the one that almost killed me. I do not understand why it happened, how old I was, or even what I was doing in those ruins. But in my dream, I gave that giant poll a life, gave it an intention, and gave it a purpose. Like we do in dreams: random inanimate objects become persons, roles are switching, "I" become a thing, carried from car to car by a vicious wind (I've seen it, dreamt it).

It is stupid to say, though, that all dreams consist of memories or that memories are actual experiences. I have so many memories of things that have never happened and even more dreams that are my most cherished experiences. But I am stupid. I will say whatever I want because I don't care. I am so dead.

In those dreams of mine, I am just a presence. I barely do anything or change anything that hasn't been changed so many times. Like a piece of paper in the wind that never stops, paper with just a few words written on it (always different words, mind you), I am skipping from one part of a dream to another, forced to relive those experiences over and over. Since, in there, the time has no meaning, I go back and visit those places many times, and the only thing I can do is watch them deceiving me, tricking me, trying to confuse me. And that doesn't concern me a bit. As I am getting used to living off those dreams, I am also starting to feel good in that situation, understanding that not having any power over my circumstances is something that was missing from my old life. I don't have to decide anything anymore or try to fix things or

look for satisfaction. I just go with the flow, trying to enjoy it as much as I can. But do not misunderstand my position. As much as I feel powerless, I also don't see or feel any other power that controls my dreams. The more I experience them, the more I realize their anarchistic nature, their pure coincidental structure. I used to play musical instruments like that, producing highly dense noise, which no one, even me, could understand, nor listen to for longer than half a second. Luck of technical knowledge, pitch, or any theoretical background in music couldn't stop me from enjoying making noise.

Marbles

Like glass marble, but the inside is empty. Just a thin, glass crust. So fragile. And there are many of them, in all colors and sizes. Identical only in their perfect shape. And the bigger they are, the more delicate they are. Sometimes I can see into them if the color is not too intense and the light is present. And although inside seems empty, often I can see a structure of some kind or even something moving, if only trembling. At first, I thought they were thoughts, but I couldn't be sure since I forgot the definition of thought. It was the same with ideas and emotions, so I decided to let them roll around freely, without labels. They made sounds, barely present, but sounds like total noise, like me playing harp or a big church organ. Or a million wind

chimes in front of the door of an enormous house without walls. White noise? No! Despite their number, it looks like they know what they are doing, meeting each other with the purpose, making precisely the sound they wanted, like making love for the first time, genuinely surprised by every kiss, every move. Or, to put it another way around, even though the produced sound was random, it looks like they are quite happy with the output. And I can amplify that noise in my right ear. Marvelous marbles. They remind me of my goats.

Goats

I didn't tell you about my goats? It is another half-second dream I have. In that dream, I have goats. They are also all different in color. Each of them has a personality, and a voice, but it would be a Sisyphus work to name them all. It took me an eternity, about half a second, to pick my favorite one. She is green. Not like the forest, more like I always imagined Aurora Borealis. Looking at her was like looking at something that was not supposed to be there, but it is, and it makes you happy, like a cellophane on a pack of fake cigarettes or the shape of the urn filled with your ashes. She used to love chewing on my long hair. After a while, she stopped since my hair became dry and resembled the hair that goats had chewed on. But I am not concerned at all over such luck of affection. She is still my favorite, although a bit

distanced, more or less like the rest of them. But that is my best dream, one that fulfilled all my nonexistent needs. Watching those animals climbing the nearby mountainside, and coming back to the barn where they sleep together, packed like oranges on a rusty boat, is blissful. There is no need to feed them or clean after them, and they have no role in my routine, except visiting me sometimes and giving me the most compassionate looks you can imagine. We live together, beside each other, tolerating each other, asking no questions. However, I sometimes daydream that I am a part of a herd, sleeping among those warm, smelly bodies, sharing their mellow, see-through dreams. In their dreams, they are singing. Their voices, almost human, with various pitches and tone colors, weaving a familiar melody brought from some distant place and another time, so gentle and sophisticated it makes me cry. It is like a lullaby for orphaned trees, like a friendly wind wrapped around my blown-up head, like a comforting fire in tiny and dark days, spilled over alerted grass. The bleating of that magnitude can effortlessly chase away the silence, but in this case, it was bringing it in, a present to the earth, tortured with tremors and sounds of distant, ever-coming steps. Oh, how peaceful I am in those dreams of my goats, how free of all the violent thoughts from earlier life, thoughts left in the trench beside some faraway street, together with rotten tomatoes and worries.

Violence

Violence was always present in my life. Like barking scissors, it was occupying spaces in which I was existing. It was cutting people around me, friendly trees and stoic stones, living waters, and calming air, cleansing fires, and guardian mountains. A blind insect, it was circling in and out of my vision, sometimes upfront, sometimes way behind. It was present on every field, every occasion, reminding me and everyone else of its presence, with deep cuts, bites, and blows that its rule will never end. When I think of it now, it comes to me like the elementary math sets, where we have several sets of different values. Each value has various characteristics that can be shared with other values, and groups can share, forming common areas. As many sets grow, the common area is shrinking until very few, if not only a single value, are shared. I can't remember the exact forms of violence I was exposed to before, but I have a sense of brutality, monstrosity, ambiguity, and multifor- mity of that violence. It was happening on a grand scale, all around me, and also inside me, in every pocket of my existence. Like a mouth full of chalk, or ecliptic passages on the eye, like a storm in your veins when you infuse cold air in them or multiply trains going all around you at high speed, in every direction, and very, very close. And there is a point, somewhere in my head (providing I have the head), where all those circles, all those explosions, all those flying pieces of bones, stones, and ripe

fruits, are meeting, sharing a small space called my universe. There is a place where that violent energy is concentrated, stored, and made into a bomb I called, for lack of a better word – *suicide*.

I used to have a lot of suicidal thoughts while I was living. Approximately between six (6) and three thousand a day. Sometimes my pockets were full of those thoughts. Like very flat pebbles, one you use for skipping on water. Otherwise known as frogs out of a basket. Sometimes they were heavy, occasionally sharp, but always, always, always... separation anxiety leads to better swimming. Once, I bought a coffin to store those pebbles in it, and I did, but every subsequent time I wanted to unload, the sarcophagus was empty. After a while, I started thinking less and less of those pebbles since they were disappearing so quickly. But the sarcophagus started to change, size vice and geometrically, making it harder for me to find a lead, to unload my heavy load. It was like masturbating with both hands in a cast. No matter which gender you are. Although, if you are a woman, a warm summer breeze might help, but not that much. My daily task became more complicated with that new puzzle that I had to solve to unload those thoughts. I was reading a lot about sarcophaguses, hoping to solve the riddle I was facing every day. I remember reading... Such a waste of time. And writing too. But not a single word about my problem. I was hoping that I would find a perfect solution, one that I could use every time I wanted to get rid of suicidal tendencies, but every solution I came up

with was valid only for that day, for that one time. I was hoping, also, that my mind would retract and start producing less of those thoughts just because of the difficulties I had unloading them. Still, production started accelerating, to the point that, by the time I managed to open the coffin, I was too exhausted to transfer those pebbles into darkness. I was sitting there, looking into the void, without the will to move. But one night (or was it a spring), I started yelling at the inside of the sarcophagus, and to my surprise, it yelled back. That is how a conversation with a void started.

“Weather is nice today,” said the void, sending its poisoned tongues around my stiff fingers.

“What weather?” I asked, blowing hot green air on my burning skin.

“Inconspicuous,” it said while getting more prominent.

“I’ve thought of leaving,” I said.

“I will miss you,” whispered now enormous darkness.

“You? How come? You are just a void!” I spilled, irritated.

“Just how I miss EVERYTHING. You think it’s easy to be emptiness?” It sounded sad.

“Sorry,” I said, “didn’t think it may hurt you.”

“That is the problem.” It sounded done.

But I continued.

“Do you think that suicide is a triumph?”

We talked many times, sometimes longer, sometimes like we were waiting for a train, but all that was just a repetition of its last sentence, in a bare, meaningful, half a second. Suppose I ended up not killing myself for any reason; that one, or just a thought that I will be missed, was crucial. Of course, I kept bringing my flat pebbles every day but for the solemn purpose of continuing our conversation. To keep it alive, like everything else I cared for. And this is one of the rare things I've brought with me to this side and made it into a reoccurring dream, as a reminder that the death I have now was not my decision.

Skin

And there is that dream about her skin... In that dream, I see her belly, like the left side of it, from her volcanic belly button toward the infinity of the day, moisturized with cum she is spreading with her fingers, painting almost on that trembling canvas. Light is also playing there, sending all kinds of shadows, making her skin change from pure paperwhite to impossible night dark like an inside of the word love. Although I am not sure if I am there, I'm thinking about floating above that picture, defying gravity after my emission. And I am afraid to look anywhere else, thinking of what would I do if the rest of her body is not there. Limitation of time, as always, makes the scene frozen but also approachable in segments, frame-

by-frame, for more in-depth investigation. (It still amazes me how many frames you can find in that short time.) Like any of those half-second movies, I could rewind, fast-forward, and freeze it as I wish for a complete understanding of the shapes, movements, and colors. If I concentrate my attention on her sticky fingers, I see her neat white nails are hiding ten more screens in them; if I want to see into the gentle wrinkles of her joints, I can spend another half-second eternity and another, and another after that. Such behavior leads to compulsive repetitions of eye movement, like those of the dreamer, but a million times faster, since time had lost its mind, but, at the same time, it keeps repeating itself, allowing the dreamer to relive it over and over.

Thinking of that half-second I am stuck in, analogies start coming in like it's Purgatory or the afterlife, or even bowel movements. Maybe it's bliss; perhaps I am here to relive my life and make it somehow bearable. But right after that thought, I remembered that I was dead, and these dreams I had were not this weird residue from my life. Nothing, not even her, ever-present, was part of my living experience. Even if it was, a wall of nothingness stands between me and those "memories," so I can't say that I recognize anything that is happening to me in this form of existence. Memories became dreams, a product of imagination, a long time ago, or right away, during my metamorphosis. I am not becoming a shiny butterfly, with seven sets of colorful wings or a peapod waiting for next year to get

harder. All I know is that I am different and that my change affects only my dreams. Somehow, I started wondering why this is happening now, when any change I experience cannot affect the real world. Why was I waiting?

Dreams are so simple when you have no needs, when you don't wish for anything. Then you can almost touch their solemn purpose. Almost. But between that magical discovery and you, there standing is a wall of prejudices, theories, and pompous knowledge. Everything you know about dreams, everything you expect from them, all the symbolism and false predictions, is a dimmed glass prison that you have to break out from before you can understand dreaming as just another way of living.

Poet

For example, I have a dream of a Poet. He is sitting on a black bench, in the park, in some distant land, far away from the past. It is hard to say when since time doesn't exist. He has big blond hair on his head like someone has left a sunset there and forgot to take it away, so night never came. His dandy clothing and long black umbrella are talking in riddles. Ascot around his neck is the caring runes of the nonexistent language, saying that night will come but in its own time. His worn-out jacket is river green, like the eyes of a stranger. Since I am not there, I cannot tell him I know that stranger, but I have a feeling that the Poet knows.

His hands look as if they are crushing each other in a slow and choreographed wrestling match.

The rest of his body is motionless. He is not even blinking. With a head full of dark thoughts, with skin vibrating under a light summer hurricane, with shoulders towering over his enormous shadow, he looks like someone familiar, someone you've played chess with that one time on a frozen lake. Lover of herbs, your offspring is a breathless butterfly. At some point, a dog approached the Poet. It is a big dog with long bushy hair, the same color as the Poet's hair. The dog sits in front of a man and looks into his absent eyes, with a half pleading, half contempt look. Like it saw the kind of literary familiarity in a man, a solemn creature in that waste country, where everything smells like rabbits. He had enough of rabbits, and this man should take him wherever he is going. Dog deeply believed. Although the Poet didn't seem to wake up from his deep dark thoughts, you can say he is aware of the company. A distant memory came into his mind of a different dog from his childhood, one that jumped on him and held him pinned to the ground for long minutes. The poet has been afraid of dogs since then, all dogs, no exception. But at this moment, his hands stopped battling each other and went straight for the dog's big head and started petting it. This dog is different. This dog has something of man's inside and outside of him. A mutual recognition happened quickly, and the Poet and the dog, both, started feeling something else in the place of a fear that is gone forever.

Like cold water filling a warm glass, love is entering the Poet's chest, refreshing and wet, and he is powerless, out of control, taken by that change of weather. Upward rain, cautious sun. They belong to each other and stay in their communication forever, whatever that means. The Poet recited verses from his favorite poem, A man with two sexes, with words that had meaning only in emotions, words that I imagine stars are saying when they are making love, words that a dog recognizes like a command for his beloved activity, hence it immediately starts singing or veiling, making the song complete. Like a song I used to wake up with, like an earworm. Like recordings of impossible music. But then, as none of them noticed, the night slowly approached them, taking over their hair, their ears, jacket with the color of a stranger's eyes (whom I know, btw), and a long, boring umbrella... Poet got up, made a little dance move from some old story, and started walking in one direction or another with a dog to his knee. Soon enough, they melted into the darkness.

Rain

The backdrop of my dreams is almost always the rain. Or a sense of the rain, at least. With its smell like cracked airwaves, smell like a distant memory, smell like my favorite color, rain is my ultimate setting on this unpredictable plateau of imagination. Those white summer clouds are all nice and fluffy,

but I prefer heavy gray ones that can spill their guts unexpectedly on your head, your window, or your naked butt while fucking in the bushes. This way – which way, oh, that way, I am securing simplicity of the color pallet of my dream. I don't need a circus there, just a simple orgy with uninvited guests and their quirky doings. Somehow, in dreams, I can connect falling rain with the feeling of walking down the wet streets in some city, snuggled in my Dead Man jacket, with my pierced eyes. I love that rain, love the air cleansed by it, giggling streets that are stilling my steps, packing them in a big brown bag, and stashing them under a truck full of false memories. Another half-second trip, but, somehow, I am sure she is here, and we will meet, just wait... The air has something different from pure ozone, lead, and burnt ambitions. Like moss from a forest in Amenia, or a strange flower ready to spit its seeds on my palm, but it is a mirror now, and I can see her face, she is saying something, a word, something I know, like a code word, but I can't hear it. Just thought how beautiful she was, but then I realized it was not her, it was a girl that looked just like her, much younger though, someone I'd met once under similar rain, in some other dream, a nightmare. Suddenly, I feel thirsty, and the Dead Man on my shoulders is soaking wet. "She is my sister," she said and disappeared in glimpsing streets. Drinking rain is so much fun, right down the middle of my skull.

Sometimes I think about my dreams. But thinking is like believing: The subject is very much out of my

hands, and I can only hope that there is something behind those thoughts. But, I lost all hope. That key fell through the tiny hole in the known Universe. It melted on the other side. It ceased to exist. That parrot is dead. It expired. Like me. Not that it was part of me while living, no. It was a construction, a crotch that living people carried, sometimes unaware of its weight. Hope, or My Hope, disappeared long before I died, and it was a side effect of the illness I might have had at that time. Like when people with a long, terminal illness, one day wake up and feel good. That is how I felt when I lost my hope. Anyway, I still think about my dreams. But I am not trying to understand them, or decipher them, or make them more real. There are no known bridges that can take dreams from their world into reality. When someone is telling a dream, that person is just trying to articulate it, make sense of that dream, translate it into a common language, and explain it by using symbols. I am not trying to do that. Yes, I am using a specific language here, but I am not trying to translate them or discover their meaning. I quit understanding like a bad habit – cold turkey. I go riding my rhinoceros. Dreams are not another language. Or a different culture that can't be deciphered by some realocentric scientist. They aim to be, but not there yet, another reality. And there is nothing we can do to understand that reality. Incomprehensible is the word. Like Indian Fire, you do it, and there is no why. You know that, sometimes, pain is good. And then, that octopus hugs you with her slimy, countless arms, covering most of your skin, and pops those gentle vacuums everywhere. But they are not sucking out

your essence. They start to share their ink, like the live vapor of magical power, an ink that immediately starts producing images, words, music, and everything else that dreams are made of. It all might seem random, but they are an actual response to what you are giving out in that hugging action. Again, it is half true to say that those products are pure fulfillment of your wishes, or corrections to your daily life made to deal with your conscience, or simple visions of some remarkable future. Those elements might be present, but the primary substance of any dream is emotions. It is like making love; one, two, or more bodies melted into one entity, unconcerned with anything but letting feelings flow uninterrupted. Images, smells, and words, can indulge us and make those feelings more intense, but you are not there to simply collect those. You are there to experience a new reality in all its power. Dreaming, therefore, is not just sexy; it is sex. More intimate than the physical act of love, with its infinite supply of orgasms, dreams are the reality of emotions, where, unlike in the so-called real world, to feel is necessary in order to survive.

Edgar Allan Poe

Then, I dream about Edgar Allan Poe. I don't remember who he is, but the name stayed on a shelf of my subconscious, like a dried-out flower or a postcard from a vacationing undertaker. Maybe because of the name that had the ability to jump

like a mad frog through my mind. Maybe because of something he did, something I can't recall, but something that had affected me while living. Edgar Allan Poe. Perhaps because he, too, had become dead, with long intervals of horrible living. Anyway, in the dream, he is circling around Piccadilly Circus at a very slow pace. He has a double-decker on his shoulders instead of a coat. Around him, rats are circling, way faster than Poe, greeting each other, laughing, and reading the paper.

The smell of mold and tobacco filled the air. The rain was in rehearsal. Just now, I notice that Poe is walking backward, still very slowly. Like he is retracing his steps, which he made way before I started dreaming about him. His lips are moving, but not like he is talking, more like he is mincing heavy air, turning it into gray jelly, the color of his piercing dreamy eyes, possible only here, where nothing can be touched. Rats are coming in and out of the double-decker, confused about moving backward and stopping so often. It is very awkward that every stop is the same like there was only one, repeating in equal intervals. And not only that same number of rats went on the bus and left the bus, but they were also, every time, the same rats, saying the same greetings, chewing on the same paper, and spitting the same tobacco. Even more strange was the fact that Poe *was* moving, as mentioned, backward; it just added more depth to this dream. There was a billboard somewhere on that big roundabout, which was at a different distance from every stop he made. And

every time, there was something different in it. Most of its surface was indeed blue, but the shade and texture looked as if they were changed at every stop. I can't say how many rounds, how many stops, had passed until the entire scene jumped into that billboard, abandoning the circle, leaving it silent and lifeless. Then the whole view went sepia, and the billboard became a screen, slowly losing its picture, color by color, shape by shape. The sound of shrieking rats was fading out. Another mystery was solved. Piccadilly Circus was never so shiny and wet in all its emptiness.

Under

I can't breathe. The rhythm section is almost silent. Refurbished affairs are spilling on vibrating streets. Names on the board are changing fast, keeping no records of earlier tenants. There is a bush behind the entrance, where my rhinoceros is hiding. A lack of air in my lungs produces images in my head. I am cold. There is water everywhere, black, thick, and salty. I am attached to something very heavy, with a tin rope tangled around my left ankle. I am trying not to move and disrupt the smooth sliding downward. Save the cold, the water is a comforting, non-threatening force, oblivious, apparently, to my drowning. For an entire half a second, the peacefulness of the surroundings is magical, and joy is the only emotion I can feel. I can feel bubbles of air on my face tickling. They

are coming from my clothes, ones that are quickly turning into metal. By the trick of fortune, the rope around my left ankle started releasing its grip, and my scheme was complete: I am free. But now, either for lack of air, the coldness of the water, or the heaviness of my armoire, nothing can make me enjoy my position. I am not happy, but I am content. Suppose there is any difference between the two. Anyway, it's peaceful, soothing, almost magical, a darkness that can only be compared with closing your eyes at the end of a very long day filled with a string of weird and unexpected events, all of which just came to their positive conclusion.

I am ready to sink into the most beautiful, most relaxing sleep ever. Oh, brides of Bavaria, how frosted were your underskirts! How black your rivers! Is that a moon you've brought me on your breastplates? Wait a minute! My eyes are moving! I mean, really moving. They are leaving my skull, going down my cheeks, my neck, respective shoulders, down my arms, and ending on top of my middle fingers. My vision comes back to me, significantly improved. If I spread my arms, I could see both sides of my ship, under which bottom I am floating, swimming in the moonlight. Now I understand; I am playing one of my death scenarios. I am pulled from my ship by that rope into the murky waters of Biscay. This is a dream! And I am not sure if I am happy about it, or if should I continue dreaming like there is no tomorrow. Like any other point in time, it just had lost all the meaning. Astrology never keeps its promises.

I am in my room (?) again, with the feeling of wet clothes on me. Air is tasty, like melted licorice, water from a vase, or your cunt in a somersault. Thinking of you helps me to continue my trip through dimensions on my silly ship of one fool. This reality of nonsense, with its layers of magical distractions, keeps taking me in circles through false memories, half seconds dreams, and useless erections. It is hard to connect all those pieces of different puzzles into one reasonably understanding story, and I was so far away from any knowledge of this new philosophy to understand the need to sort those into groups of similar items and try to make sense of them. My mind is blank when I am not dreaming. I am not sure if I still have a mind. Or is it necessary to have a mind to have these dreams? Where are they coming from? Is there "me" who produces them, controls (ha-ha) them, transfers them into some language to understand them, and tells them to you, my live audience? Who can have dreams like those and vouch for his sanity?

CHAPTER 3

Hokahey! Today is a good day to die.

— Crazy Horse

Insomnia

Oh, unforgettable nights of insomnia balloons! Who would say I would ever miss you? You were taking me from my most precious possessions, night after night, for most of my living. Yes, I remember you, and I miss you! You were the single most interesting, hugely annoying, mind-bagging uneventful company I ever had. I've spent more time with you than with anybody or anything else. You made me explore my ceiling so thoroughly that now I can write a book about all the inconsistencies it has and the little shadows they make... Notorious dreamer sings an ode to insomnia. Oh, how I hated lying in my bed, awake and without any thoughts. Early enough, though, I've learned not to be angry with you. You were unbearable by yourself, and adding anger to the mix would have been catastrophic. An extra layer of star-shine, please. We are going to burn some midnight oil. I remember different techniques I've tried to keep you away, so I can sleep and eventually dream, but nothing worked. Masturbation was only partially successful. It would bring some images that would put me in a dream mode,

but sleep would last only for an hour or so, after which you would wait for me to bore me to the... morning. You had found me when I was young, when I just peeled the last, heavy protective skin of childhood, unaware of the magician nature of the outside world. I didn't go out then, still gaining legs for walking distances. Maybe even waiting for the smelly world to come to visit me in my darkroom, where I was developing my negatives. Chemical walls and cotton pillows; I wanted to dream of different perfumes of cunts and raspberries, of her coconut skin, aerial adventures, and friendships with elderly warriors. Of glass ceilings and friendly lightning, air balloons propelled with hot lava, and kids melted into the wind of good fortune... But you came and made me look into your white papers, without teaching me to read and write, night after night, continually IV-ing me with loneliness. Sure, someone would come from time to time and even feed me with empty words and kisses, but they would always leave, leaving traces of rouge on my skin and trembling cigarette butts, the smell of melancholy on my dick, and a bitter taste of the time in my mouth. I had only one shirt at that time. And a paper boat that was floating in my bowl room filled with leftover soup. To think about how tragic were those nights without dreams. I was filling my head with music and books and wooden tables, but the emptiness stayed. I would hook a hose from the facet and an electrical outlet and shove the other end in my ear, hoping that you would leave.

I was pulling my nails with fishhooks. I was drawing on my skin with leaches and katanas. I've made alliances with bats, with giant cockroaches. In vain. Your stubborn silence was invincible. You have taken the life of dreams out of me. It was so hard to step into the real world without the ability to compare it to some expectations. But I went and immediately started to dream while walking, to dream while talking, to dream while reality was putting me through all possible trials. Learned reality ways in excel, its language, its tricks, and only when I mastered the master, I was free to dream with my eyes open. I beat you, insomnia whore! I spent a life of pretense, a life of somnambulism and somniloquy, trying to convince everybody that I am present, that I am there for them. Oh, how hard I was laughing in their plastic faces with earthly colors spread all over, how hard I was crying when they were not around, with my melting face in my see-through hands. I've opened my stony skull so many times in search of a friend, a partner. But found nothing, save illusion. Not even in my daily dreams could I put together a jigsaw puzzle of my personality. But, managing to convince myself that I am there, that 'I' actually exist, I was slurping life from my crystal bowl, unaware of the other life that was also passing.

But now – this. I am in a modular, circular, perpetual dream. Why do people dream? Or, even better, why did people stop dreaming? It looks like, at some point in our confusing development as a species, as time and space were running out of favors

for us, we hit some invisible wall and changed the way we dream forever. Changed it so much that this new way does not seem like dreaming anymore. More like chasing crumbs thrown around by our generous master. If you dream of food, you must be hungry. If you are dreaming only about things that are missing from your life, your life is garbage. Suppression of dreams by hardship. Even in your sleep, you are fighting the same battle for a better position in the pen, in the office, in the bedroom. I dream not of my needs. I dream of a world where everything is possible, with the possibility that I am not. To dream in color or in a preferred language? No! Absolutely not! I stopped capturing dreams in dense net for butterflies, net of reason, net of understanding. I dream in magic, in visions, dreams that are not what I can become but what is possible to be part of. They are not mine; they belong to themselves, to the story that captures them, gently and with lots of respect. Dangerous dreams, crazy dreams, dreams with hidden messages, hidden passages into the unknown, friendly or not. I never wanted my life to be bearable. I never asked my dreams for help. I want, when I go there, to be ready for anything.

Suit

I am a suit! I am a wet suit! I am a metal suit!
I am a wet metal suit! I am a suit that gets dried
and comes out three sizes bigger! Like a sponge
that crushed the sun and swallowed it, took its

place, and now the whole system is my suit, in a color that I don't even like! Get me out of here! What does this all mean? Book of symbols... So big! Like a moon's butt! Listing pages... Torture. Torture? It can't be right. I don't have any feathers that tickle my soles. And there is nobody there to tell me endless boring stories. I am a suit. No substance, no meat, just a bunch of materials sewn together. Depression? "State of mind in which a person feels less pressed from the outside world." Excellent! I have to get me some of that. But that suit is me, no other way around. It is a three-piece suit, no, four! There is a fluffy shirt made of northern hemisphere baby clouds. Cotton ones, yes. Pillows assembled under my waistcoat, which is made of soft grass. It smells like an animal fight, like a wedding present, like a hotel soap mashed in kerosene. Then there are my paints, made of bungee cords and rat skin, newspaper cuts, and old celluloid tape. And finally, my jacket was made of unfamiliar faces, magnets, and purified water. Water, crazy dark water, from the first tale of *The House Of Manheim*. Very comfortable, despite the needles. Plus, there are some details, like a lighthouse tie and blood moon handkerchief. That is it. Perfect for night strolling in the park with wild words in it. Or for rare occasions when I meet you at the bell tower. But, despite my best wishes, the suit is empty. It is me without me. I don't even know if it fits. Waist 32, shoulders 42, inseam... Revolver in an inside pocket? I feel lucky tonight. I really shouldn't wear it while walking down that one-sided street. Left-handed people never tell se-

crets. The very first step was to wake up with the feeling that I was never there.

Ocean

Often, I dream of the ocean. It is like I am standing on the prow of an old ship, all covered with rust and diamond fishnets, and all that I see is water, dark and heavy, like a worn-out woolen hat on the head of a wooden man. Sometimes it changes color, from blue to green and from brown to see-through gray. In those dreams, I am very silent, and I have a feeling that I don't have a voice. I only listen. Like the audience of none, in a large theatre, I listen to the ocean talking. At first, it is like a million cockroaches running away from hissing poison gas, and then there is the clicking of hyena teeth in the silent Serengeti night, and, finally, there is a noise of thousands of low pitch trumpets that sound like an internal volcano, almost impossible to bear with normal hearing. But, somehow, I began to understand. There are no words – they would take too long. It is the whole story packed in half-second. And the language is so ancient that scientists from either side of the night couldn't conclude from which era of dreaming it came. Somehow, it made me think of the Poet's ascot...

I am Life. But I know nothing about it. Bloop, bloop. My waves are days, my foam is thoughts, and with my storms, I am challenging your dreams.

I make my winds, and the weather is a tool I use to pick the teeth of the Universe. I have no warnings, and my depths are the nostrils of an enormous cow preparing to sleep. I can swallow a country with one tide and make a continent with my currents. Bloop, bloop. But I am not with infinite power. There are winds that I cannot control; there are mouths that I can't feed. If you stay longer, you can see different shapes of me, some peaceful, some scary, but I will never be your savior. Bloop, bloop. Friend, maybe, but only if I can see you with some eyes. The last time we spoke, you were wearing long chains, afraid of me. For fun, I did try to pull you toward me, but the chains were too much. Then you spoke to me, in the language of sorrow, as you did centuries ago. Bloop, bloop. Your words made me sleepy, and I had to call the rain to chase you away. Right now, I can only feel your presence somewhere on my back. Bloop, bloop. You are a heavy rider, and you think you know some of my secrets. But be aware: I change my secret socks every morning before most of the dreams evaporate into the mist of reality. Sleep well, my faithful jockey. Maybe we will meet again, on a day of roses, sea urchins, and incredible faith in... Bloop, bloop. Bloop, bloop.

Some other times, I find myself looking in the mirror. And all I see is an impeccable silver layer, untouched and shiny, like an empty eye. Either I can't see it, or there is no reflection in that mirror. Not me, not anything that surrounds me. It takes some time until I realize that I am looking at it

from above. And it is the ocean again, sleepy and moving only in gigantic waves without beginning, without end. It is silent, save the confused birds looking for food. If I look long enough, though, the whole half-second long, I imagine it is frozen, with a thick layer of ice covering his enormous body. And then I start seeing some shadows floating under the ice, shadows different in size and shape but without any characteristics of living beings. I feel fear, but I try to get closer to the surface anyway. Finally, I spread myself on the top of that cold surface, trembling. Shadows are playing, tricking me into seeing various shapes, and scenes, and, after a while, streets, cities, even forests with red and yellow trees, trains and automobiles with black masks, empty signs, blind windows, but no people no animals. Then the pain comes, and I think of serious explosions, of water quakes, of the red hot nose of some volcano. I wake up when the mirror starts cracking.

No, I don't want to wake up! I want to stay with him! Not because he is living, but because he said we are friends. I had very few friends while living. Few books, magnetic tape, and a vase full of white sand. And maybe cigarettes, if breathing was required. Gipsy opium, in the middle of the Atlantic. Or some other train, sodomizing the mountain. No, the ocean was there for sure. I've put it in my veins once, and he stayed there forever. Green chair or not, his name is an echo: salutations, my friend. Forgive me for being what I am.

Reality check 1

You are in a coma. You had stumbled down sixteen stairs, fell into a dump truck, got tumbled for a whole day with the garbage, and finally dumped on a landfill, where you were lying for seven days before the scavengers found you. Most of your bones were broken, and you have severe damage to your head. Your brain is swollen, and doctors put you into an induced coma, so you can naturally heal, if possible. Your chances are next to none. You didn't move any part of your body for a couple of months. The only movement noticed by nurses is rapid eye movement, which means either that you are dreaming or that your brain is so damaged, that it is sending signals that are making you move your eyes. Machines, though, cannot detect any brain activity. But the strange thing is (you won't find it in any reports) that your room is changing colors from time to time, depending on who is in the place and what they are talking about. An investigation has been conducted, and your windows are closed and darkened, in case outside light is causing the changes, but it is still happening, with random frequencies. They tried to connect certain people with some of the colors but with no conclusive evidence. So the investigation is discontinued, and visitors are not permitted anymore. Only nurses. Even doctors don't come anymore.

The hospital manager is afraid the rumors will spread, and reporters will start swarming around like mad wasps. He is also hunting a spider that

keeps visiting you and often sleeps on your pillow. It looks a lot like it is talking to you, and every time it is there, rain comes. Cameras were installed in five places, allowing us to follow the movements in the room, but they don't work correctly. It looks like some other signals are interfering, showing footage from unknown places. We looked at the tapes many times, trying to understand, but all of those glitches lasted only half of a second. There was an idea to wake you up and ask you if you know something about it, but doctors are against it.

Everything will be all right

Since I came to my prison death, one thing is evident to me, to my delight and most pleasant surprise. I remembered all of my dreams, down to the smallest details. They are now like drinking water from beautiful leaves in the forest in which I got lost. Every drop is so refreshing, so tasty, so reassuring that I am on the right path to nowhere, in a labyrinth of some outside conscious, carefully constructed from everything possible. Everything that was missing from my living dreams, things that were censored by my ego, my fears, my carefully built personality, was here now, brave and willing to show itself in the shiniest possible light. I came to an understanding that "I" was protecting me from all the beauty of dreams, quirkiness, and weirdness, something that is so enjoyable now. And, the opium of it all, ever-changing its taste, its potency, its ways of seducing

my open, vulnerable mind, cleaned from worries, from fears, from expectations. I am taking it as a perfect addict, wanting to escape the void of death, looking forward to another half-second magic, for another rush not of images, words, places, or happenings, but of pure explosive emotions. If this is what means to be dead, then I like it and embrace it without any reservations. I feel like I am in a perpetual orgasm, and my whole consciousness is a large sexual organ, vibrating and pulsing, cumming, and squirting all over the place.

Every one of my dreams now starts with, "everything will be all right." I can hear her whisper them in my leafy ears, in my open skull with a vegetable garden in it, in my stomach that strings the pearls, in my balls that don't remember, like a bell on a very low tower, like a grass waking up, like good news by wind mail. Her voice is like a stream of water in which I can clench my thirst and wash my face, scorched before by fears and lying sun. Those words are like a door, an entrance to the unknown, where a variety of teeth are waiting to rip down my consciousness, a screen of shiny lights, behind which the gold of dreams is hidden. Brace yourselves now; we are going up and down, west and east, left and another left, without any brakes. And a steering wheel just disappeared in stone beside that awkward bush. Did I see horns in it? There was a pair of red women's panties on them. Asparagus will know everything about it. Just go second left, behind the crooked tree, and you will find a pamphlet full of naked questions about her nipples.

Leather

In the velvet of possible afternoon, I dream about doing some work on some raw leather. Sun is still up, but it is very distant, and it looks uninterested in what I am doing. Crusting. I can only see the tools that I am using. Leather is hard, with some holes in it, and looks almost inorganic. It is excruciating working on it, but I can't tell if the pain is in my hands or somewhere else. It was hornets' nest intense. Like I was looking into a hole in a tree, and the hornet struck me in my forehead. But there was no hornet. Only dead skin from an unknown animal. A hide. Shapeless piece of leather, waiting to become somebody's second skin. Under my heavy strokes, it started shaping nicely, so I feel like some artist, creating a masterpiece from almost nothing. Despite some holes and other damage, now it took a familiar shape, almost human. Arms, shoulders, back... I now think of some old art of torture, when artists were able to skin an enemy leaving the skin in one piece, save the head. But here I didn't have legs, luckily. I've finished arms and back and started working on chests. It was the roughest part. There was a hole where the heart was supposed to be. And the belly button was missing, being pressed too many times, I guess. Something was dirty in the middle, to the right from a heart hole. Wait, it is some drawing. Some circles. Wait for a half-second! This looks familiar. Stars and swallow holes! Morse codes and dried vegetables! Impossible! I am working on my

lost skin! Half a second flashback on my living persona, on time when I was designing those symbols, calling it “our totem pole” on the needle that was pricking my chest, like an angry wasp, on ink that was painting inside of my skin cells... Is it possible that someone found my lifeless body and skinned it Japanese style? Yet another memory-thought came to me: didn't she, as a present to me, inked the same design on her chests? I was never sure if it was a permanent one, but I know I've seen it there, between her breasts, sleeping in that cozy bed, and safe from the outside world. Could this be her skin? Let's check further down the belly underneath the missing belly button... Nothing, it is cut in the pelvis area, inconclusive, sex wise. Checking for tits... She had small ones, soft and flat like just born kitten. Besides, there is that hole where the heart was. I cannot say. But enormous sorrow overloaded me. To think that she may have followed me over here is terrible. But then again, maybe she is just traveling from world to world, giving me secret signs of her existence, like safety words for my sanity. So I stopped working on that sorry leftover, and water came and flooded the scene, and I woke up wet once more.

Wet Dream

I am in the big room, couldn't say 'living room' but of that style, with several large, comfy sofas made of some kind of fur or other, and cowhide

rugs thrown carelessly on the circle-shaped floor. There are several people in the room with me, mostly, if not only, women. Some of them are standing against the wall, with their palms shining, blending in-and-out the color of the wall. Some are lying on sofas, with their eyes closed, with their fingers busy. Two of them are lying on a cow's skin on the floor, but it looks like they are struggling to touch each other as if there are invisible restraints on their ankles and wrists. The strong smell of their sexes made me dizzy. I am holding a glass bowl full of strawberries, or, more precisely, a glass bowl of strawberries is floating in front of me since I don't see my hands holding it. It moves together with my vision around the room, and I let every woman take a strawberry and do what she wants with it. Some eat it right away, and some play with it, putting it against various parts of their bodies, or rolling it against someone else's skin. I see two women kissing the same huge fruit while kissing each other, with their lips and tongues red like Masaya Sunset. I omitted two girls on the floor since they were involved in their own game, with no place for my intervention. It looked like they managed to get closer to each other and use long, thick tongues, pearly teeth, and bulging lips to communicate with their respective chocolate skin, absolutely lost in that dance without using arms and legs. I see other women on bearskin sofas, with their hips swinging as kids swing in some faraway park, with tits wobbling like an earthquake-shaken mountain, with shiny skin wet off their pleasure dew... There is a whisper in the room, at first very quiet, but as the

dream progresses, louder and louder, with a slow rhythm getting faster and faster, but very subtle, with long poses, and long rests between progressions. I feel very aroused with the whole scene, but I don't feel my dick or any other part of my body. As the whisper gets louder and in a fast advancement, I feel a shortage of breath, dizziness, and blurred vision. The room started spinning, women laughing, moaning, and strawberries smeared inside and all over their naked bodies, mixed with cum that I wasn't aware of releasing. But, at that moment, I felt something else. It was a familiar but frightening feeling that made me ashamed and embarrassed, like a child caught abusing an animal, or touching itself, or telling gore stories to their siblings, like a hunter after killing a skinny sacred deer, like a sea after swallowing a ship full of refugees. I felt her eyes on me, burning like oil, like magma, like a barrel of a freshly emptied gun. It was pointless looking for her – she wouldn't show up, even in the mirror. The room was empty now, with no colors and no reflections. Maybe just a shadow of a black cat somewhere down the corridor.

Regardless, I woke up wet again.

Implosion

Other times, I dream of making love to *her* in a very small space, in which we fit closely connected, making only one body. I feel her skin pressing on me, with agility and force, like she wants to

melt into me. Every one of our pores is fucking, penetrating, and receiving other skin. We are barely moving, almost afraid of what is coming, and postponing it with some form of common meditation. I can hear her breathing, and her heartbeat is so strong, that it looks like it is trying to break my ribs and enter me so we can explore together. Joined, we smell like a young forest, leather books, and rainy afternoon, we smell like fresh fish and cut grass, we smell like the smelliest day of the year, like a faraway sea, like wet macadam. Every part of us wants to die here, but we live eternally, jauntily, fearlessly. I feel her with all of my being, but also feel something unusual, but not strange or unwanted: like my cock is simultaneously in her mouth, her cunt, and up her ass, and that feeling is making me want her more, wanting her orgasm with all my strength, even if that leads into madness, into death. There is the magic of her lips and her tongue, the tightness of her ass, and the warm lubrication of her birth canal, inviting me to stay there forever. Our minds are melting into instinctual mush. The room around us gets smaller, but it just makes us come closer, if that is even possible. There was almost no air left, and none of us was breathing now. Silence will be perfect if only our hearts don't beat that loud, in sync, ever faster rhythm. And then we came. We came as one, as many, as all. Every cell of our bodies came, and burst, relieving tones of cum, blood, and saliva, waves of energy that shook the confining walls, and, being unable to break them, turned against itself, imploded, and formed a miniature

black hole, where we, happily, disappeared, as energy for ourselves.

Black Poetry

I dream, in black and white, of a woman masturbating. She is sitting in front of me, naked, with her legs banded in knees, knees open so I can see her cunt, and her long, beautiful hand, with fingers like water snakes, wiggling around. Every time, in this dream, the picture is shaking, like vibrating, but it is still clear. It gives me a slight sense of doubt, but I continue to dream. Vibrations are not in sync with what she is doing with her fingers, though. She is massaging her clitoris quite slowly like she is in no rush and not yet caught in a wave of excitement. Like some fancy paper, her light gray skin is thin and smooth, which mystifies her appearance further, and makes me reach for my fountain pen. As she's playing with her pubic hair, I notice her nails, short and natural in color but shiny and beautiful, ready to reflect some of the light just for my eyes. I feel like I am made of stone, but if she squeezes me with those limbs, I am sure to squirt out some liquid. She is now stretching along the vast bed, and I am trying to guess what she imagines.

There must be some other people with her there. Yes, a woman and a man are lying down beside her. Both of them are naked and oriented opposite her. Their heads are close to her crotch, while their

middles are around her head. I am painfully aware that this setup is almost impossible in reality, but their bodies are so flexible, almost fluid, and dedicated to the task at hand.

So, in her head, the three of them were making love, fondling, licking, sucking... Playing! And she does play. She enjoys them enormously, testing the limits of their elasticity. At the same time, her two companions are doing whatever they want with her. You would think that all those activities would distract her, but she is going on those organs offered to her with dedication and particular animosity.

(The whole setup looks impossible, as it is in a dream, utterly free from the rules of reality. And the woman knows that it is something reality wouldn't allow, nor would she have wanted it there. Masturbation is an uncharted field, where we can imagine whatever we want, do whatever excites us, and taste whatever fruit we like. Some levels of excitement stay there forever.)

And then... It was her turn.

I exited her head when that started happening. I want to see her in that state. Watching that woman gives me great pleasure, and what is just happening is pure poetry, although kind of black.

Then

She came

*Like a memory from childhood buried
under the world*

Like a forgotten name face hands

Like a mad alarm clock that multiples
Like the end of the line on a typewriter
Like summer many years ago
She came
And when she came
The earth trashed like a wet dog
Rivers went mad and sometimes backward
The volcanoes spelled all their gold on her tits
And I stopped flying and hung there for
a half-second
Waiting for her final moan
And she moaned
Like a wind released from the cave
Like a wordless sailor song
Like a tree breaking under unbearable
temperature
Like water falling in a bottomless pool
Like an escape swim
Like a small death...

She opens her eyes, and she sees me crying. Without the sound, she crawls toward me and sits in my lap, taking my fully erected cock deep inside her, and then, without the tiniest movement, let me explode, out of the dream, out of the conscience.

CHAPTER 4

*I am tired, I am weary
I could sleep for a thousand years
A thousand dreams that would awake me
Different colors made of tears*
— Lou Reed, *Venus In Furs*

This Chair Is Empty

The reversible day is dripping his pointless stethoscopes, golf balls are zipping by no windows, brick in the Earth wall playing some jumping game, and fire in the fireplace is singing an old anthem from child's play. Forgotten atrocities lie down in the sand, trying to spell the word MALAGA, and water from Water Wall is circling the sand patch, like a hunter without ammunition, like a toothless tiger on his last quest. Empty prophecies are crawling up the crystallized furniture's legs, like fire ants searching for my skin. But where am I in this absurd setting? I am present, but the substance of it is not clear. My jaw was fixed in the first half-second of my arrival, but I didn't move much since. Nothing changed much since, save the occasional sensation of wetness. But like everything else here, it is only a feeling. How can I feel if I am dead? And where is my body? Why can't I see my legs or hands? I can't trust my feelings anymore! They are like a bird

*chirping in a forest without birds. Phantom pain!
Sound of silence! Society! Or any other paradox!*

Two men in the game of chess, but only one is a hunter. Fermenting fruit on the face of yesterday. Olive oil sunscreen. When I was a child, running backward and forgetting things made me a man. But now, I don't think. I have a body to find. Let's look behind. But, there are so many ways to do it, and I have to choose one. I am looking left, toward the Air wall, where I see shadows fighting, and then part of the floor with water on it, then the beginning of the sand patch, book of riddles, and nothing after that. Let's try right toward the Firewall. The flame in the fireplace is silent and depressing. It got colder, and I lost weight. Ashes underneath are colorless, and they barely reach the leg of a table, if there is any. And, nothing, again. I have to try to lower my eyes in front of me, but I can't. Like my chin is hitting my chest. But then, as I look in front of me, I see a mirror stretched over the Earth wall. In that mirror, there is a room exactly how I see it, there is a chair in the middle, but that chair is EMPTY!

Exhibition

I am dreaming about an art exhibition by an artist named Down Marcus. I never heard of him, but the name was carrying something warm and familiar, like certain water in which you dive, and it feels like your new skin, one made up to your measures, a perfect fit. Or like a wind that brings

you a smell of home from different directions. Or like a soil that welcomes your bare feet with a tangling feeling of hot and cold, wet and sharp, telling you which direction you should go. Or... I feel like I have known that name forever, so much that it could have been my name. But this name that I know it's not mine, this exhibition constructed out of imagination, this gallery without walls, with all these picture frames hanging in mid-air, it all gives me a strong feeling of familiarity and an awkward sadness.

The frames look empty. People are walking around very confused, looking at the frames. Then, someone tries to touch the space inside the frame, and there is an instant reaction: colors are forming around a person's finger, mimicking the skin color, creating lines that look like knuckles and wrinkles. The person, a woman in her 60s", started feeling something, and she withdrew her hand. But curiosity makes her do it again. This time she puts the whole hand into a frame, and some form of gasses and lights respond immediately, making a distorted but exciting image of the skin, nails, and jewelry on a woman's fingers. She pulls her hand again, talking about the strange feeling the frame induced around her wedding ring. The feeling of sadness and deceit. Other people start touching invisible canvases, making different images, sensing specter of emotions: joy, sadness, excitement... Some are mild, some overpowering, but people continued playing with frames, creating fantastic paintings along the way.

But those images made of some gas and light sprayed and projected from the edges of frames are so light and almost see-through like appearances of clouds over the moon in the night sky or tender ghosts in somebody's nightmare. And they were following people's movements and emotions so effortlessly and precisely, so much so that the gallery very soon became full of laughing, sobbing, and climaxing dancers, communicating with those strange frames their most intimate emotions. And in that particular moment, just before everything broke into pieces, the artist appeared. He is a shadow. He is a cut-out from a very dark park. He is a black hole sucking up all the colors and emotions from the wall-less room. But despite his disruptive appearance, nobody in the gallery noticed him. They kept playing their strange games until the scene froze in a timeless, spaceless fashion. Then, the artist approached the biggest frame in the gallery and stepped into it. It was like turning the lights off, but slowly and painfully, like an emergency vehicle that lost its way. By following him, my vision sank into nothingness, where we were set in the pose of two old smokers.

"Welcome to the black hole of my mind," he said. He looked like a blackboard, with no trace of chalk on it. I wanted to tell him that it was my mind as well, but no words were coming out of my mouth. Maybe because I didn't have a mouth, not the one I could feel or move.

"Why are you bringing me into your dreams?" he asked. We are sitting on a bench on some aban-

doned promenade, which I can almost recognize. "For you, I am just a memory. The one on which you are trying to construct a story, a friendship, a life. You know, dreams are different than life, and the connection you are searching for is very rare. Parallel lines never touch each other. But you think you can bend one of them enough to make a spark, to mix them up, even for just a half-second. The problem is with you. It is you who are doing it for you. You are like water stuck in a vortex. Lost your purpose. Who knows who else you brought in your dreams, just to feel alive? But dreams are not a replacement for life, just another face of it. I am sorry for you being dead and all, but it looks like you are trying to live through your dreams. You want to live. Even if you have chosen your present condition yourself, it is ridiculous to try to prove something through dreams. But, a lie is a truth. Right? Living under pretenses is not living. So is not replacing life with unfounded hope, of fairy tale happiness, of earthly riches, of eternity. Or dreams. Freedom comes in many forms. And I have no teeth. The misery of existence is the base of escapism. Literature, music, the art of any kind. Is that a leak from a dream factory or a cry for help? But regardless of the leaked amount, those dreams are not you. They are constructs of your imagination, your wishes, and your memories. And all that just to satisfy some animalistic urges. Feelings are for children. Those games... I have no ears. You can get drunk on dreams, but you can also overdose on them. But you think you are safe since you are already dead. Mornings are like

plaster, with silicone dust down my throat. Half a second of potency and another planet is lost. Go, travel, but remember, I have no hands.”

He left me crying. The whole pentagon apartment is crying. Some pieces of furniture are floating around, like in some awful flood. There is my chinchilla coat! There is my favorite pipe! I sit in my dentist's chair while looking at the drinking glass placed on the table in front of me. It has been raining for a long time now, and the glass is overfilled. But the drops on its surface are not so many now. Although it looks like the rain is stopping, I am not fooled. I can't even remember the last time I was dry! It is slowing down, for sure, but it never stops. All those clouds I've made love to, all those aphrodisiac drops on my inner skin, I want them here, always. Rain is like cosmic cleanser, prolific radiation, violin concerto on 78, slow motion sex... An intermediate movie is playing, but I can only catch it with my peripheral vision, which means I will forget it very soon if I ever record it. Somebody is cleaning a backyard of a house, while some people are watching and kind of cheering. Some other group of people on the opposite side of the lawn is making some noise, but it is not directed toward the one who is cleaning, which could only be me. Leaves and garbage disappear, but once the job is done, my vision goes back toward the people who are still cheering, and there are even more leaves on the ground now, although it looks nice and tidy. In that dream, there is no rain. Just quiet sadness.

Crash

I am in a car crush! But not *a* car crash, THE car crush. I see all cars of the world coming my way, fast as a blizzard, fast as a thought, fast as birds hunting one worm, like a blink of a blind eye that changes nothing. They are streaming down the hills, through the water, and up the streets of an ultimate town, like metallic, shiny ants with blades for eyes, helicopter wings, chainsaws for hearts. As they are coming closer, I can see drivers. They all have some visors on, covering half of their faces. And, as I am watching their cars speeding toward me, I can also see what they see: some watching movies, dramas, porn, and action, some are engaged in some games, some are reading books, and following talk shows, but none of them sees me, although I am a target of their crazy drive. I, too, am sitting in a car and watching the scene through the windshield, but it looks like the car I am in is not moving. As they approach me, I am getting scared. Horizon is full of shiny machines, but as they are coming closer, there is less and less space for them. So, they are starting to crash into each other, but instead of pushing each other away, they begin merging and, therefore, becoming bigger. As those towers of metal closed on me, their number declined, but their size grove, same as my fear. Singing metal, screaming tires, and someone called in thunders that gave the rhythm to the scene. I am paralyzed with fear of all of it. On the other hand, I am deciding to

let it happen since I cannot move, and the southing knowledge of me being dead is also present. As many cars crush to one another, I can hear cries, loud and long, cries that at one point become one cry, the ultimate cry, scary like a siren, just before the meteor hits the ground. The landscape is filled with scrap metal and burning tires, and for some reason, I think of *Giaconda* without 3D glasses. The next scene is only three enormous cars running toward me, while two on the outside are crushing to the middle one and, eventually, merging into one colossal automobile, the size of a balloon cruise ship, the one that takes all of my vision plains. And now I can see the driver of that car. It is *her*! She doesn't have a visor, and her face is wet. At that moment, just before the collision, all my fears disappear.

Or do they? The next thing I know, she is with me in my pentagon apartment. She is sitting in a pony hair liegenstuhl placed opposite my barber chair, looking at me with her green universe eyes. She is showing in her thirties, with her long hair that melts into a pony hair chair, in a dress that looks a bit small for her curves, with her hands in the air, like she is still steering the wheel of that imaginary car. Her dress looks wet on a couple of happy places, her heels scratching the floor, while she is mouthing verses of some poem I never heard before:

*“AplachiAplachimorem
istihomerdredul
merdredul amore
snake poison pructan...”*

At least, that is what I hear while blades of frizzing rain attack my eyebrows. It sounds like a thousand-year-old story about forbidden love, something they put in those books for kids without empathy. Souls are clashing, trying to merge into one, just like all those cars... The eternal question of lust and love, possession and reproduction, forbidden love, dangerous love, love that tries to crush reality. A myth powered by the human inability to live free, therefore by their desire to free themselves. But, as soon as we open our mouths, we are replacing our freedom with inadequate words. We learn not to speak but to imitate life with language. It is hard for me to express what I feel with those words, real ones or made-up ones.

Balawalava.Exmoodus.Subia. It is terrifying to think that words mean nothing. Word love, for example, has nothing to do with human emotions. It represents an economic correlation where people get together to gain more material stuff for themselves and their offspring. But, every real-time emotion gets two people involved; they have a problem with the whole of their surroundings. They got destroyed by reality. The violent nature of reality makes it impossible to contain explosive tendencies of mad love. That is why it had to be suppressed in myths, in books, so it doesn't interfere with bone-crushing reality. Love is specialized, customized, user-flavored, masked by images made to evoke second-hand feelings. People are lost in a maze of manipulative, selfish reality. They love by demand, filling in cracks, playing their destinies, the roles

they didn't choose, and procreating for prosperity. I didn't want her like that. I just wanted to be noticed by her, accepted, and, if possible, loved by her.

"You are not supposed to be here," I said. "This is not a dream."

She goes silent. Too silent. I can't say if she is breathing. She is not aware of me or the place. Although I forgot about colors, I somehow know the colors of her hair and her dress. It was always like that, her signature on the visible landscape, part of her tricky image, one that eluded me for such a long...

"Everything is a dream with you." Words are coming not from her but from everywhere around us. I am shaking with fear now. I don't want her here. This is my death, not hers. There is nothing for her here. Not that there is anything here for me, either, but this is it for me. I died. She is supposed to live without me. But wait! Wasn't that me who brought her here with my dream? She crushed in me, just like we crushed in each other sometimes during our lives. That was in a dream. Now, we are here, in this place where I usually wake up, alone. Is this just an extension of my dream? Is there a code word for confirming wakefulness? Should I, if possible, pinch myself? But I still cannot see any part of my body. I am taking it as a good sign. So, she must be right, everything is a dream, with me, and so it is this.

"Your mind is playing tricks with you," the voice said.

"I am not sure that I have a mind. It is a receptacle full of gooey liquid. If you put your fingers in it, you will meet nothingness." Cell separate in front of another foggy mirror. Footprints on it disappear as I struggle to breathe in. Chubby eyes of midnight blinking like a voice, like a broken bedroom in a forest. Her cunt is pulsating, causing the universe to expand, inch by inch. Half a second later, silence stops, and screens start to blink, coming to life, and showing way more realities than I've ever seen. I imagine her losing color, her dress fading, and she is naked for a moment; just before her skin becomes transparent, she is here less and less, taking her chair with her, taking my mind in her breast pocket, in her nasal cavity, in her small hands... She is safe, I think, like a forgotten lullaby.

"You killed yourself with a thought," an echo in the cave said.

You killed yourself with a thought, she said, and I was listening. She is folding little envelopes of days into paper boats and letting them float down the electric stream coming from the wall and through the midair, all the way onto the floor, and through a small opening somewhere in my peripheral vision. I couldn't remember which thought, but the sound of her voice was so mellow that I had no reason not to trust her. I am thinking: she can't be real since I give up on reality, but if she is, then I am a step closer to waking up. Little boats turn into fallen leaves, and I think of birthdays and child games with stones. Lonely birthdays lead to loss of memory, loss of names, and loss of interest in reality. My invisibil-

ity, found in a second-hand clothing shop, enabled me to slip through between the door and leave her, transparent and secure in the world that loved her. Counting stars, fallen leaves, or paper days, they don't help. She invented all the colors, knowing that life has none. Light, the same as water, is colorless, and invisible. However, they are not afraid of minor mistakes that make them visible to hungry eyes. They do not need to see me for me to be who I am. If thoughts can kill, it would be the most dangerous weapon, unpredictable and combustible, with a unique vaporizing effect. Puff! Just disappeared. An enormous amount of energy is concentrated on the live matter. Deathray. But, it is a myth. Fairy tale. Doesn't exist. Energy like that can only be found in a distant corner of the human galaxy mind.

As always, it starts with a dream...

Safety Word

I met her precisely thirty-five years after we stopped dating, to the minute. It was noon of some summer day, of some year lost in memories, when she picked up her dress train like a prehistoric cat lifting her tail and, with a sad smirk on her face, left through the proverbial door, into some other life that I never touched. She said nothing, and since then, that 'nothing' became a word, and after that, it became the tattoo on my forehead.

The sun was a little further then, but the streets are wet now. She is wearing a white jumpsuit and

has a collar made of fox fur. It looks alive, but only if you try to touch it. She is barefoot, and I can tell that her feet grew a bit, maybe half size. Her black hair was curlier than I remember, and those curls look animated, in some playful mode, probably a reaction to that new shampoo which they say contains an old rock song commemorating the visible grays. I am looking at her mouth while she is talking, and it seems like she is repeating only one word, a safety word that we use in our sex games. I can smell her juices. It is a matter of seconds before her wetness will become visible to all the people on this street, so I suggest that we sit on a restaurant patio and calmly ride the storm she is caught in. I remember the moment when she swallowed me for the first time. We were always horny, jumping on each other any chance we had, breaking every rule and taboo in our blindness. Time and place lost their meaning in our madness.

As we sit down, the waitress, who is a butterfly, starts bringing glasses of colored water to our table. I can't take my eyes off her face. The sun is playing with water on the table, and the colors are dancing on her face, erasing time. The present creeps in, and we are finally capable of conversation.

"Life is good," she says, answering the question I didn't have to ask. "Airplanes are faster, and they fly lower than before. And you?"

"Good, good, (I would like to fuck you right here) but good," I answer casually.

“I know,” she responds, “flowers are beautiful when you are naked.”

The butterfly waitress comes again and shakes her tits in front of our faces, a scene from a famous play in an old theatre, not far from where we are.

“Would you like some more water?” she asks. “There is a call for you, but it doesn’t matter.”

Now, the enormous turtle (or tortoise) is approaching our table. The waitress is telling us that he is five hundred years old. We look at each other, surprised by this uncanny appearance. The same memory comes into both of our minds: That time in the park, a long time ago, we were making love, and someone was coming toward us. She started yelling our safety word but didn’t want to stop what we were doing. A giant turtle, maybe the same one, came to the bench we were on and started talking:

“I am five hundred years old and blind. But somehow, I can see you. Can I have a piece of your clothes for a souvenir?” She gave him her panties, and he disappeared. That made us change our safety word to ‘turtle.’

Now, this turtle, that may be the same one, five hundred years old, is coming toward her. It is silent. She is frozen in her surprise, and she is holding on to her fox with both hands. The turtle begins chewing on the white jumpsuit, and after a while, the suit starts breaking...

CHAPTER 5

*Who looks outside, dreams;
who looks inside, awakes.*

— Carl Jung

The Longest Dream I Had

Like a flash of the camera attached to the brain of a hungry wolf in a winter cry. They say when people are in peril, their mind runs their whole life in front of them, all precious moments, every familiar face, even words that have changed the course of their lives. Imagine this is like that. But, for you, this is a hollow ground, where you will find me in a labyrinth, where every corner, every leaf, looks and smells like her. My whole life in dreams. A woman of those dreams. Magical creature, master of deceit, queen of pranks, and villa of my clouds, someone I know better than trees, better than fountain pens, better than myself when I fly through the bright tunnels of schizophrenia. Two sugars? Ok. A pipe? Sure. This is a one-way trip to eternity. Where I think I am now.

First, I am very old and sitting in a red wheelchair, with a harlequin hat on my head. I don't have any motor functions, save in my left hand and dick in the constant erection. They like each other. Not much to do around here. I am surprised

to see any part of my body, but soon an explanation comes to me: I see myself in an ancient mirror, placed in front of me, all distorted and full of all kinds of scratches and lines where the silver layer is broken. That mirror has its own eyes, shiny and artificial eyes that change colors like some ludicrous sky in Northern Africa. It rarely happens in my dreams. I feel very suspicious about the image I see, but something tells me it might be how the future looks. I hear a woodpecker somewhere in the room, but I am sure there are no birds around me. The rapid-fire of its peaking hurts my brain. Artificial light is adding to my headache. Slowly, like a sea rush, like a tired waterfall, or more like a prison morning, I start to recognize those woodpecking noises as notes from some particular instruments. I don't recognize the melody, but it is the music of some kind. I recognize it as her signature, something that always goes with her, in reality, the same as in dreams. I can smell *her*, her hair, her neck, her cunt... The air is pregnant with tiny particles of her presence both in smell and sound, mellow and soothing, like a burning sea, like a screaming rain forest, like the appearance of a long lost shoe... But where is she? Why can't I see her? It looks like nothing is there but my chair and the mirror. And everything else looks like a world from the corner of the eye. Inconclusive. With attention drawn to something else. Music I hear or wood peaking slowly becomes chatter of some kind. Like a tone-deaf magic flower, it opens into her voice, an unstoppable typewriter, involved in a tirade about crazy rivers. They were holding

hands just before the ocean, and then they swallowed a couple of sleepy ships, half of the night sky and tickets for the local circus.

Like any other news of the day, one floated in the air, like the smell of a good lunch. Where is she? She came in the mirror, but like a blue butterfly, she sat beside me, but like a soap bubble, she hugs me, but like a gentle snake. The distorted image of her hourglass body moves through the mirror, and my erection is even harder, telling her to stay for another half-second. She is much older than I ever have seen her, but also much more beautiful. Love preserved the shine of her skin, the strength of her hair, the clarity of her voice... Love that kept me alive for so long. Now she is on top of me, making love to me, a ridiculous creep with nothing to give. Her hair and skin covered my disabled body, which provided me with a feeling of ultimate happiness, something that, in dreams and reality, only she could do. For a half-second, I can only see her eyes, and then, mutual orgasm comes like a million tiny bees with their heeling stings, with their poison of oblivion. She is showing me something on her palm. It is beautiful, but I don't want to go there, I want to stay here, with her.

It's too late. I am already on some beach, looking over my feet to the waves of clean green water. I have a sugar taste in my mouth that reminds me of fairs from childhood, ones with crazy rides and cotton candy. The smell of salty water is the smell of her sweat, which must be the truth under the relentless sun that completely blinds me. In my

peripheral vision, I can see her swollen belly that looks like a giant orange in competition with the sun for space, shine, and beauty. I try to touch it, but it is too hot, although I do have a sense of its curve, warmth, and life. Mussels are having a party nearby, and they are giggling in secret. Beyond that, the beach looks empty, in the sense that no one has ever been there, like a life-free zone. The sand surrounding us is the same color as her skin, and if it's not for a bump I see, I wouldn't be able to locate her. The whole beach is pulsating, like an irregular heartbeat: seven-eighths, fifteen sixteenths, back to three-quarters. I feel something strange behind my right ribcage, like tickling, or a fountain pen on the paper, or a word lost in a scream forest. It is ballooning fast and, like a grooving pain, making the sky look very low. She is contracting hard, ready to paint a new picture for me, lubricating a tunnel for a new dream or a new stream of water that will take us together into an unexpected rain city.

Now, this is what I call rain. Ultimate background music to all the shifts of days and nights, gentle winters, and mild summers. Tiny drops, like the digits of a small hand, make vibrations in the air full of laughing gas. Again, I cannot move, but my 360-degree vision gives me a full sense of nature that surrounds me. The world of the deep ocean and high mountains would probably fit into each other if they could get together. But rain, rain, rain, rain, it is all that is there, a living

thing with no much sense, ultimate purifier of all things, alive or dead.

I am switching to a lower gear on my moon drive, looking at blue clouds, night children hanging on the pierced ceiling, one that keeps moving, ignoring city lights and the footsteps of ant people. Loneliness evacuates mirror streets, and solitude rules parks and abandoned bus stations. The ocean is vertical now, and if I walk to certain corners, the invalidity of street lights, I can dip my head in the water and start a conversation with a sea urchin, although there won't be much difference, since the rain is so heavy, that I have to fight for air. Then I see her swimming through the air or whatever it is around us. She does it very stylishly, like a choreographed dance, to the music only she can hear. There are some other, fishlike beings swimming with her, trying to get her attention, but her eyes are closed, and I can tell she is asleep. I want to tell her something, but water is blocking the sound, like I am in a music studio, behind the glass, and the main room is an aquarium. Her costume looks like dolphin skin but has dragonfly prints on it, and as she gets closer, I see those beautiful bugs flying away, leaving her naked. Her nipples propel, her butt paddles, and with hands and legs making silent signs, she passes above me. What is she saying? I travel, she says, but each stop on my way is home.

Suddenly, I am in her dream, on a train that snakes through fantastic landscapes, between mountains, and along rivers never seen by human

eyes before. She is inhaling scenery passionately like she is making love, and I wonder if she thinks of me. But I am here, between her legs, on her lip, while she is savoring wild strawberries, gooseberries, and some other fruits available only in her dreams. I can say that she is aware of my presence, even if she is not looking for me, at me. Do I change her behavior? Am I part of her conscience? It is possible that she is acting according to accepted rules, constructed to please me, to stay close to me, at least to one me she loved, one me that she is comfortable with.

Loving someone doesn't stop with accepting the person as they are. Hard work stays true to the common ideas, living in the world you created together, and changing yourself and others to fit better in that environment. Each love has its language, its own set of patterns, games, and stories that magically transform your everyday reality into a livable space. I know she loves me by the way she is exploring strange areas, dealing with complex thoughts, the way she's choosing her clothes and the way she talks in her sleep. But somehow, I know that it is not me exclusively. She does it for the whole world, picking love sweets wherever she can. That way, she is changing reality in our favor, making more space for us. That is one thing she never managed to teach me: dreams are always more appealing to me, and if it weren't for her, I wouldn't have much in common with the world. Watching her moving through all kinds of air and liquids, with the skills of a blond villa, with the

ease of a blind fish, she is, and always was, a meteor, shooting star in my mind. She was the only fuel that made me run, which made me live. Until I died. Even now, she is a perpetuum mobile in many of my dreams. It never stops.

Whale

Half a second later, I am in a theatre, or some music house, with its seats filled with people of different sizes and shapes. Some look like balloons, some like a coil, and some are just bubbling water. They are all mad. At the bottom of the theater, the stage is constructed out of tin cans and unread books. At the center of the stage, there is a giant white whale, still and silent. Coming from people, from the wall made of forest, from the ceiling full of stalactites, the noise is growing louder and louder, until the moment she comes to the stage, at which point surprising silence occurs. She is covered with veils of different colors and materials, with only her hair visible under them, revealing her identity. She sits in front of the whale, which then opens its mouth, showing a row of perfect white teeth. Hands are emerging from living veils, and they start touching those teeth, making different sounds as they go. Music emerges from the whale's blowhole in staccato and melodic intervals, making the audience sigh and almost protest. But as it went on, people started calming down. Music was flowing through the air, bouncing off trees, of sta-

lactites, of bodies unprepared for such an attack. As she is playing, her veils start lifting and disappearing, one by one. Each of them corresponds with a specific melody or a phrase, depending on the mood she is spreading, and when done, the appropriate veil is gone too. As the concert progresses, the musician is getting more naked. The music is made with fewer notes, and the auditorium is getting empty since people are leaving, seeing misappropriation of further attendance. In the end, it is she, naked, a low 'c' that sounds like a siren of a departing ship, and me, swallowed by the waves of tears.

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Now, I am in a courtroom, together with fifty angry pigs. They are all pointing their hoofs at me while making squeaky sounds and slobbering extensively. The woman judge was not even trying to quiet them, not with her voice or a gavel. She, half-bird, half-horse, is sitting in her high chair, and in a feat of somnambulism, she is reading a comic book, one that I almost remember from some different time, and she is reciting poetry in the dark language. Squealing is getting louder, and now there are more pigs around me, all of them pointing at me. The judge is starting to laugh, and soon her tunic catches the flame. Then, sprinklers go off, and it looks like it is raining in the courthouse. Pigs are pulling out umbrellas and running

out, making horrible sounds of disappointment. It is the judge and me now engaged in a very intense staring contest. She is sentencing me to six rounds of running around the soccer field on one leg. Then, in the last row of beach chairs, I see *her* wrapped in a velvet curtain, with one of her arms sticking out from almost liquid material. She is holding something in her small hand as if she is offering it to me. The next moment, it is me who is holding it. It is a vial of blood, with a note attached to it that says: *I hope this will be enough.*

Come Together

The scene is changed, and we are now in a small cabin of an ancient ship. It is heaving and swaying heavily, and as we make love, we are trying to use the boat's movements for our pleasure. Most of the time, it is an impossible task, and we are laughing like crazy as we try to stay connected. Although she looks like she is lost, I know her very well; her body is so familiar, her face playfully serious, her eyes deep and understanding. We hold onto each other with skills that are developing fast, with acrobatic necessary to stay connected, to enjoy the closeness that pleases us and brings us oblivion. As our minds float through the cabin, following new gravity rules, our skins merge with every touch, and it is hard to say who is who and even how many of us are here. I am searching for an image of me in her eyes, but there is only a vast

space, full of stars and planets, of unfinished people, of stories eager to start. Her eyes are a cunt of the universe, a place where everything just *is*, with all beginnings and ends, uterus ready to create beautifully crazy worlds, colorful seas, and liquid gas giants. All *time* that ever existed is condensed in that half-second of my glimpse into it. I am lost there, where I want to be lost. And, as our bodies were getting in sync with the waves and ships rolling, as we let gravity make our movements, as we started to levitate in the middle of the cabin, the round window that was submerged underwater started growing and grew to a meter wide. Then it broke, and just when the pressure sucked us into turbulent water, we came, together.

Arrow

Suddenly, I am somewhere else, deep in a scene that looks almost like a memory. I am eight years old, playing with a few boys my age. The game is something we call Ceewbooy Indie. We are making bows and arrows, which we are trying to perfect by adding some copper wire to the arrows' tips. We coiled the wire around the straight branches, with one end of the wire sharpened and left sticking straight from the wood. We were shooting those arrows everywhere until we came up with an idea to shoot them toward each other. I am standing with my back against the wall while my best friend aims at me from some distance.

Everything slows down, and I can see him releasing the arrow from his little bow. The arrow travels toward me slowly, so I can see it coming to my left eye. I see the tip of the wire, serious and determined, approaching. But just before it hits me, the arrow changes its course upward, brushing my forehead, and disappearing. The scene is frozen, or it just goes on in sequences, with all of our faces astonished by what just happened. Reality broke for a half-second, and it did not know how to proceed. The option in which I am dead or badly injured passed, but nothing else took its place. The brush of air on my eyebrow and my forehead is still hanging, the surprised faces of my friends haven't changed yet, and it looks like the world is waiting to see what comes next. But I know that feeling of uncertainty, anticipation, and the nest where coincidences, like little birds, cry for their worm of continuation. I've seen it many times before and after, and I am always surprised by what comes next. This time, though, it is a touch. I feel her hand in my hand, warm and sweaty. I don't have to look at her; I know that she came to take me away to save me again. Now, I can watch those boys continuing with their game like nothing is happening, like everything is still possible. Game in which you are not stopping, you are not waiting for results. Nothing is there save new moves, new rules, and new direction. Who knows where the night will find them? But for me, she is taking me into my dreams, with skills and drives that only eight years old girl can have.

Nancy

I see her naked. Her tight and shiny black skin reflected the light of some projector placed behind my head. Her tights look like a viaduct of the mountain in some interstellar gas giant. She is not moving but inviting me, with her murderous beauty, to touch her, to take her in my lungs, in my veins. As I move closer, I can feel the heat of her presence, like a destination for a stubborn traveler, like a road to much needed unknown, like a riddle without a solution. But the touch that is happening is not exactly a touch. It is more like sinking into a cloud, or warm water, not just with my fingers, or my shaking hands, but with the whole of my skin, my existence, deep into black cooking oil. I still see her, but I am completely inside her, and all I can feel is content, like I finally came where I always wanted to be. I know that my eyes are closed now, but I can see with all of my other senses. She starts to move gracefully and slowly; her hands are waving through the air, her firm breasts are vibrating under my presence, and her buttocks and her legs going in some weird and uneven dance routine, as I begin to move with her, in her, being her. But she didn't stop giving me her body to enjoy and call it mine; she also gave me her mind, so strong and sharp, that it was easy to leave my own behind.

Next thing I know, I am in some village, in some faraway country, where I am sitting on the ground, together with a couple of other women. All of us are treading some colorful beads in wooden bowls,

creating kaleidoscopic textures. We are silent, but beads are creating water-like sounds and make us giggle a little. Just in front of us, children are playing some confusing game with stones and sticks. It looks like they will hurt each other any moment, but somehow they stay unharmed and giggling just like us. Now and then, a young man would pass by us, looking shyly at me. As he does that, I have some warm and tingling feeling in my lower belly. He is from a close-by village, and it looks like he likes me a lot. My body reacts very strongly to his presence, and sometimes I have flash day-dreams about being with him, alone and naked. He is holding me, gentle but passionate, kissing my neck, my tits, my belly. I've never seen erected cock before, and it is much nicer than what women were describing or drew in the dirt. Touching it is very strange, soft and firm at the same time, and worm, as it is entering me. My cunt is wet and welcoming, and I feel many things besides the pain. I kiss the man's face, but I am afraid to open my eyes now since I am not sure what is happening. As he pushes dipper inside me, I start enjoying his hardness. I am working my mussels around it, squeezing it, pulling it. My cunt is sucking on it, and I feel man's pleasure from it. I am stone, he is a stick, and we are making fire together. I can feel the sparks inside me, and soon there are many, everywhere, until fire spreads, fast and powerful, and we are both cumming without a sound. As I bite my lip, I can feel new warmth coming into me, and it makes me think of a sunny day swimming in cold river water. We are wet, and all is good.

Back in the village, everything happens in a blink of an eye, half a second, but somehow continues to last, effortlessly and seamlessly, without me feeling stuck. Other women are looking at something toward the village center. I noticed the kids who stopped playing and were looking in the same direction as women. There is some kind of window there, full of colorful pictures, with strange people and weird houses, and many other things that are hard for me to explain. I am now looking at the boy approaching me, a terrified look on his face and covered with blood. He is holding his hand out, looking at me. I'm on my feet, going toward the boy, and now I see what it is in his hand. There are two eyeballs on his palm. Instead of being frightened, I am thinking about how the irises on those eyeballs are a different color like they are from two different people. Or from one very strange person. I hug the child, and he drops the eyeballs on the ground, and they make a sound like bells, like waterfalls, like earthquakes. I embrace the boy while imagining giving birth to him, and a spirit woman is helping me. Although she is blind, she is telling me that not all colors are right. She is giving me my baby, and its eyes are of a different color, but it is smiling at me. Spirit woman is taking my pain between her thumb and index finger and throwing it in a fire, which now looks like a bowl of beads. I am back hugging a boy, but he is now just a piece of yellow parchment with some signs on it, signs that I read with the tips of my fingers, and I start crying. I notice that people are moving their huts behind the strange window, which is filled with

all kinds of insects now. Holding that paper in my hand, I approach the window and step into it, like in a very cold fire.

Reality

It smells like a liver and burned tires. Like an abandoned butcher store. Like a zoo. Everything is sticky like sprayed with condensed sugary juice, but it doesn't smell sweet, only rotten. The air is full of sharp microscopic objects, like ninja stars that can get in your eyes, your mouth, in every pore of your skin, and cut microscopic cuts to every cell. Rotten flesh and stale blood cannot be seen as the herd of giant lizards passed by and licked it all away, but it lingers all around anyway. That is the ultimate pain, she would say, in one of the dead languages. And the noise, like a thousand helicopters placed in earplugs that protect you from silence. But wait! Those are human screams, long and sharp, mixed with the sound of squalling and cracking of million burning trees and countless machines grinding foul air into even less breathable poison. Everything here is made to produce some discomfort. The blinding light is everywhere, reflecting an infinite number of times from chemical clouds, glass buildings, and oil roads. Even shades are hot enough to soup your brain.

– People smell like new plastic. They got headaches as a measurement of their success.

- Their faces are blurred. The new technology that prevents them from being recognized on the streets is working correctly.
- Their eyes are empty. Sometimes, in the evening, you can see rays of light searching for lost things on the ground.
- Colorful windows are attacking each other.
- Everybody is pretending there are no explosions. Even if it hits very close and takes the bartender's arm, nobody will notice since they are focused on getting their personalized coffee.
- Music like squalling metal on the hypnotizer's watch is playing everywhere. It tends to be louder than bombs and gets into people's heads more easily through the hair products they use.
- A blinding mist of artificial light is filling every room. White mud absorbs thoughts and sends them into dark pits of oblivion.
- Balloons of coincidences lying popped on the ground. Since they lack programmed language and cannot be absorbed into the precise mechanism of the grind, they are destroyed and neglected. Nobody learns about them in schools anymore. People who are unlucky to experience them take unique ultraviolet showers for months to go back into the routine.
- Two-dimensional sex is everywhere. No other kind of sex is allowed.
- People live multiple lives in the ether but live nowhere else. They are free to take any personality they want, as long as it brings them some

reward. Some poets eat children, journalists collect eyes, doctors make bone towers, wealthy people steal memories, and housewives enjoy running over school teachers.

- Water is heavy on lead and swords.
- Bottles of second-hand emotions fill the shelves of every store. Nobody knows where the first hand was.
- The town that I see looks abandoned. Pawed streets have different lanes, dedicated to different people. If you mistakenly wander into the wrong lane, you end up in the meat factory.
- Across the street, there is a store where body parts, body-liquids, and bone marrow are sold. In its backyard, people are fighting.
- Nature doesn't exist. There is a law that strictly forbids any of its occurrences.
- Words in any constellation can change reality instantly.
- Dreams are scripted. They come from the factory downtown. You buy them in vending machines placed in schools, hospitals, stadiums, and trains that take you in the wrong direction.
- The universe is a decorated cubicle with twelve hours of oxygen. Scientists have decided that there is no need for more space than three by three rooms, and they ordered people to take only every second breath.
- There is a road leading out of town, through the big, gray desert, the road pawed with human bodies, some dead, some still alive but muti-

lated, desperate, and in an enormous amount of pain. They are distorted as they have fallen from a great height, but together, they form a trembling mass that moves in one direction or the other.

- In one of the houses, many people are talking in the choir. With their flat faces, they were looking two-dimensional and sad. Words they are saying are flying off their chicks, like half-second birds.
- Beautiful garbage everywhere, needless glass structures, images of nameless shiny things, and rules are melting under the scorching sun.
- Deep down, where there is almost no light, in dinners with meat mincing machines, people eat themselves.
- There are no animals, save alleged lizards, nor any live plants. Skins are used for protection from sun rays and dry trees that self-combust without any outside help.
- Tears are collected and shipped to the murdered seas.

But when I speak to people here, I always find them overly enthusiastic about this place.

“We all have numbers now,” they would say. “And we can walk on the Moon in our own house if we want. Big leaps, you know.”

They all spoke one language, made of 56 words plus four forbidden ones. They can choose the color of their chains, and they spend their lives trying to shorten them.

“We follow the rules to achieve happiness,” they say. “Nobody likes to get hurt.”

Although they are blinking in precise sequences, I fail to understand the narrowness of their vision, and I'm having trouble seeing my reflection in their eyes.

“Nothing exists besides this, and what you are looking for is wrong. The economy of feelings is a post-stamp of the day. Asking for more is selfish. Abra-Kadabra of today is a gravel road. Your knees get scraped. You believe in reality, and death will be kind to you.”

My subconscious is floating through this dream crematorium, and, surprisingly, I feel Nothing. No sadness, no pain. Nothing. Water is missing. And I wake up, not missing this place.

Yellow water can

Now, I am walking in a park, with twisted benches and diamond-shaped bushes. I see umbrellas growing from narrow patches of dirt. I am breathing, but whatever I inhale, I breathe out smoke. It reminds me of a habit I had when I was alive, but this is different. It is happening with every breath, and the smoke is ticking, and it looks like there is more of it every time I open my mouth. It doesn't smell like any smoke I've smelled before, but I think of burning rubber and roasted animals on sticks mixed with burned sun dust. As it becomes more intense, I feel the fire in my chest, burning

like a small star, reluctant to make its mark on this imaginary park. Fighting for air, I am coughing now, and as I do so, little tongues of flame are coming out of my mouth. And with every step I make, with every new cough, the fire becomes bigger until I start exhaling a flame a couple of meters long, like a newly born dragon or an old-fashioned flame thrower. I am not surprised by this development, and a thought comes to my mind that I can use this ability to burn some stuff. So I point the fire toward a couple of cute umbrellas, and they burn instantaneously, like a piece of paper with secret wording on it. Next, I burn a bench, which is twisted like someone was trying to squeeze some liquid from it. It burned with a long, painful scream, which, for some reason, made me happy and eager to do it again, and again. Diamond bushes were making clicking sounds while burning, like a typewriter or the alien language I speak. As I am burning stuff around me, the park I am in seems to expand, giving me more targets, and making me move faster. Next thing I know, I am running from bush to bush, from one bench to another, down the long line of umbrellas. The sound of them burning makes some pleasant music to my ear, and I feel like I am dancing. I am jumping and twirling like an ice dancer.

Since none of the fire lasts more than a blink of an eye, the day is beautiful. Joy overwhelms me, and I understand that this is a dream. Suddenly, I find myself in front of a patch of dirt that doesn't have any umbrellas, twisted benches, and dia-

mond-shaped bushes. On it lays only a shy amount of emerald grass, and, in the middle, there was a red, maybe a day-old flower. I stop for a moment, thinking about what kind of sound it can produce when I burn it, but then I notice a girl, maybe six, or seven years old, kneeling beside that flower. She looks like she is not aware of my presence, entirely focused on a flower. She is holding a yellow water can in her pale hand. Clumsy but precise, she was pouring a small amount of water directly on a flower, which was vividly grooving, and turned toward the girl's smiling face, and looked like it was sending her a kiss. The scene becomes like a hand-painted canvas, and I feel that fire is dying in me, replaced with an enormous sense of thirst.

Reality Check 2

You are frozen. The illness you have is unknown to science, so scientists decided to freeze you and keep you in a crayon tube, where you can live a virtual life while your body is frozen and not alive. That technology is not perfect, but at least it gives you hope that sometime in the future, they will be able to revive you and cure your illness, making you capable of living. You are the first one with that kind of disease to be put on the procedure. Your body is healthy, but your mind is completely messed up. You are dangerous, but not to yourself or others, only to reality, which was suffering under your constant push toward dreams. At

one point, you could erase the line between reality and your dreams so much that real people got sucked into those dreams. Scientists urged the governments to proclaim a state of emergency due to the widespread outbreak of strange dream-like occurrences, which made all kinds of disturbances in everyday life. What was the worst, most people started preferring those symptoms to a normal way of living, and governments had to protect reality. They find you to be a source but could not isolate you from the rest of the population. There was an early argument against killing you and vaporizing your body. Some doctors who knew you, whose help you asked for, suggested that the power of your dreams could survive physical elimination and stay active after your death. So, they froze you, thinking that the procedure would minimize the effect of your dreams on the rest of the world. Some military experts suggested using you as a psychological weapon against the enemy since people affected stopped caring about reality's most precious values. Therefore, they were easy to conquer. The argument against it was stronger since no one had any idea how to manipulate the disease's spreading and effects. Even now, some strange things are happening. Yesterday, on a football field, at the moment when the player of one team was returning the ball to golly, a player from the opposite team ran faster than the ball, outran it, took it, and scored a goal. Nobody can be that fast. The other time, a girl was about to be hit by a car, but the car jumped over her. Further, small occurrences, like changing water to wine,

duplicating people, turning metal to gold, etc., are still happening, although most phenomena are not registered or reported since people are scared to be prosecuted and confined. Special secret investigators are appointed to hunt and collect abnormalities and people who are involved. In a way, your illness caused resistance to reality. It opened the door to possibilities for different ways of life, opposite to usual, ones that can distract people from fulfilling their duties. A few people have been confined to particular districts and facilities, where scientists experiment with different procedures and chemicals. None of them gave any results. The cryonic tube is used only a few times after you since it is costly. Deployment of the bomb is imminent. Lemons are changing colors. Fingers are too long to type this. Did you see a dolphin with yellow strips? Made havoc at the porcelain store.

I am bedazzled by this possibility. I never wanted to disturb anything. The effects a person makes on reality should be minimized by using the mechanisms invented by civilization's guardians. I always thought the status quo was the most outstanding achievement of humanity.

CHAPTER 6

*Sleep is a reward for some, a punishment
for others. For all, it is a sanction*

— Comte de Lautreamont

The Sixth Wall

For a long time, circa half a second, I was scared to move around my pentagon apartment. I was moving my eyeballs, trying to understand where I am. I was looking at those walls, comprehending their nature, noticing details in their structure, wondering what they meant... The room looks like a pentagon, and I can see a wall right in front of me and two adjacent walls on the side. Those two are finishing beside me, and I can almost see their ends, the points where they touch the next two walls. But I cannot see the sixth wall. It is not behind me, though. By the rules of geometry, it ought to be right where I am, in level with my eyes. It was blurry before, but now I think that I am either installed in the wall, or I am that wall myself. But...

The Bird

I dream about meeting with a woman I've never seen before. We are supposed to meet in an abandoned part of town, where nobody has lived for a long time. But it happens that we both know where it is since we separately dreamed about this place. There are only two streets there, and they are crossing each other under a strange angle, making the corner houses so narrow it seems impossible that anyone ever lived there. Windows on houses are boarded, and facades are falling apart, but, somehow, those buildings have dignity, made of the place's ambiance and distant glamour of their past. But the dark colors on all of them are giving the whole site a mystic appeal like it knew it did not exist. I came up one of the streets, narrow and full of empty bottles and rusty pots, that were dancing on the strong wind, or a draft, making clanking noise similar to those chimes people hold dear somewhere else. The street continued going up and up after the cross until it got lost in a sparkling mist, way above half-ruined buildings. I am standing on one of the corners, underneath the old watch covered with spider webs and dust. People who lived here, if they ever did, forgot to take it with them, probably in a hurry to wake up. So, with the face of an exterminated animal and with hands of shooting stars, the old watch is, surprisingly, showing the right time. It was almost the time when she was supposed to show up. I compare its time with one I was carrying in my

broken pocket and inhale something reminiscent of air but way sweeter.

“She won’t come,” says someone above my head, in the native language, but with a strange accent.

I look above. The voice is coming from the old watch. And there, staring at me through the spider web, is the coo-coo bird. It is bigger than a wooden bird that announces a full hour but similar. And it looks like a real bird.

“I am a real bird as far as anything here can be real. It is exhilarating being here, though, where two people’s dreams are to meet.” Besides excitement, the bird sounds sad. “She is not coming,” she repeats.

“How do you know?” I ask, although not intrigued. I am looking up the opposite street, which begins to darken, even if the night is hours away.

“I read the letter she sent to you. It is written by a child.”

At this moment, my attention went to a bunch of kangaroos jumping around the old clock, revealing that they are not kangaroos but broken motorcycles. Air, or whatever, was painted with a new smell, cotton candy, and I almost remembered the day I went to... Some lights appeared on one of the buildings, then another. Still, the night is far, far away.

I know,” I say, “She grew up since.”

At that moment, the other street goes dark. And, despite those lights in the windows, you could say that the night that is coming, although premature,

will be the darkest one of my life. I am thinking of interesting things I can tell, but there are no words in my head – only the picture of a leaking boat.

The bird started flapping her wings when six o'clock came, and she didn't announce it. The face of the clock started roaring, and now spiders are running scared. They hide behind the clock, where they are just numbers. The night is rolling down the other street. It looks like a black dust cloud or a giant sack of potatoes. But, now, a figure is emerging from the mass. As it approaches the square on the opposite side from where I am standing, hugging the watch, a woman's face is visible. It is pale, almost shining. I am surprised since I don't recognize her. I also notice her hands, but the rest of the figure is lost in the cloud she is pulling. She is rolling across the square, oblivious to non-existing traffic, and soon, she is face to face with me. I can see her body now, covered with black, living cloth that extends behind her into a silent and motionless cloud. She is almost touching me with the tip of her nose and her sticking-out nipples.

"Who are you?" asked someone using my mouth and voice.

"I don't know you either, but here we are," says she, in a bird voice.

"But, I am dead," I say, unconvinced.

"Then I am Death," she says.

"Mine?" I ask, feeling wooden.

"Not necessarily," she says, confused. She looks away, and now she is just a young girl, in a flower

dress, standing in front of a clock, with no one else around. It was half the second past six.

The Sea

I am floating on the sea surface. Waves are tickling all sides of my body. Or at least that's what I feel. Same as a breeze on those wet parts, gentle and comforting, like a tree branch. I also have a feeling of being here a long time, of belonging here, being part of the Sea. It is so comforting, floating on the most prominent living being in the universe while not moving at all. But, the strangest thing is that the Sea is changing. From time to time, I can feel the change in water temperature, in its color, in the amount of salt and minerals in the air, and somehow I know that I am, from time to time, at a different sea. Since the weather is changing constantly, I am exposed to the sun's cruelty, embrace of the storm, love of the rain... My skin is hard like driftwood, smooth, almost slimy. Occasionally, some sea creatures come to scratch their back on me, thanking me for my patience. A Sea turtle named Freud is often visiting. He is talking to me in my mother's tongue, although he swallows some consonants, and then it sounds like a talking equivalent to a strobe light.

"Magic ca-a-a-a(r)pet?" he says.

"Big one," I answer.

"Sea is like denial. You need to paddle a lo-o-o(t) to get over it."

"I can't paddle. I am..."

I stopped there since I didn't trust him completely.

"I know," he says, "you are... what you are. But someone, somewhere else, would have lots of work to get ove-e-e-e(r)."

"Is it important? To get over, I mean?" I ask.

"Sometimes," he says, like he is losing interest.

"In a way, you are a perad-d-(d)-ox. I live here, in a living thing, a living organism, and you, what?"

"I am just here," I answer unconvincingly.

The storm is coming, with its smell of forbidden fruit, its arms like carnival whips, and its voice of exploding cities. Sun is running away, an animal scared by distant shots. Wind crushes on my sides, unable to move me. Its game, after a while, becomes a frustration, and it hits me harder and harder. Waves accompany the wind, and together they send me deep into the water, where everything is peaceful and silent. Despite their wish to leave me there, I float back up, unmoved by their frustration. And, after that half-second disturbance, I am back to floating, like before. Now, I notice another unusual thing. While the weather is changing and light is often different from one moment to another, it is always a day at the Sea. The night is missing, but not by me.

"Time has no saying here; everything is just as it is," says the dolphin named Frantz. He has yellow stripes on his back.

“It is stupid to even think about it. You can easily be 150 years old, and I can grow wings if I want”.

His voice has perfect reverb to it, and occasionally, he would seem to be far away from me, looking like a dot on a horizon or as a little cloud on a calm red sky.

“I remember you from some other dream,” I say, thinking of vascular surgery.

“Yes, we met before. Back then, you had eyes.” I don’t know what he meant by that.

Now, rain is falling, and I feel some strange vibrations on the surface. Like something is cutting the waves.

“It’s a ship.” I think. “I am saved.”

Soon, I see a black bulk of a ship in the distance. It is moving slowly, lazy, toward me. I imagine the excitement of sailors when they notice me. ‘Man overboard! Man overboard!’ They will throw life belts and ropes toward me, and the captain will order a full stop. And all my imaginary friends will clap, and cheer. Only the rain will be unusually sad.

The ship is very close to us now. It is approaching us on its starboard side. But there is no excitement on the deck – only a few bearded men, leaning on a fence, smoking. I can hear them talking.

“Look, the board!”

"It looks very old."

"It looks like a part of some ship. Or a ponat.*"

"Imagine poor souls hanging on to it after a shipwreck."

"Look! There is something carved on the surface. Like names or something. Should we alert the skipper?"

"No, he wouldn't stop. We have to deliver our cargo as soon as possible. The other side is winning. The weapons we carry might change the outcome of the war. No, he wouldn't stop. Anyway, it is tea time."

"But look, look! There is a turtle swimming alongside it. And a dolphin is jumping over it. What a scene."

And while they were cheerfully chatting, smoke from their pipes made end credits, and their voices started to fade. Soon, they are lost in the distance.

Landfill

In an enormous landfill, I just opened my eyes. The field, filled with piles of household items, is stretching in every direction, as far as the eye can see. The smell of dust and old wood, dirty cushions, and burned electric wires is overwhelming. I find myself lying on a woolen mattress that looks clean and, somehow, gives me a pleasant sense of

* A piece of plank hanging from ship's fence on a rope attached to both sides.

familiarity. Chairs and chests of drawers sticking from hills of stuff. Old clocks and ceramic figurines caught in a strange embrace with table legs and lamp cords, early TV sets, and deflated footballs. I hear the cracking, and as I turn my head in the sound's direction, I see a record player between a couple of heaps. It was on level, and the record on it was spinning while the needle was skipping so fast that it was impossible to recognize the song. There are no speakers, but the sound is loud. I see a coffee pot near the player, and instantly I can smell freshly brewed coffee. I am not sure if I am standing or lying down and if it is possible to move around in this chaos. The sky is dark, with layered clouds that look like balconies in a theater where you can find stethoscopes and water balloons. As I look around, I notice a movement a couple of steps in front of me. A table or a chair moves its legs as it is stretching them out. I try to look closer, and now I understand that those are human arms eased upward and stretching. But no visible skin is on those arms, those hands. They are covered with somewhat colorful material that looks like a painted canvas. At that moment, the whole figure of a woman emerged from the garbage. She is tall, with somewhat unusual curves on her body. From where I am, it looks as if her tits are on her back. She is standing tall, looking like a mirror image. She is about to start digging through the garbage, but before that, she throws an electrifying look toward me. Rain is traveling, and ozone is poking the air. I see many other people now, all of them digging after they electrocute me with their eyes. The

paint on their bodies is running with rain. Soon, their skin will be visible. The phonograph is yelling: 'Dah... (crack), Dah... (crack), Dah... (crack).'

I recognized a half eight note of the rhythm – almost a sixteenth. I am thinking now, if my dream is a half-second long, how are these people continuing to do what they are doing? There is no half-second repetition in their work. This upsets me, and I try to yell at them. At that moment, they look at me with their stun-gun-eyes, and they start throwing stuff at me. I see an old shelf clock, an aluminum ashtray with three legs, a green chair, a crystal vase, and many other half-familiar things, all flying toward me, toward my face, to be precise. I am prepared for an impact, closing my eyes, but then, I feel *them* on my face, these huge drops of rain washing the tears away from my cheeks.

CHAPTER 7

*Gadji beri bimba clandridi
Lauli lonni cadori gadjam
A bim beri glassala glandride
E glassala tuffm I zimbra*
— Hugo Ball

Intro

Unfortunate misunderstandings, uncomfortable silences, endless worries, small talks, search for love, digging in the past, redoing the future, reading books with different realities, promises, fear of death, the idea of free will forced on people, inaccurate fate, false choices, I got rid of all of it. If I can do freedom, it will be here, in death. I am not reliving my life or any other life for that matter. Nor am I waiting for someone to take me away. There is nowhere to go. There is no tunnel. The light here is darker than any given night if you want it. I will be here as long as I feel like it, and after that, I won't be anymore. There is no destination for me or a resolution to this situation. It is what it is, and it will end on its terms when there are no more dreams. And dreams will keep coming as long as there is material in my subconscious for building them. A second ingredient necessary, my feelings. Not even wish. I don't have those. I've ditched those, together

with my clothes and my hair. Maybe even a large piece of skin. I was at a train station, and someone asked me for a ticket. After a thorough search, I've limped out from there, convinced to be a shark. Never turned back to look for excuses or apologies. Death horse is a desert diet. Since then, the time has stopped making sense. It is always now, with the occasional accent at any time. Very heavy, east Macalorian accent. Dualities of all kinds just disappeared. Never missed them much since dreams are the only thing that has no opposite. If you think of reality, I will tell you a secret: reality is just a low-level, very plain, boring dream. A collective dream. It has the same values for everyone in it. Individually, people can perceive reality differently, but the main rules are the same for everybody. Inflated egos might change the perspective, but they can't hide collective suffering forever. Ergo, the reality is a nightmare, in which individuals thrive to develop defenses to live their lives as comfortably as possible. Varieties of so-called 'life choices' are available, although limited by laws of 'physics' and 'economics.' And those choices are there only if you follow basic rules, limits in achievement, behavior, everything, really, but greed. In reality, greed is the only free thing.

A Lecture

“Ipalapaapadrapaikalapa boom!Ipalampasapadrapakalapa to trum! Chapalapaatrampa, kolamapa

ta truph! Callalapaipadrapamika sapa muff! Calap-dalapaatapalapa, ika papa chuff! Akra tuppa, ika truppa, mak ama kastooff?”

I am in an auditorium, giving a speech in front of a group of people. Their faces are familiar to me, although I could not say that I know their names, my connection with them, or anything else. The older man in the first row is picking his nose, and it looks like he is enjoying doing that. A naked girl is sitting in a lotus pose, with few seats left to him, and it seems like she is sleeping or meditating. It is hard for me not to look at her crotch. A couple of rows behind her, a boy is tossing and turning, he is in pain but does not scream or make any other sounds. There are others on benches, all of them doing some weird thing, either with their hands or their faces. Or they are just strange. One of them is making signs with his hands like he is translating what I am saying into sign language, but nobody around him pays any attention. I am sure that I know his name, but a little tornado in my head wouldn't allow me to put it together. The person beside him is wearing a see-through plastic suit filled with water. A woman and a man, both middle-aged and drunk, share a hair, and, being connected by it, they are pulling each other from time to time, visibly annoyed. There is, to the left of me, a group of teenage girls with pink skin, having fun, but, although giggling, they also didn't make any sound. They all have guns in their hair. To the right, I see three gentlemen dressed in black suits, with bowler hats and long umbrellas.

They are very serious, but the rope going through their ears and connecting them almost made me laugh. In the row below, two boxers are seated, with gloves and trunks, looking exhausted, with bruises on their faces. One of them is passionately whispering something in the other one's ear while the smoke is coming from both men's heads. A few adorable piglets are occupying the second row, wearing glasses. One of them is chewing gum. Besides them, a guy is hugging some musical instrument carefully, as if he is afraid it will sound. There are more naked people on the benches, but they look tribal, and they seem very interested in what I am saying.

“Ikalabikala, tongetrum, a bikabika, serapa, tolikepripes, aka boom, tory bum, tori miske. Ikekeatobe, akalatiredd, ichopaahuhaotvoresbalida, ba boom, ba boom! Ikvete mores italla, ikvetemase, ikvete, llal. Atocibembeller, toladaikvaq, isoisolalaki, otvernpalegisvisy, akala boom. Ikatoretvalabi masker isikot, abalabiatoreit vamor, asangao dorme,asadewachvi, igatoreigsomset, a boom belat, a toverat.”

But, as I am saying those ‘words’ whose meanings are irrelevant to me because all words lost their substance since I died, I start thinking of the catastrophic influence they might have on my audience. Any language has its meaning, but its primary purpose is to change reality and make it smaller, and less engaging. When you give a name to the unknown, it becomes familiar, straightforward, and even useful. Once people had the

word ‘storm,’ they were less scared of the storm. Words are comforting, but they also create their reality with their meaning. They usually simplify and deconstruct experience, replacing emotional charge with intellectual sense. But, since I am saying words without meanings, they must have the opposite effect on people. They experience all the strangeness of this reality without the help of decoding language. What they hear pushes them deeper into discomfort. I am up on the stage, saying something that none of them understand. I, too, am getting uncomfortable, but I am continuing anyway. They must feel lost in some foreign country, already given up understanding. Or in some bizarre reality.

“Abashi, abashi, twig abashi. Idole, makonfrige, idole abashi. Ikijomegule, atoprapi se vihe, se odori. Akele, boom. Isoshihbeavele, itromakuleasvetorobe, icalakombe, icalaaa boom.”

As I was continuing, I noticed the strange effect of my words. People are starting to disappear, one by one. They were popping like balloons, releasing stinky gas along the way and their skins melting on the hot floor. Moreover, some leave things behind them: gentlemen left the rope connecting them, girls left the guns from their hair, and boxers left gloves... Benches are like isles now, full of useless stuff. A guy in a see-through plastic suit full of water just popped with a big splash. Soon, as I finish with: “Glogektadhervaickto, boom, eheremadaotap, boom.” I understand; it is the word ‘boom’ that is making people go. I have to stop! But there

are no more people in the audience! At that moment of ultimate horror, when I understood the full effect of imposing reality on people, I felt someone's hand on my shoulder.

"Ihtovito mote, Quagua," the person says, and I wake up.

Frogs

People are one giant green blob, spread over most land, water, and even air. Out of the blob, their heads are sticking, small frog heads, or some macaroni lizards. And they talk, sometimes in the choir, other times solo. The language is simple, with most nouns sounding like a hammer hitting a running train. It spread over the blob, connecting and making a barge, allowing people to get on the surface. From time to time, one of them would jump out of the blob, only to splash back into the green slime. They tell me they have done that for centuries, but that just recently, someone developed a skill allowing the jumper to stay in the air longer, even for a half-second. As I look around, I see more and more jumpers, but none remain in the air longer than half a second. I am thinking about how paradoxical us their dream of staying in the air for a half-second, but they can't grasp it. I know how different our perspectives on time are. The length of my dream must be their eternity.

"How long is your jump?" asks one of the heads.

I don't answer since I can't remember ever jumping.

"He is not jumping," says the other head.

"It is three in the morning," says someone in the familiar voice of the radio hitting the ground after traveling 15 stories. Short stories. Without nouns.

"He is not here. He is paradox."

"What's paradox?" asked the same voice, but from a different direction.

"It is when you are dead, but you still have an erection." Now, I find this behind my comprehension, so I look up. Voices are connecting, holding to each other. Surviving.

At three in the morning, long jumps are more possible. And as I look at the moon, I can see human silhouettes passing over the yellow circle.

Flying

Oh, those dreams of flying! The magnificent, incomparable, ultimate feeling of freedom! I used to fly over many untouched lands, colorful waters, breathing forests... Deserts full of sea glass, abandoned streets without names, green sand beaches without sun, mountain peaks covered with sad snow, so sad it was weeping. But now, I fly with my back turned to the ground, looking to the endless land of clouds. Clouds are forming unique landscapes, and one can find things in them: from powerful waterfalls to rolling rocks, jumping trees and breaking

oceans, upside-down cities, and running elephants to empty fields with misty flowers and woman's hands sculpturing giant cocks. And, with all those things anthropomorphizing from second to its other half, you can never look at one scene for long. It looks like someone's imagination is working hard and fast, and there is no telling what land, what color, what space your eyes will land at next. As I fly through the soft structures of abandoned planets, destroyed towns, gas giants that smell like her underarm, forest ashes that keep my teeth clean, as I slide through clouds of ice, clouds of flowers, clouds of thoughts, as I glide...

I used to hate airplanes. So, I replaced them with wings, parachutes, and human cannons. The birds were my companions; I was feeding them worms. They showed me how to develop the beak. It is useless, but being a friend is nice.

What am I saying? Flying is terrifying. If you have a body, and you lack natural, nicely attached wings, you can fall to your death! I always had nightmares of crushing on some rocks, some forests, and even some water. It is not natural to be up there! The dream of flying is humanity's biggest mistake. It is us trying not to be us. Escaping!

But dreams of flying are not dreams of seeing the Earth from above or getting somewhere very fast. Those dreams are of freedom. Ultimate freedom.

Being a bird does not interest me more than being a fish, a worm, or a bear. But all those shapes have some distinctive abilities, which humans always wanted, being greedy and egoistic.

Wanting to fly or dig through the smelly dirt is a dream, and if used correctly, it can give you a sense of freedom. Flying is like talking to the wind, skipping on the waves, brushing on treetops... Up and down, here and there, it is not the task of conquering the world. It is simple, dreamy freedom.

Note

I am walking down some underground hallway. Walls are a mix of red stone, earth, and small amounts of water, running up and down like tears in the wind or raindrops on the windshield of a speeding car. Although it is a dugout tunnel, it is precise in its rectangular shape, with all the right angles and smooth surfaces. The light fixtures are placed in the middle of the floor and on the ceiling, pairing and mirroring each other, so lights connect and resemble light columns. They are placed on every seventh step. Between each of those two light columns, I see a door, sometimes left, sometimes right, and on the floor or even on the ceiling. As I walk, trying to avoid stepping in the light or on the door, a certain familiarity overwhelms me like I was here before. I notice that the doors look like old scars, ugly, and with traces of many stitches. As I am passing those, I hear music coming from behind them, calming and soothing sounds, notes that seem so close to me, like I am the one who is producing them. For a moment, I am not sure if they are coming from behind the doors or from

my head. But then, moths come out and drag my thoughts into thin air and into the light columns, leaving my head empty like a thirsty tin can. I am sure the dream is over since everything looks frozen and starting to lose cohesion, and my memory of being here is fading. But then, I am in a different tunnel, feeling that I am somewhere else, where I have never been before. Walls are smooth and metallic now, like walls of an air conditioning duct, with openings on all sides covered with slanted covers through which light and air are coming and going. The tunnel is narrow now, and I have to crawl toward something I imagine is an exit. Music is still coming in through the openings, but songs are mixing now, and I can't say what they are. I am petrified. The fear, like fire ants, is carpeting my skin, in a way making me real, material. I am trying to crawl faster, but, at the same time, I pedal backward, subjugating to my fear.

Somehow, I get to the exit, which is just another slanted cover placed at the end of the duct. Now, I see a door with the scars again, and I am pushing on its wet, slimy surface. It opens to a bright room, a palace-like ballroom, with heavy blue curtains hanging beside enormous windows, and partially a cave, with walls of uneven stones, from which the water is dripping, making the only sound present. As I step into the room, I notice the only object lying in the middle of the floor. It is an old piano, partially embedded in the stone wall behind it, but with most of the keyboard still intact. As I am intensely trying to understand where I am, I

recognize that the sound of dripping water is coming from the piano, from one of the keys that looks depressed. As I try to get closer and recognize the melody it is playing, everything starts to reverse very fast, and I am going backward, through the duct, then a tunnel, past the light columns. And, as I collect the moths along the way, I find myself back in my pentagon apartment.

“Where have I just been?” I ask myself but am unable to answer. I am holding the piano key in my hand, and it is still playing the note I’ve heard in that strange ballroom. I open my eyes for a half-second and look at the screens on all five walls, trying to find the dream that I just had. It is not there. There is a beautiful woman on crutches, a yelping half-burned tree, a road coiled like a snake, a heart-shaped box full of fresh rain, and many other interesting images, but not the ballroom. I panic, afraid I will lose it, and feel like those walls are closing on me, pressing me, making me fear, not for life, but for one silly, unexplainable dream, which might have something important to tell me. Still, it also might not, just like many other silly dreams, that only play with my emotions, or send me someone else’s feelings, originated in some additional time, past or future, in this place or another, in one reality, or many different ones. After a half-second, the only thing I remember is that one note, now a melody that will follow me for a while, in my waking time.

Orcan

They call it Orcan, for no reason. They are afraid of him, although he is only a swirl of air, an intangible thing left loose in the waste space, a spiritless gasp made of pressure and temperature change. But he rages, or they think he does, and they are making all kinds of shelters to keep safe from him. Although forbidden, some watch him in his play, moving from one side of the vision to the other, then up and down, close and far, with no pattern. He looks enraged at his freedom, but no one knows if he is free or if it is just a perspective the spectators are giving him, together with his power and monstrosity. So he rides on the top of the mountain, making it shift and on the edge of escape. He is shuffling the forest making new meadows and beds for lovers, and he is lifting the waves of an invisible ocean and throwing them in empty windows, he is breaking the walls he finds in the minds of his unwanted audience. His non-existence is our pain, and he looks like he doesn't care. A few brave souls are making an excursion to find him, to make peace with him, to help him in his destruction. But space is shrinking, and one traveler holding a city in his palm, a city is growing factories in its belly, a city doomed to exist without the power of smell. Orcan comes to collect his fingers and brings the night in the city with his bouquet of happy fish and maroons. Time shifts back and further back, and nobody knows when the game starts. They know about the winter and

atrocities it brings on its dark wings, but they cannot think in advance, they cannot anticipate the havoc of Orcan's rolling pin, and they don't have eyes. They are moving in groups, unable to recognize each other or to tell which house is their new home, but saying numbers bring warm childhood memories, and their fear is gone, as they are watching Orcan destroying the substance of the dream.

Blind

There is a large hotel-like bed in front of me. The headboard is mainly wooden, possibly carved from one piece of an enormous tree, and, like randomly, it had large nails in it, rusty and bent. Carvings on the wood are spherical, and they look like tits and like testicles. There is a lock of hair hanging from each of those nails, which, I notice just now, are not randomly nailed. Hairs are all different colors, clean, and combed. Pushed against the headboard, there is a gray velvet pillow, wide as a bed and so wrinkled, it reminds me of elephant skin in the afternoon when coffee is not hot anymore. In the middle of the pillow, I see the head of a woman with almost see-through skin. She is sleeping. She might be bald, but maybe I am mistaking the pillow's wrinkles for her hair, spilled like water, free and lonely. I see movement under her eyelids, her pupils hunting a dream. A drop of pure amber is coming from the end of her left eye, and like a

globe, like a world in a distant galaxy, somewhere where we meet, open shoulders, the sepia world of the future. I look at her neck, and her naked body twisted in an impossible position like a strange whirlwind was visiting her in her sleep. Still, I understand it is a dream that makes her toss and turn, whipping her arms around and opening her knees wide, making her look incredibly unerotic, although her tits are pointing in different directions, and her cunt is pulsating. She looks two-dimensional, almost line drawing. I don't have any thoughts in my head, only feeling that clocks are dead, water didn't stop eating everything for months, and she is about to wake up right now.

As she does, she looks around in fear, not knowing where she is – trashing around with her arms and her legs in a slightly different manner than when she was asleep. Like she became more real. But, after half a second, she looks at me with some relief and calms down, not because she recognizes me, but like she is happy not to be alone. She is looking straight into my eyes, and right away, I understand she is not saying hallo. She is inviting me into her dream, and I am powerless to look away. Her eyes are enormous, two moons on a distant planet, greenish-yellow and fiery. I am feeling their gravitational pull, and the next thing I know, I am sucked into that alien world without opportunity or strength, even a wish to resist.

This is not a person whose dreams I've visited before. I know nothing about this girl. Nothing about her triggers any memory, however distant.

Nor am I feeling anything right now, save indifferent curiosity. For all I know, she could be another skin that I am borrowing, another soul I am piggy-backing on, or just a strain of consequential thoughts flowing from one mind or another. Defective vacuum cleaners never race. Millions of words in dark languages, a mountain of gibberish crushes with everything I think I know, together with a couple of chatty kangaroos, as I enter a woman's dream, without even noticing that she is blind.

Light is everywhere, making colors bright and happy. I am sitting on her shoulder, small and powerless, unsure if she knows I am there. We see different kinds of birds that look more like lizards flying around in a beautiful wavy sky, framed with cartoon trees and fluffy orange clouds. Those birds stop in their flight every half-second like they are frozen or captured in a photograph. And they don't fall to the ground; they fade out, together with all of the colors, and darkness comes, final and ruthless, one that stings eyes with its acid. The other scene starts simultaneously, somewhere under the horizon, a stage full of dark gray objects, most of whom I cannot recognize. Shiny metal boxes are running on one wheel; houses cut out from huge rocks, streets so sleek they are actual mirrors, and many, many, misshaped people. Some look like balloons, others like poles, some with giant heads, others without heads, and a few so tin, and some are two-dimensional. People with book hands, umbrella legs, and eyes that shine like stars... There is no sky in this scene, and very few lights look

like permanent night, but the noise is unbearable! It is a mixture of twisted metal, millions of gas engines, disaccorded clocks ticking, and people talking in many languages mixed into ultimate gibberish, with very loud peaks, sharp as knives. She is walking straight forward, eyes fixed at some distant point, one that she has chosen to lead her through this jungle. She doesn't react to people, vehicles, or noise. She had selected a safety path, undisturbed by outside stimulants. She experiences her dream the only way she can, with senses that she relies on the whole of her life. Gravity, a friend of her feet, leads her through chaos safely. Images are shifting, changing, and disappearing, without confusing her. Incomprehensible leave a little trace on our conscience, but in the root of her confidence, behind her enjoyment, I sense a stone of fear. Even here, in the freedom of her mind, she is carrying insecurities that follow her in reality.

I struggle to understand this strange world until it comes to me that she is blind and has never seen what things really look like. A construct of her blindness, this world represents everything she knows about reality. But an abundance of images tells me how hard her mind works to compensate for what she is missing. Truth, we all do that in our dreams, but she works with way less material than me. I am thinking of what it would be like to be able to read people's minds, for some reason. She then tells me that she made everything out of other people's descriptions and what she read in books. The only thing with colors is a story some-

one told her when she was just a child, and those half-seconds she kept forever.

Then she released me from her dream. We are back in the hotel room, but now I am looking at it from the side. There are three chairs beside the bed.

The woman is peaceful, lying on her stomach, and at the foot of her bed, there is a creature made of wax, or glass, white and semitransparent, standing and watching her sleep.

Thirty thousand years

I am in a tight bubble, one that won't let me move but also comfortable enough to sit without feeling restrained. Thru its transparent wall, I can see a gray, rocky desert with no life. It looks as if someone is switching the light on and off so fast that you can't say if it is dark or light. But it might be that millions of nights and days are stuck in a half-second, making it impossible to say what it is. I feel wet all the time, like it is raining non-stop. And although the weather in the valley is cloudy, I can't say if it is raining for sure. After my eyes were accustomed to my surroundings, I noticed the movements in the valley. People are coming toward me, and they look at me, touch me. They poke at me, but the bubble is protecting me. I wonder if they can see me inside.

As people grew in numbers, they threw stones at me, hitting me with wooden sticks, then with

metal, and then struck me with different blades. As they build the surrounding city, they shoot at me with arrows, then with guns. Then they stop. The valley is flooded now, and few people stayed on the hill where I am. Now, they seem to worship me, bowing, singing, and dancing in front of me. Some of them bring me presents, some make sacrifices, even human ones. Then they are gone, and water is gone too. I still feel raindrops in my bubble. Some giant animals come and lick me sometimes, and small ones also do. Then people come again and build the wall around me while they fight other people. They flood the valley, and then they dry it, then they fill it with garbage. Later, they bring their dead to me and make my surroundings into a cemetery, but they disappear again. I enjoy those breaks without people, aware of years, centuries, even millennia that might be passing.

The next thing I know, I am surrounded by tall buildings and millions of people who seem not to care about me and my rain. With various helpers at their disposal, they lost their basic human abilities but were still capable of working within their group. Then the heat waves and floods erase any sign of their existence. And another long break came, without people. Rain is falling, even if only on me, despite the change in gravity. The plants are growing around me, and they are short and wide, stuck to the ground. Crawling people came too, carrying each other on their backs. They visit me for the water, and some even talk to me in some languages I cannot understand. Few lie beside me

and listen to the rain. One day, a woman crawls to me. I saw her at the end of the valley, drifting, but skipping the distance, so she approached me rather quickly. She has a child on her back. Crawling people are almost naked, save for the straps they attach to children or possessions they might have. Their skin is covered with dust, but somehow without visible scratches from all the rocks they are crawling on. A child is completely naked, and it is a girl, 5-6 years old. Her skin is white like snow she had never seen, and her hair is red like her mother's. They both have vivid blue eyes. And, for some reason, the girl's palms are black. The woman says something and I, to my surprise, understand.

“Thirty thousand years.”

Then the girl put her black palms on my bubble, and ink started spreading all over it, preventing me from seeing anything save her palms and her long fingers. She has six fingers on each hand. And, while my bubble became black, her palms got pure white. And through that whiteness, she started sending the signals, or energy, or invisible fluids that vented through the wall and got to my mind. I am feeling those emotions like they are my own. Fear and comfort, anger and love, are all mixed up into some multicolor lights, moving in any direction. It takes me a while, a half-second, to understand that she shows me something I don't know about: outside Nature. More than that, the girl is telling me she is Nature. She aggressively paints storms she is making, earthquakes from her heart,

volcano oblivion... She contains life, but she is not just that. I felt the sun in her tiny finger and the universe behind it, like a cup of herbal tea, like a barbed ocean of stars, rediscovering thirty thousand years of motionless existence, somewhere in the far left corner of one dying galaxy. Without words, without pictures, she sucked up all of my memories of this place, telling me to wake up.

Pentagon

And I did wake up in my pentagon apartment, wet and dark, with screens on five walls emitting white noise. I can swear there is a pattern in those annoying white spots, and if only I can focus enough, I can understand what they are telling me. But how different that is from my dreams, ones I pretend to understand. The truth is, I present them in writing, in some language, with words that are just a replacement for what I really "see" there. I am using common symbols in an effort to explain what happened to me in that strange land. But dreams are much more than that. Describing the visual aspect of dreams is difficult enough, but defining the full scope of emotions they carry is an impossible task. While telling them in the form of a story, my mind is still lost in an emotional maze, where many things are still unclear and many parts are missing. Tentacles of oblivion lingered while I felt something important on the tip of my tongue. I am not just trying to remember a dream. I am also deep in the mo-

ment of it, like time has stopped, and I am allowed to explore through the magical mist. Hey, there are my green socks... And her underwear, still smelling like a glacier...

A smile of a shape-shifting bird, a magnifying glass, pictures without walls... Most of the time, I am aware that the search is futile, but I stay there, feeling much better than anywhere else. Looking around me, I am assured of my choice of existence or non-existence. I see five walls: Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Space. At least, that was what they were before they got covered with screens. There are two inches of water on the floor, and it is muddy, and it looks like something is swimming in it. The patch of sand is no longer there – some paper melted on a coffee table from constant, slow rain coming from nowhere.

For the first time since I arrived here, I asked myself if there was any door in this place. I see five walls, and, logically, the sixth one should be behind me. But, as much as I try to turn and look behind me, I can't. Every time I try, the whole room moves with me, so what I see doesn't change. Like, I am part of the place like I am one of the walls, the sixth wall, so to speak. And there is no door. No windows. The only way in and out of this place is thru one of many screens. I am confused, like a triangle on a sphere, or a melted wheel of an old wagon, found in an upper drawer in your eyes. Still, I am not scared, not like a skeleton leaving the flesh on a trip to the market, not like a bent telephone pole

during a conversation between lovers, not like eyes opened in the moment of dream death...

The Tree

The next thing I know, I am lying on the ground under an enormous tree. I know that tree, not from memory, but from the core of my existence, like it is something I grew up with, part of me that is there from the beginning. I know it is a thousand years old, born long before I came here, but we are still the same. The day is dying, and I notice that, even though I am flat on my back under the tree, I am also moving around it, examining its bark, thick and uneven, like some maze, natural and unpredictable, with some parts looking like little shelves, where visitors from different points of time left little presents, rings, pieces of paper with messages of hope, of doubt, of meaningless dreams. I know I cannot touch those, but I feel their presence in the forms of sounds, pictures, of emotions. Each of them takes me in, telling me stories about the lives of people they belonged to; stories short but powerful, like little flashes of life, left there to live with the tree for another thousand years. With the sun gone, birds got quiet, and the present sank into darkness. I am motionless, laying on the ground, with my feet close to the tree, and my head away from it, just enough so I can see the fullness of its top. I see the damage people made to a tree. Like some struggle against its

timelessness, people were breaking its branches, burning its bark, cutting into its meat, trying to bring it down to their level of mortality, scared by the thought that there is something that lives out of their time. For me, though, this is a moment in which I am confident that both of us exist in the simplest possible way, without hope, expectations, or lust. And I know that this half-second can be the most critical half-second of my dreams. Night fell like a comforting blanket on both of us. I feel all kinds of movements around me, little paws tapping around, and some not so small. Suddenly, I have a vision of a skunk, a sense of smell of a bear, the weightlessness of a bird. I am too excited to sleep, but some bizarre dream is pulling me in, and I can't resist it.

I am still under the tree, in perfect silence, one that can be frightening, but, for me, it is soothing. It is very dark, but I can see a glimpse of light, blue, and green somewhere above the treetop. I recognize Aurora Borealis right away, and happiness overtakes my mind. I know her, or I know of her, but we have never met before. And it looks like she is happy to see me as well since she gets stronger and starts climbing down the tree, and, while talking to the tree, like only old friends can, comes all the way down to where I am, almost to a touching distance. She is floating around old bark, examining little shelves, comforting wounded parts. However, she doesn't talk to me, which I take with relief since I am sure that I have no language good enough to speak to her. As she floats around the

tree, in a dance following the rhythm of the night, rhythm sacred and full of magic syncopations, she starts to pull me into another realm of existence, and maybe in some story, she has for me, some dream she wants to share.

But nothing changes, save the feeling of some presence I have. I can't really "look around me," but I know that I am no longer alone. Soon, from the corner of my eye, some figures emerge. First, there is a figure of a woman floating in midair. She wears a white nightgown, with long black hair falling on her shoulders and down her chest. Her face is white, almost without any lines, like a blank page of a diary. Her gown covers all of her body, save hands, long fingers, and even longer nails, and feet, with toes, stretched downward as if they want to reach the ground that promises them safety. Then, there comes a figure of a man, bulky and ugly in every way, holding the woman by her shoulders, pushing her backward toward the tree. As she back touches the tree, Aurora tries to wrap her tentacles around the woman, but the man starts to fight it and succeeds, leaving the lights floating around the tin woman's figure. Then I notice that the man has an erection, but it seems like he is not going to penetrate the woman's body. Frozen by fear, I look at the woman's face, and now I can see her burning eyes, the slope of her nose, her lips full of pulsating blood, and her teeth as she is mouthing some words I cannot hear or read. She doesn't look scared, but I see locks of her hair, like live snakes, serpentines on the tree bark, trying to

find a way to escape. Now, I see a man taking his penis with one hand, and it becomes a long blade, which he raises above his head like he is examining it in twinkling lights. My fear is culminating as I switch from her eyes to a blade, back and forth, back and forth. Night becomes louder, synchronizing its beats with my fear. The man lowers his blade toward the woman's neck, and she screams as she feels its sharpness on her skin. He starts pushing it slowly, looking only at the cut he is making, like he is afraid of looking into her eyes. She stops screaming, and looks at me, as her eyes become volcanoes, then storms, tsunamis, black holes, stars... I understand her words, "This will never happen," and fear leaves me as I am watching the blade going deeper into her neck and then severing her head from her body. Aurora takes the body, like she is the blood flowing down the whiteness, and starts pulling it down. The man disappears with his blade, while the woman's head, with hair holding to the tree, stays where it was before. Her eyes are closed now, and she looks peaceful. But then, lights covering the body, in one fast and surprising half-second move, vent in my eye, and I woke up.

I am still under the tree. Birds are welcoming the sun, Aurora is long gone, and the tree is stretching to the lit blue sky. As I lower my eyes to the ground on which I am still lying, I see, right beside the tree, the head of a large animal, the head without the body, but the head with eyes that can only be human. It was too much, so I woke up again.

The Street

The street on which I am walking has two very different sides. The side where I am is full of old paper buildings, with banded edges and color dripping from the photos in everlasting rain. Buildings look like ones in cartoons, but I am aware that people live there since all kinds of noises come from behind those facades. It is a mix of different languages, none of which I understand, music that sounds like a river hitting a volcanic mountain with all its strength, and strange clicking on windows that are not see-through. The sidewalk on which I am is sticky, and I am having a hard time walking. I am scared to lift my head and look around me, so I look straight in front of me. I only see sandbags on the street, some barrage against the water coming down the road. Some imaginary voice tells me not to look up, but that only conceives and develops instant curiosity that I cannot fight. I lift my head, but between what I was looking at before and what I am about to see stands half a second of fascinating darkness.

There are shadows, many shadows. At first, I think they are flapping like some black flags in the wind, but then I see they are wrestling, fighting, and making love. Some of them were so violent, ripping others apart and throwing pieces at me. Others, so gentle, are melting into each other, mimicking water that rolls its waves over me. But that darkness squeezed in the blink of an eye, had very sharp teeth, and made me almost step back. I

open my eyes and look at those washed-out buildings, the sidewalk covered with paint, the middle of the street where rain was running its marathon, and sandbags that are bodies, small and lifeless, like colorless balloons at a ruined birthday party, relieved of their duties. Water is running now over their tied mouths. As I almost start crying, I feel the heat on my left cheek. Or a simple change of temperature. It was coming from the other side of the street. And now, I am looking in that direction, without any understanding of what I see. There is some wall stretching from the road in all directions, without a visible ending. It is bluish-gray, and semi-gloss, like stainless steel or a foggy mirror. I can't see any reflection in it, my or any other. It is shiny mud, and I unintentionally walk toward it to touch it, although I already know what it is. THE SEA. It is a profile of some sea, brought here to contrast whatever is on the other side of the street. Like a cut-out of the sea, disabled to spill over the street by some invisible barrier. I am touching it, and it is water. I am confused by its cloudiness since I want to see inside, the deepness, the life, or the lack of it. After a while, I see some silhouettes moving inside, some small, some large, but I am not sure if those are fish or some other creatures living in that forbidden reality. However, there is a life inside. I am sure of it. I look behind me and notice that water on the street is rising fast and taking away the balloons and paint from the facades, but somehow, I am dry and on the surface. Back to the wall, I am touching it with both hands, like I am looking for some hole in it, some entrance

into that muddy madness. Then, a couple of steps to the right, I see shadows in the shape of human hands like they are touching the barrier from the other side. Fast, I am moving toward the spot, and as I am getting closer, I see the movement of those hands, as if they are trying to clean the glass, so whoever those hands belong to can see through. For a moment, they succeed, and there is a spot size of a human head very clear, blue, and shiny. I am almost there, ready to discover the secret, to see the fullness of life in this big watery world. Just a few steps, a few waves of arms, and I will be at that window, enjoying its secrets. Half a second more, and...

I woke up. I am back in my pentagon apartment, wet and almost mad at the disruption. I don't want to wake up! I want to see what's in the water. Someone from the other side was making a window for me. I look at the screens around me, trying to find that dream, but the monitors are showing the faces of people. They are ancient, and their eyes are full of bursting capillary, full of anger.

"You can't go there," they say in unison. I try to close my eyes and go back to that street, but "the judges," as I immediately call them, are pinching me and jerking my body, keeping me awake.

Going back to a dream is the most unnerving thing you can experience. You are digging through your mind, trying to find a string, a hook, anything, to go back where you were just half a second ago, but your surroundings, your daily occupations, and sometimes your fears, your earthly limitations

stand in the way of your return. Judges are yelling, screaming even at me, trying to keep me awake. Some of the faces are familiar but too old to recognize. Now I see that they are changing, taking different looks, transforming into something even more familiar until they all become one face. Her face. I am trying not to look at her, closing my eyes, but I can't. Then she starts sending some shiny confetti toward me, little machines that take all of my vision. They go for my eyes, and it starts to hurt, but I can't shut them up. The thought came to me that this also can be a dream, so I pinch myself mentally, and I am back in front of the water wall.

But now, everything is clear, and inside, the body of water is bright as on the most beautiful morning on a desert island. It is almost the same on both sides of the wall, and I struggle to comprehend the surroundings. Am I breathing water now? Or has the sea become just an open field? The other side of the street is still there, but what I see in the water is not what I expected. Save for slight changes in color, and there is NOTHING in there. No fish, NOTHING. I try to enter the water, but the barrier is still there, wet and crude, unbreakable with my confusion. I put my hands on it, then my face and my breath start making a fog circle. And through that fog, I can see a creature on the other side, similar to the amphibian monster I saw in my childhood, in the movie maybe. It is the same size as me, and doing the same thing, touching the invisible surface, putting its nose on it, its scary mouth... Then I see, behind him, some

lost city, covered with vines and shells, and then some lost shoes, umbrellas, and, finally, some other creatures swimming around, oblivious to what the two of us are doing. He puts his amphibian hands where my hands are, and I can almost understand his thoughts. Half a second later, the barrier disappears, and there is just a touch. Both of us got scared, and both of us stepped back. There is a crushing sound around us, but water stays put. So does the air. I dive into the water with my new membrane between my fingers and my toes. At first, it feels natural and liberating, but then I start thinking, and fear overcomes me. I am trying to find a way out, but there is nothing but a deep-sea around me. The other side of the street disappeared as well as the creature. Looking for an exit is futile since everything looks the same. Then I look for a lost city I saw previously, and I see it, but it is very far. As I try to swim toward it, it seems like it goes further away, in frames, until it completely disappears. The water is getting darker, and I am having trouble breathing. I struggle for air for half a second, feeling lost and finished, and then I wake up.

CHAPTER 8

*But whatever lies behind the door
There is nothing much to do
Angel or devil, I don't care
For in front of that door, there is you*

— Jaques Brel

New Cock

Wet and scared, I am still fighting for air. As I painfully adjust and start breathing more naturally, I can still feel the membranes between my fingers. My vision is broader than usual, and I can see around my head, except for the blind spot just behind me. I am panicking, afraid of unwanted metamorphosis, of being stuck in a monster's body. But then I realize that I haven't seen my body for a very long time, and, although I can feel it, I am not sure that I have it. What would be the difference between my body and this one that was forced on me in a dream? Is there anybody there that can see me? As I think of that creature, I remember it being lonely, between two worlds, and very much in love. Not much unlike me, except triangles under my skin and alcohol tears that occasionally flow down my spine. But the body, my body, is just an extension of my feelings, and I feel like a monster. On the other hand, I don't care about being a monster. Now

that I can be whatever I want, I don't mind being whatever I am. It is all the same for me. There are no eyes on me, so I don't need to mold myself to anybody's expectations. I can be what I feel.

"But you are wrong," she would say, with her metronome voice, coming from a faraway alley. "You need people's eyes to be what you want to be. That is how reality works. Chapter 7, line 34, says, 'grass is not grooving if you don't look at it.' By the way, I like your new cock."

Pretending to understand, I shed my skin, shave my eyebrows, and start reading from a book she's in. Half a second later, I feel an awful pain down my spine, in my legs, and all around me, like the pain is disconnected from the body, or it is just a sign of me existing in a way that body is irrelevant. It is like my body is amputated, but I still feel the phantom pain in every part of it, even in those I don't remember having. Breasts, for example. Or a tail. It is how our senses work: we extend our feelings beyond the borders of our bodies. Like with love, it extends even to objects and areas that are not remotely connected to the circle we made. Or anger, with its tentacles swooshing randomly around us, like electric whips, hitting anything and everything. Fear is the worst; it doesn't just burn inside but makes fires all around us, and everything outside our comfort zone becomes a treat. Also, this pain, excruciating and perpetual, makes me, amazingly, feel more prominent than the perception I have of myself, bigger than this room I'm stuck in, bigger than... Suddenly, the world I am in, or my reality, expanded fully in

its tiny capsule, evoking another paradox. Big, but small. The pressure is rising, and so does my urge to flee this place. The nature of things always provides a means of escape; whenever reality becomes a burden, the air is too thin whenever places are too crowded. Three steps back, always. The only way to survive is to regress. If humanity had taken its last chances to escape self-suffixation, this planet would not be dead.

Revolver

Bang bang, my friend says in his euphoria. His body was warm, his barrel red hot. He is the only universe he knows. As he expends, he is pushing the air, warm and trembling, toward my wet face. 9 mm. As an equivalent to half a second, his caliber holds the key to the secret passage leading to suburban galaxies in perfectly uneven rows. His trigger, in a love affair with my finger, is lubricated, ready, and determined. There is a wire in my finger connecting the touching spot with my still-enclosed brain. Gold wire. Cold wire. A wire that transfers unreadable signals from planet to planet, from nebula to black hole, from the grind of sand to a thought. Two ways signals. In and out. Or double in. The mind is a trigger, it is a field. If I open my eyes, I might see my arm holding the gun. Still, again, it could be any of my goats singing, or it could be only the surface of an enormous body of water stretched through the galaxies, scooped

in a spoon of tears delivered on your birthday, at the time I already didn't know you. *Reality* is like a piece of chewing gum, changing its flavor every half a second, and I can barely follow the path toward your lips, if not for their smell, like autumn, like a down, like a pulsating heart. I understand that stuff like this causes volcano reactions, the invention of a bomb, bones breaking, and orgasms. But the revolver stays silent for another era, another life, another half-second diversion. And that is the kind of silence I wanted to wrap in a box for you, along with the eye of Jupiter. It is going to be silence, death, or life.

Reality check 3

You are isolated in a fully padded cell, in a hospital near the town where you lived most of your life. Your story is hidden from the public for many reasons since some unexplained things happened from the time you've been locked up.

It all started one day when you showed up in the emergency room, saying that you had suicidal thoughts and needed someone to talk to. When the hospital staff told you that there was no available doctor at the moment, you changed your mind and attempted to leave. But the nurse called security, and you were forcibly stopped and restrained. The doctor did show up then, and he drugged you right away, putting you to sleep.

You woke up two days ago in the small padded cell, dressed in a hospital gown. Still, under the influence of the drugs, you tried to find the exit from the room, and you were calling for help, stating that you were hurt. But for another two days, nobody came to visit you. Some food and water were left in the cell while you were sleeping.

Then, a doctor came with nurses and security. They gave you some clothes and more food. The doctor wanted to hear your story, but you didn't want to speak to him. You were repeating that you wanted to go home, but they tried to explain that you are a danger to yourself and need to stay under observation for a few more days. They wanted to know your name or the name of the person they could call, but you didn't want to talk to them a all.

So, you have been sent back to your cell.

What happened since then is very hard to explain; the birds refused to help. Due to various mistakes, you stayed in that cell for a long time, a period that is not yet finished. You were protesting, yelling, and threatening, to no avail. You are regularly fed, cleaned, and observed, but no doctor or professional came to speak to you, which worked well for you since you told everyone that you would talk only to birds. No birds show up.

Until one day, a raven flew into your room through a food opening. Nurses didn't panic or try to chase it. They were busy picking up pieces of the puzzle spelled on the floor by firemen. Although the staff couldn't see this raven on the cameras

(there are three of those), it is evident that you are talking to someone, in gibberish, mind you.

Hummingbirds and nightingales visited often, but the alarm was raised when a hawk came and injured a nurse who tried to chase it. They put steel nets on windows then, and birds' visits stopped.

But it didn't affect you. You continued to talk in a language known only to you. Nothing was happening with you for a long time, so nurses stopped checking the tapes or making reports. You have become a feature on the second floor.

But if you didn't change, the people around you did. A nurse, a big woman in her forties, decided not to leave her station and permanently start living there. A young girl in charge of your food started coming to work with fewer and fewer clothes until, one day, she began serving you completely naked. It didn't visibly affect you, since you barely noticed anything that was happening around you. Then, there was a male nurse whose job was not known, who kept pushing the empty wheelchair up and down the hallway, singing some folk songs with a lot of swear words in them.

That situation hasn't changed since. No one knows for how long. The only time indicator is a wall clock stacked on 5:17 with the seconds' hand twitching every half second.

Most of the time, you look like you are watching something on the wall. On some of the white cushions, which now look like a television screen, now when I think of that, looks like a television screen. That old-fashioned TV set that looked like

a fisheye. There are dozens of them on the walls, rows, and columns of them. The nurse noticed in her diary (yes, she is writing a journal together with some crazy poetry and descriptions of wild sex) that you are looking at a single cushion, but always in a different one. She also noted that some of the cushions are glowing when your eyes are glued to them.

She also mentioned your soliloquies. You would talk for hours. And sometimes in languages she didn't understand. She would speak to her colleagues about those things, but, for a long time, they thought that she imagined things. One night she was asleep, and the nurse with the wheelchair was buzzing through the hallways as usual, when he heard screams and arguments from your cell. He checked the camera just to see you talking to one of the cushions. There was the light on the cushion, like some blurry projection. But it couldn't be coming from anywhere in the room. And it wasn't. The cushion itself projected some film, and you were watching it while narrating. The nurse got closer to the door and could clearly hear your voice mixed up with some others, as well as some strange noise. He woke up the main nurse, and together, they were observing you for hours.

It happened frequently. Sometimes your speech was in ordinary language, sometimes in foreign languages, but often it was just gibberish. And most of the time, you were saying just a part of the word and repeating it like a broken record. Living

there nurse tried to put some of those words on paper, but it didn't make any sense.

Three of them started having concerns about their well-being and decided to tell the doctors what was happening. They tried many times, but doctors didn't do anything. They said how some symptoms are typical, how the nurses are exaggerating, and many other stupid excuses not to check the patient. You.

Then you started disappearing from your cell. The hospital employees would listen to your monologue, and all of a sudden, it would stop. At first, they thought that you just stopped talking, but one night the naked girl checked the camera and discovered that you were not there.

They raised the alarm, and now the doctors took it seriously. They started checking the tapes only to find out that you had a habit of disappearing. But what was the weirdest thing, most of the time, you were gone for only a fraction of the second, the half, at the most. But on some of the newer recordings, you were missing for a longer time. And for all that time, the recording was twitching. The different cushions were gloving. Sometimes many of them at the same time.

They isolated the unit. Three of the nurses stayed since they knew the logistics of taking care of you. All three of them moved to the unit permanently. Doing each other's jobs, they had worked in shifts. The naked girl started telling the other two how she knew where they were going when they left here and that those trips made you happy.

The male nurse has stories of how he would sometimes get you into his wheelchair and run with you to strange places, forests, beaches, or parks. The nurse in charge put in her journal that the two of you had sex multiple times and that she never had sex like that before.

But then, some people started showing up on the floor. They roamed around dressed in some suits reminiscent of deep diving or cosmonaut suits, carrying devices that measured something from the walls, computers, and medications. They never shared their findings with the nursing trio. Their operation lasted a few days. On the last day, they brought huge amounts of food, stuffed it in empty fridges in the morgue next door, and then they left, sealing the doors behind them. The only explanation was the placard printed in red letters:

DUE TO UNCERTAINTY AND GRAVE SITUATION
IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD,
THIS HOSPITAL UNIT IS UNDER STRICT
QUARANTINE UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.
NO ENTRIES OR LEAVING PREMISES ARE
ALLOWED.
LAW 23-11c. NO OTHER LAW APPLIES

87

I am sane, I am sane, I am sane. I repeat those words in my head while walking down the crowded

street. I am 87 years old, and I just got a letter from the Ministry of Living

Longer congratulating me on another 15-year extension. It should not happen, and I am slightly mad at their decision, which conflicts with my plans to end my life by eating too much popcorn. They made me doubt my sanity. If I live by their plans, I will witness Death of the Crows and Moon Peeling. Who wants to see that? My sanity, in question, conflicts with the "life at any cost" policy, very popular these days and sold in every grocery shop. So, I went for a walk. I have never been here, on this street full of people, moving like upright ants in two directions, staying out of each other's ways, walking silently, with biddy eyes full of ones and zeros. In hands full of blisters, they are holding their virtual lives close to their skin, sucking brain curls out of thin air. I do feel sane among these absent souls, these empty shells in auto-motion. They are lost, impotent, but far from being harmless. I feel indifference toward them, save some pity I carry in my left ear. The right one is deaf to them. As I walk, I notice how they move out of my way without even looking at me. My sanity is like a force field that is protecting me from being bumped into. As I cut effortlessly through the crowd, my hands start to feel heavy, my forefingers and middle fingers, especially. They are separating as if they are making space for something, another finger perhaps. Yes, just what I need, six fingers hands. As it is simultaneously happening on both sides, I feel the coldness of something

metal coming out of my skin. Moreover, it is growing, way passing the length of the fingers. Those are one-inch wide poles, with six even sides, and it is around 12 inches long, now that they stopped growing. I realize: those are revolvers' barrels. They are heavy, but without thinking, I lift my hands to my stomach height, feeling the purpose of those newly acquired weapons. I am pointing them toward the mass of the people moving in my direction. Somehow, I know the triggering mechanism; I need to move my thumb down to fire. Therefore, I do. The first shots are silent, and they are happening in slow motion. I can see large bullets coming from the barrels, followed by the blast of fire. They are crystal and spiral, looking like peg-tops. One of them hits a woman between her breasts, the other, a man, in the guts. However, they are not falling. More like folding, and deflating. Their bare skins and clothes pile on the street, and the only blood I see is staying in the air, in specs, in clusters. The next volley sends three more people to the ground. Now, everything comes back to normal speed, and I can hear explosions coming from my hands. But people stay silent like they are unaware of what is happening. More than death is needed to get their attention. Now, the shots are close together, and they sound like a huge woodpecker harassing a three. Or like my pot of popcorn, which I left on a stove. Or like a sewing machine, making funny costumes for a group funeral. Skins cover more and more of the street, as I feel relief similar to inhaling fresh air after a long dive in fast-moving water. Depressurize the cabin; we are safe. I am

happy for these people; their suffering is over, although most prefer a lousy life to a beautiful death. As the mass in front of me gets thinner, I am firing less and less until there is no one in front of me, and my hands run out of ammo. The place smells like burned popcorn. I look around; the street is now empty, and it must have been afternoon since the cats had stopped meowing. Then, the buildings start shaking, their facades crumbling and falling, and, followed by unbearable noise, they change their looks altogether as if I am suddenly in a different town. The next thing I know, I am watching some slide show, with photographs in three dimensions, where the motionless scenery of many cities is switching very fast, some of them familiar, some very strange. Moreover, they are all abandoned, lifeless, forgotten. I am thinking, how many 87-year-old people are needed to empty those concrete tubes of life? Or how many 45-year-old people? 23 years old? 15? 8? I am getting dizzy from that entire math, meticulously forming an algorithm customized for mass murder. Looking at those city landscapes makes me think of traveling for no reason, traveling through walls, through landscapes, through time, through gravity... Freedom, as a song ringing in my ear now, is traveling faster than thought, faster than imagination, faster than a dream... Its piercing arrow does not discriminate; nothing in its way will survive, not humans, not rivers, not planets. Buzzing through the air faster than bullets from my guns, freedom gets everywhere at the same time, unlimited with any duality, any feeling, any thought. No fear, no

anger, no love. Some pain, though. Actually, plenty of pain. Free of any physical manifestation, pain is unstoppable in its movement. That is why it accompanies freedom in its conquest. It just caused me a great deal of pain by killing everyone. Does it make this more REAL? Or, less a DREAM? Where am I now? In which of those cities do I exist? Wooglee-wooglee, what? Speak up, rain. I am tired, and my ears are not working properly. Thank you for cooling my hands, though. Stop smelling like the inside of the bottle with the message: some alcohol, mixed with ink, still can sober me up. I am sane, I am sane, I am sane.

Day

“It is still daylight,” says one of two women sitting on the bench. Their hair and fur coats they are wearing are entirely wet.

“You know,” she continued, “Tomorrow, if tomorrow happens, it is going to be 600 days without the night.”

The other woman stayed silent. She is chewing tobacco. Sometimes, she would close her eyes and start fading out, looking like a painted, wet window. The first one continues:

“Good thing, it is raining. The clods are protecting us from the sun. It would burn us in a half-second.”

“What do you think? Why is this happening, and how long can we go on without the night?”

The silent one opens her mouth with an apparent struggle to produce the words.

"Illegible," she managed to say.

"What is illegible? Your thoughts or situation?" the first woman says, with aggressive tendencies.

The other one is silent again.

On the streets in front of them, a group of possums is slowly moving. Five or six of them are holding each other with teeth to the side of another's body, forming a wiggly mass trying to coordinate movements so that they can reach their destination.

"It is hard for nocturnal animals," the woman says. "Remember, at the beginning of light, how clumsy they were. Now they learned some skills. Hope they will find some food and not be eaten themselves."

One of the animals looks at her, and its eyes are shiny as if they are still carrying a reflection from some distant night.

Across the street, there is a movie theatre, with a whiteboard on which, with bold black letters, is written:

"Come sleep with us!" There is no movie name on the board, so it is unsure if they are showing any. In the beginning, they were showing some, but the audience was complaining about the loud sound, and then the brightness of the screen, so the owner decided to offer two hours of darkness for the regular ticket price.

"You know," the first woman continues, "there is a Wake Up Police now. Yes, there is. They are going around, searching for dark places where people go to sleep, and they are waking them up. It's because people stopped doing their chores, and stopped taking care of others. They only want to sleep since they lost the natural cycle. I haven't heard of insomnia for ages. People, lots of them, disappear in their sleep."

The tobacco woman closed her eyes and started fading out immediately. Her obscure colors are being smudged. Looking at her is like looking at a sunbathing meadow, or a broken kaleidoscope, with its tiny beads all over the place. But just before she completely disappeared, the other woman yelled at her and shook her a little.

"Hey, where are you going? To whom would I talk too? I need you. You know, 100 days ago, or even 50, people were afraid to fall asleep because of what may happen to them, something like that. Now, nobody cares. You don't come back, you know."

At that moment, the big bus was passing by. It was moving slowly as if it was careful not to disturb the street. Metallic, almost shiny, with windows painted black in a hurry, it was a rolling box of insects. Women looked at it like they saw a ghost.

"You see this? This is what I'm talking about. People go for a ride and never come back. They go inside, and they sleep on top of each other, and, at the last stop, the bus is empty."

As she watched the bus in its slow-motion, she was not aware of her companion's fading out, to the point of no return, when she became just a memory. A few of her colors stayed in the air for half a second, but then everything returned to usual gray. Now, the woman, looking annoyed, continued to speak as if nothing happened.

"You know, when people were exhausted from lack of sleep, they ask for help from people of the North, where days usually last for six months. They wanted to know the secret of sleeping during the light. Northerners wanted to help, but their methods didn't work for other people. Invaders insisted on some kind of cure, but there wasn't any. They associated sleeping with darkness so closely that any other way was useless for them. Northerners, on the other hand, used warmth to induce sleep, and they can sleep with their eyes open, as long as they have someone beside them."

The woman stops talking as if she was interrupted, even though nothing unusual was happening around her. Her eyes are glued to something only she can see and, whatever she is seeing, occupies her mind, disrupting her monologue. There is a fear in her eyes now, mostly because she knew that if she stops talking, she will fall asleep and, eventually, disappear. But there was something else that scared her: graffiti on the brick wall in front of her was changing. It was just a line drawing that looked like a human figure, but now it is getting some substance, color, and definition, another dimension. The woman knew what it was,

but her surprise was enormous and understandable since she never witnessed anything like that.

I am thinking: “Why is this woman looking at me? Can she see me?” while trying not to move. I don’t want to scare her more. But, after half a second of trying to say something, she finally found some words.

“How did you manage to come back?” she asks, obviously confusing me for someone native to this place.

I wanted to tell her that I have never been here before, but I am not a full-body yet, and the only ability I have is some confused thinking. Her voice is echoing now like two voices, one is hers, and the other sounds much like my voice. The next thing I know, I am sitting on the bench, in my fur coat, watching the bus slowly arriving at the station. I get on the bus using my shaky female feet. Inside, thanks to gray light coming through the door, I can see some sleepers on the floor and some in the seats. The driver, half asleep, half-transparent, asks:

“Where to?”

There is the sound of a coin flipping in the air.

“South,” I finally say.

“Here it is,” he says and hands me a roll of printed paper.

CHAPTER 9

*“There are other relations besides reality,
which the mind is capable of grasping
and which also are primary, like chance,
illusion, the fantastic, the dream.”*

— Louis Aragon

She

I met her down south, close to a raging volcano that was spitting liquid trees and green stones. She was offering her tears to anyone with eyes. It was fascinating watching her dancing with her palms open like lotuses, drank on dew, drunk on fire. The volcano is her lover, and she is collecting his semen for future worlds. I, or my presence as it was, didn't seem to affect her in any way. She might have looked at me once or twice, but nothing in her behavior changed enough to be sure that she had noticed me. For some reason, I am thinking of an old wingchair in my pentagon apartment, which is collecting empty days without anybody noticing.

I wanted to give her a name, something that could secure her a permanent place in my thoughts, but she kept avoiding it, changing her shape, and her colors, leaving nothing stable enough to attach the chains. She doesn't like the prison, and, somehow,

she proved the theory that names should be liquid, changeable, and suppressive to ever-changing feelings about oneself, influenced only by the environment. So, I marked her *she*, to make it easier to follow my feelings, but she could easily have been *he*, an *animal*, or just a *window*. I've met her luxurious personality at many points in space and time, points connected only by the smell of her mouth and my feelings. She is trying to be asexual, and although I can often see her naked, with her burning pubic hair, curvy tights, and juggling tits, her butt sculptured from the finest dream clay, I was not aroused by her presence. Sometimes, when I have a chance to look into her eyes, where the mix of fire and ice twirling in a strange dance, I think of another woman I've known, also nameless and faceless, but with a skin of finest down, where touch is an ultimate, like a suicide. She is like a figure in a pattern on the floor, a shape we might see in the dancing shadow or that ship-shaped passing cloud that takes us sailing through a comfortable atmosphere. I like to think that I had dreams about her even before I died. Of all the constants in the stretch of my existence, I can say without a doubt that she is the most regular one. I can say that she is my favorite reoccurring dream, although not the most pleasurable one. Those dreams are heavy, fast-paced, full of all sorts of crushes with people, buildings, trains, exhausting races, fights, arguments... And, in almost all of them, she dies. She dies before I get to her, before I introduce myself, before I ever have a chance to approach her and tell her what she

means to me. Not that I know that; it's just an urge to start a conversation, to make her notice me. Her deaths are so painful, so devastating, that, even if I am aware of the possibility of our new meetings, all of my powers are immediately drained, and I sink into nothingness and go back to my pentagon apartment right away.

Once, I saw her making love to the biggest tree I ever seen in my dreams. In that dream, she is hugging a tree with her arms and legs, moving only her bottom, slowly and in unequal sequence. The act is soundless, genuinely erotic, and for some reason, I can't take my eyes off the scene. Everything looks like a whip of imagination, not different or more significant than discovering a funny face in a splotch of ink. If you look at anything long enough, you ought to see a familiar face in it. But I have trouble recognizing her every time since she often changes her face, not physically, but expressively, like every set of emotions completely changes her appearance. Now, with the tree, I can see her profile, her mouth half-open, her eyes closed, her cheeks wet from various body fluids, but it is not the face I've seen before. She is a lover, and I can assume that is a face meant only for her lover. I am an intruder, although she would never say anything since she is not talking to me. I can see all of her fragile veins through her thin white skin, and they look like a tattoo, one that is forming a picture, one particular photo for the moment that is coming, of her cumming. Yes, riding her voiceless, motionless lover, she is cumming, and her body is

twitching in a wave of spasms, looking like a pond in an earthquake, like a wind in a forgotten street, like a thought in a lost mind. Then, she opens her eyes, and, while fighting for breath, she looks in my direction, and then she dies, and disappears, leaving a little speck of blood on the rough bark of a tree. But nobody, except me, noticed, not even a passing group of kindergarten kids on a field trip, hunting for owls and tortoises.

Her death always brings me back to my apartment, a place with bright, clean walls, no furniture, and no screens. For a half-second, I can stay in that white mud and grief, letting the balloon of sorrow deflate into the vacuum of my head. After that, everything comes back to normal, and, somehow, I don't remember her at all. The worst part of dreaming is the inability to remember a dream, being in a fog that covers all essential aspects of the life that just ended. While emotions still lingering, the mind, the enemy, is pulling you out of the place you belong to, away from everything important to you, and into so-called reality. For some reason, I wish I was a frog. Or maybe I am a frog-like creature, an amphibian, "living" in "both" worlds, in dreams, and in my apartment, that is.

Screens start flickering again, ready to take me somewhere else. People say you can control your dreams, prepare them, and guide yourself through the land of accidents and coincidences, but that is not how it happens, nor does it have any meaning where I am now. Freedom of dreams is in complete surrender, the same as any other form of space.

The moment you start influencing something, you are not free anymore; you are part of a construct, prefabricated or original. It doesn't matter. By letting things flow without any influence on my part, that is the place where dream gold lays. So many times, I wanted to meet her and made a wish to have a dream about her, but she would come only when she wanted to, utterly deaf to my prayers. I guess it may be different for the living.

The reality of her is what is most painful. There she lives, and there she dies, like a half-second butterfly, with ever-changing colors on her wings, with wordless stories depicting mortality and rebirth so easily. I think there is no secret in her existence other than who she is and what she represents. Caves, treetops, rivers: she lives everywhere, and she dies around, in order not to escape my curiosity, but to make me want her more every time. Again, she stays beyond seduction, not as a woman, but more like an idea, a form, a dream.

Often, I see her standing in the river, shallow but fast, with water coming toward her from all directions, like a twirl, bringing many creatures to her, animals needy of her touch. Some of them disappear right after she gives them some attention, some lingering for a while, feeling safe around her. A crayfish, a dolphin, an eel, and a frog all look like they are her best friends. The picture is almost mythical, but its meaning avoids me. I wish they were all made out of chocolate or some fruit to understand them easier. I have an urge to reach out with my hands and take them all in a bowl of

my palms. Suddenly, the river becomes an open and upside-down umbrella full of water, with her standing in the middle of it. I try to reach the handle, but just then, the umbrella closes, splashing the water around, making me wet, and... Awake.

The next thing I know, I am in my pentagon apartment, wet and confused.

Passage

Now, there is a man with a very familiar hat. He looks like a charcoal drawing, one that emphasizes his hat and his jacket, with almost no facial features. His hands are huge, and his long fingers are moving like he is playing some invisible wind instrument. The rest of his body is motionless, he is not walking, but his surroundings are moving around him, so it seems like he is floating through various streets, parks, deserts, and forests. Some music is playing backward, with distorted strings, tom-toms, and trumpets. His fingers are in perfect sync with the sound of the wind. Then, everything stops abruptly. He is standing in front of a house with many windows, through which the light spills down the facade, transforming the place into a light waterfall. Some tribal drums started fading in until they became very loud, corresponding to the intensity of the lights. The man's fingers stopped moving. Some air can be heard hissing, leaving, and making a vacuum where he stands. It is hard on his lugs, but it is even harder on

his emotions. He got lost in front of a golden mirror. *Passage du opera* is opening his wings to him, and he doesn't recognize any of the steps lying in front of his dead feet.

He starts walking and finds himself on the road leading to three different paths, passages 1, 2, and 3. He continues down (or up) path number 1, but after a few steps, he notices that he is actually on path number 3. He tries to go back and again, and he is in the same spot where paths are dividing. He chooses the same way, number 1, but he goes down (or up) a different way, this time path number 2. He plays this game for a whole half a second but then decides to go further, no matter which path. To his surprise, he is now on a new track, one without the number. Along that path, vines are growing up the walls of curious old buildings, with clusters of grapes from which the finest-smelling vine is dripping. Windows on the buildings are low, and he can see the tenants going about their business. In one of them, a girl is reading a book and crying; in the other, a boxing man is masturbating with his eyes closed. The third window conceals a murder atmosphere. On the opposite wall, in a tiny window, a mother is singing to a newborn baby who is moving her little hands very fast, so it looks like it has many of them. The following window shows nothing, but some somber music is coming from it.

A man with a familiar hat stops there, with an urge to sing familiar verses, but no sound comes out of his mouth. He continues up the curvy street,

tiled with shiny stones. The raindrops stopped in midair, but the ones that fell before had made the rocks resemble light bulbs, so he walked very carefully. He remembers his friend telling him about a fragile package he received the other day; it was full of glass bulbs of various sizes and colors, and they were breaking at the slightest touch. Our hatter couldn't continue walking in these conditions, so he climbed up the wall, using the vines while drinking the wine. He climbs for some time or the other, and he is now in front of the door, placed in the middle of the wall, taking space from some poor window. Now, our hero is in doubt. Should he open the door or fall on the shiny street? His choice is simple, so he opens the door, steps into what awaits him, and, to a little of his surprise, falls onto a different, much further down the street. He ends up on a grass field, hurting his knees and left wrist. This street is narrow, and buildings on both sides are tall and wooden. He hears the noise coming from behind and turns his head to see: an angry mob running toward him, some of them yelling the names of some old philosophers, and the others, the names of the books they wrote.

CHABALES

and on the other side:

MAGNIFYING GLASS EYE

QUNE — EXCREMENTS

REBANTES — NOTHING TO KNOW

VOITERS — MIND AND OTHER SHIT

ABLAHAMAH VITES — TO BE INSIDE

EPILEE — BEUTY OF THE LIE
ADOUY — IS THERE A THOUGHT
NESCAVIER — BIG I

He is frightened and wounded, and he starts running down the street, a forest now. There is a further light up front, and he is trying to reach it. The mob is getting closer, and he can smell something like the printing lead on a paper. He runs faster and finds himself at the end of the path, looking at a yellow body of water. His death is imminent, but just before it happens, he sees the mob diving into bright nothingness without a splash.

Reality check 4

You are looked in prison for criminally insane. It is not a prison, per se. It is a modified nuclear shelter made for city officials back in nuclear era decadence. At that time, the government pronounced the city a significant target for a nuclear attack from all war parties, and they ordered the construction of shelters for its members and other chosen individuals. After completing the first shelter, they abandoned the project because the threat was either passed or fulfilled; nobody remembers now. Anyhow, this one stayed as a monument to those times, and since it was built in secret, very few people knew about it. Being in an undisclosed location, outside the city, a hundred meters under the surface, the shelter came as an option for your confinement only after certain documents

came to light during your trial. Some believe it was not accidental at all since your hiding place was an almost identical copy of that shelter, just a bit smaller. Anyway, you are there now, alone and without any contact with any living beings, save some bonsai plants you've insisted upon. They were given to you as a part of a deal when you gave particulars of your "project" to authorities. Only two people know where you are, and only one of them is in charge of providing you with essentials for your survival. The person does it through the complicated computer system, connected with mechanical circuits that deliver everything you need to the shelter. Essentials delivered to you consist of everything you need to survive. The only restriction, for some odd reason, is that there can't be any written words anywhere. No books, papers, or even labels. It was a form of punishment. Some people think that you tricked authorities into that, but no one can find a sane reason for it. Like there is any room for sanity in your case.

Anyway, there you are, away from society, away from the face of the Earth, but alive. The mob was ready to kill you, but capital punishment was abolished decades ago, so the government sentenced you to the cruelest sentence possible. Little did they know how your story would be kept alive through tabloids, magazines, and even books, and films. But none of those came even close to the truth. Since most of the policemen and prosecutors involved in your apprehension either died, went crazy or disappeared, nobody in public knows pre-

cisely the extension of your crimes. People involved in the case started complaining about severe dyslexia and, inability to read or write after the arrest. Then, one by one, they began disappearing, and in a few weeks, only a handful of people were even aware of you and what you had done. Luckily, the trial and sentencing were all done by then. Some details are known and correct, but most of the legend (and it has become a legend) is pure fiction. Journalists, writers, and film-makers; all added some of their imagination to the story without actual knowledge of how far you went in your “project.” For a reason known only to you, you called that “project” – Minski.

This is what we know, what we witnessed in this case.

One year, around the summer solstice, people started missing from different parts of town. All ages, although no one younger than 7. They were disappearing from streets, from stores, their homes, some even from their place of work. And there were no witnesses to any of the kidnappings. By extensive police work, using camera footage and online tracking, they concluded that all of the missing people were participating in some game of dare, organized by an unknown perpetrator, one that was caught on several videos from CC cameras. It was described as a man in his thirties, tall, dressed in black, with a Borsalino hat hiding his face. So, police investigated social media, connected some dots, and understood that one unknown person approached all of the missing people, prob-

ably the same guy in black. They made countless traps for him, online and on the street, but he evaded them with the finest skills. A year passed, A Year of the Hunt, as it is remembered, and a total of 147 people went missing. No bodies were found, however. Then, it stopped. For a couple of months, nothing happened. Police were digging, media guessing, and speculating, but nothing new was going on. Until...

You contacted us, a group of five people you've chosen, regular citizens with no government connection. With the internet, mail, or telephone, you give us instructions on finding you. You told us to share everything with the police, but you insisted that only five would be permitted to enter your world. After that, you promised to allow the police to arrest you and do with you as they pleased. Each of us separately contacted the law, and they started interrogating us, suspecting our involvement. When they understood the truth and were the only connection they had with the case, they started cooperating and allowed us to follow your instructions. With them close behind, we went to an abandoned factory on the outskirts of the city. It is a vast ground, with many warehouses and production sections. Since you have given each of us only partial instruction, we struggled to understand them and make a visual map with directions in it. Searching for days through a labyrinth of spooky factory atmosphere and your quirky guidance, we finally found the entrance to your hiding place. It was behind one massive turbine, still ac-

tive but very silent. Later we find out it was the central air intake for your place. As instructed, we entered a small room filled with old, dusty cleaning supplies. Two armed police officers accompanied us for our protection. You silently agreed to that request. When the door closed behind us, the room started moving downward, as if it was an elevator. We were traveling for a minute or so and stopped abruptly. One of the walls opened to a poorly lightened hallway. Then, a voice came from above:

“Welcome to project ‘Minsky,’” it said. It was your voice.

“I will guide you through it. Please, don’t leave the group and stay on the path. Only if you follow instructions will you get to the end of the tour, which will result in my complete surrender. And, no questions of any kind, please.”

What happened from then on might be just my own experience. It also might be a dream. Hallucination. There must have been something in the air. I am sure I’ve lost my mind there. I never talked to anybody about that.

Room after room, there were setups and scenes from worst nightmares and most beautiful dreams.

People were sleeping in every room while on the walls, the ceilings, and the floors, their dreams were projected. So many of them, mixed up in movie footage, a movie like I had never seen before, the one that is still playing in my head. Some even floated in the thin air, like holograms (holographs).

There was unimaginable violence projected, and people were yelling, singing, running, people becoming animals, people dying. Scenery switched from desert to oceans, from cities to forests, and then, from everything I was able to comprehend to something I cannot explain. The sheer volume of it was scary! I was trying to stay calm and find out if the sleeping people were ok, and if they needed assistance. But the pull of the dreams was too strong, and I couldn't differentiate what was real from what was not. The sleepers looked calm and in a deep sleep, but as I approached them, some stood up, some turned their back to me, and some even disappeared. Weird birds and painted horses, frog people, and herds of pink piglets, together with all kinds of different appearances, were mixed all around me. Enormous trees with stars and airplanes in their canopies, volcanoes spitting furniture, happy sewing machines with umbrella boyfriends, doing it on a surgical table. Everything is mixed in the chaos of lights, colors, and darkness. So vivid and real, covered with a curtain of rain, which was giving a sight blur to the scene.

And people! Besides the sleepers, there were all kinds of people around me, talking in unknown languages, fighting, making love, some even flying. Some were gigantic, some tiny, changing the color of their skin, grooving or losing their hair, dying on the spot.

There were several rooms with a similar setup, with dreams flying around, covered with the cloak of rain. I was not wet, but I had a feeling of be-

ing wet. In some of the rooms, there were storms, winds, lightning... And snow, in all its shapes, its beautiful whiteness, and soothing coolness. I remember that the most.

As we approached the last room, the temperature dropped to an almost unbearable level. We entered that room and found you sleeping there.

There were no flying pictures on the walls in this room, and there were no people, fights, storms, or anything confusing. The room was empty, save your bed and you. It was freezing cold, and the feeling of rain had turned to actual rain, one that was coming down our faces, our bodies, as well as the walls. And then, like you were showing something to us, in the middle of the space started appearing a figure of a white rhinoceros. When it finished its appearance, I suddenly had an urge to come closer and touch it. It looked like it was breathing, letting out the steam from its nostrils. But when I touched it, I found out it was made of ice.

There was no trial, and you were confined to your cell the same week. The city government decided to keep all the details a secret. They closed the case, got a big media fuss about catching the "Scientist," and let tabloids run things and keep the public away from the truth. And they moved five of us to different parts of the country. We were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements, but after the media distorted the truth in so many ways and collective imagination made it impossible to believe in rumors fully, our knowledge of the case

came to the same level as fairy tales. I don't know what happened to the sleepers.

The Restaurant

I am in a very fancy restaurant. Somehow, in my head, there must be a reason why I am here. I've heard that this particular place gives you plenty of dining choices you can't find in other places, but it was not huger, decor, or variability that brought me here. People think that they can choose where they are going to go for diner. But when you are in your mind bubble, alone in front of the mirror, or, perhaps, some other screen, then you can see possibilities disappearing, choices abandoning, and dreams evaporating in front of you. And the only thing left is to run away from you and get into some crowd, somewhere where everything is melting together. That is not a choice, not just one of the things that can happen to you when you are desperate. It is the only thing. Melt in, or disappear. That is what I am doing here, or anywhere else for that matter. Here I am, melted in a décor similar to some middle age castles, with a lot of gold and red dripping down the walls and creeping on the ceiling.

The tables of all sizes are randomly scattered around the big room, accompanied by different chairs, each filled with a person. The waiters dressed as court stewards care around cutlery and straws, but no food or drinks in any of their

hands. But soon, half a second later or a bird blinked away, I understood why, although I didn't want to, and certainly wasn't intrigued by that state of affairs. However, things are happening despite our interest or wish to tumble down the waterfall in a sealed barrel. Inside, if someone is alive, they recite newborn poets' poetry in disgusting hope that the water is fresh. So I understood what was happening. The meals in this restaurant, a famous one mentioned before, are solemnly and, ultimately, the guests themselves.

At the opposite table, I see close the fountain of red and gold, a couple sitting close to each other. She eats his fingers while he is slicing her shoulder and then putting it between her previously detached ears and eating it like the most delicious sandwich. What surprises me (if I can be more surprised) is the complete neatness of their acts. Nothing seems gory or dirty. There is no excess of blood, and none of them is in any discomfort.

At the table in the corner, the family of five is having dinner. Obviously, the older man is busy eating his wife's cheeks, while his upper arm is eaten by a younger woman, possibly a daughter. At the same time, her ass is eaten by a young man, her brother, assuming by the hair color. The mother is trying to reach the young man's toes, but at the same time, she is talking. And although the language sounds legit and words are complete and round, nobody, including me, understands what is being said. Ah, wait; there is a boy, maybe seven, eight years old, sitting at their table. He is

too young to eat here or be eaten. It looks like the mother is talking to him, but he has trouble hearing her. Then he starts yelling, and that makes several waiters appear. They try, in vain, to calm the boy, and then they take him from the table drag him down the room, and disappear.

My attention then switches to a woman who just entered the room. She is tall. And she is wearing a long black frock with a fur collar. She moves in between the tables like she is skating, but slowly, elegant, like a fountain pen. She approaches the empty table close to the one I am sitting at, looks at it for a half-second, and then throws her frock on the ground. Beautifully naked, she sits on a chair. Then, she takes off the pearl bracelet, the only thing she has on her body, and, reluctantly, maybe with tears in her eyes, starts chewing on her arm. I want to get up and introduce myself to her, maybe eat her a little bit, but I cannot move. Then, with my eyes open, I dream of eating her left breast.

At that moment, another woman approaches my table, and after a short, needless introduction, she starts eating my chest. She is eager, hungry, and maybe even angry. Barely noticing her, I continue with my dream in which I am eating a tall woman's left tit. Slowly but passionately, I enjoy its softness, its wiggly surrender, and its majestic smallness. Now I can see her ribs, and through that cage, I see her heart or a ghost of her heart. It is small, and it is beeping at long intervals. As

I put my lips and my teeth around it, I somehow know that it is the last thing I'll ever eat.

My dream ends, and I am back at my table. The other woman is not here, but she did her job thoroughly. My penis is gone, together with most of my upper left leg. But it doesn't matter. I am looking at a tall woman's eyes, and I see her sorrow, her anger. It seems like she wants to jump on me and destroy me in a blink, but she stays where she is, looking at me.

Then, lights go out, slowly, like with dimming switches, like a long tunnel, or a long incoming night.

And, I was not there to witness waiters picking up what was left of me, taking it outside, and dumping it into a giant compost bin.

I woke up without the headache but with the light of her eyes imprinted in mine.

CHAPTER 10

*Who am I? What am I? Just a dreamer
Looking for a ring of happiness in the dark,
Living this life as if by happenstance,
Just like others on earth.*

— Sergey Esenin

Walk

I am looking through the window, and I see a meteor shower coming down through heavy clouds and falling on the city and surrounding area. Meteors look like various pieces of furniture couth on fire, like some antique store had decided to conquer the planet. Although they are falling fast, they stop just above the ground and become clouds of green gas. At that moment, gas starts spreading over town, covering the whole area in just half a second. Rain is falling even harder than usual, and its drops are collecting gas, making green mint candies covered with sugar. People, who were scared a moment ago, are now looking toward the sky, opening their mouths, and catching those candies. They all start laughing like madmen, and it sounds like it is coming from large speakers replacing buildings in the center of the city. A moment later, the laughing storm stops, but people are still walking in all direc-

tions, giggling, unable to understand what is happening. Their happiness is a gurgle. As I watch their misery, I see something else emerging on the street in front of me: it looks like a giant bug crawling on its six legs. It is coming toward me, and I see its head very clearly. It has an almost human face, with a beard and an eye patch over its left eye. It climbs up the building and comes right to my window. I feel like I know him. I am afraid he will start to speak and tell me about his dream, but he doesn't. He stares at me with his eyes made of broken coffee cups. Now I see that the window between us is a map of some other city, and his crooked fingers are pointing to the street named *Lamartine*. All of a sudden, we are walking down that street. He has lost his middle legs, and now he looks almost human. He is way shorter than me, though, so I can see the top of his hat, where some water is boiling. Houses on both sides of the street have mirror walls, but his reflection is different in each of them. In one, he is a three-legged dog, and then he is an old lady with long white hair that seems to help her walk, and then he is back in his bug shape. We stop in front of the house made of water. The sign above the door says, "Taylor Dreams." Inside, people sit in the dentist's chairs while a very tall man in a red suit serves them. He is touching their faces, making them change. We crossed the street, and on that side, we found a butcher store with zebras hanging in the window. We continue faster down the road which looks like it has no end.

Finally, we stop in front of a small singing house, where I get an idea to check its mailbox. My companion opens the box, and it is full of mint candies, covered with white sugar. We eat those and start laughing right away. But then, an old lady comes out of the door and starts yelling and waving a snake at us. Scared, we run back to the street, which is now full of small automobiles, each of whom is honking their sirens, making an unbearable noise. The young man approaches us and starts walking with us. He has a thousand flays on his head instead of hair. We stop to look at the ruins of a large building next to the Park of Ghosts. On the top of the rumble, we see a large sign which reads: "Earthquake Institute."

Then we enter the Park of Ghosts, welcomed by stones of many kinds. They all have numbers on them, which we accept as symbols for colors. Red, red, green, blue, black, red, yellow, black... Following an inexistent pattern, we come to a large marble cube, almost transparent in its lack of color. We all put our palms on it, but it feels like touching the air: its smoothness is beyond our comprehension. We continue toward the exit, ignoring the stones that are throwing some names at us. Past the exit, we find ourselves at the main square of the city. It is crowded with people, each of whom is trying to get out of there, but, somehow, they can't. We are trying to stay together in the crowd, but soon I find myself alone, surrounded by faceless people in heavy raincoats. They are pushing in every direction, but I manage to walk through the mass with-

out obstacles. Music that is coming from the far end of the square sounds interesting, and I choose to go there and check it out. But soon, I found myself in front of a hairdresser's store called Little Down. I look through the window and see an aquarium in which a beautiful beluga whale is swimming. I knock on the glass lightly, but it shatters, and all the water comes on me, along with a whale.

I am wet. And I don't remember this weird dream at all. Nothing, but the grace of her thighs on my knees, a gentle wind of distant memory from a life I might have once had, like a hand that slides up my desire to surrender entirely to her dance. Her tights are so gentle they might not exist anywhere else but here, around this chair stolen from a spaceship cruising through a remote planetary system, her thighs whose curves touching a black hole of my imagination, and, then, as we turn, her cleavage reflecting, starting between eclipsed moons and going upward to her collar bones, those viaducts leading to her neck, white as a beluga skin, as it is connecting to her face, which details elude me right now, but the face of peace and storm at the same time, face framed with curls of black gold, black snakes that would make Medusa jealous. Her lips are moving, releasing silent words, chants that work as midnight opium, like hypnotic rhythm without voodoo dancers, like a smell that equally saves us from committing to the day or night. Oh, princes of levitation, cut my skin with silver extensions of your fingers, cut me into an unsolvable puzzle for the next generations of

dorks. While you are buzzing around my head like a hungry hummingbird, one that carries the spirit of a recently deceased elephant, I dream of incisions on my torso, I dream of inking your name on my bare heart with a dull needle of coincidence, I dream of fresh scars on my face. No, holding your hand is not enough! I wish to enter your skin and lick your bones while you are filling my ears with poison! I want to eat grapes with you! In this house where we meet, full of smells and sharp objects, the only secret is... You never ask for my name, making the spell more powerful. You choose the mirror that cannot see me. While you brew your potion in the cauldron I put myself in, my erection is a pole for my white flag, but you only see the sails of the ship that is leaving down the street, which you've filled with amphibian gods, with your multiple lives, and some tears for me. But tell me, honestly, do you ask how I am, sometimes, on your end of reality, and do you listen to my answers, those sounds of a dying cat caught between two newly grown castles, do you tell me about the things I was not part of, not to anyone's knowledge, do you pretend to wait for me, in your shoes of invisibility, a timeless poster on board, beyond anyone's reach?

A couple of houses down, there is a shop where you can buy broken wristwatches, as well as all kinds of parts of mechanisms that ordinarily made them work – they are selling those delicate parts wrapped in clear glass cubes. (Just before I visited you, I bought from there a small box full of

tiny rubies used for jewel bearings and swallowed them on the spot so that my desire for you could be projected through my veins and get through your metaphysic shields. It didn't work, though.) And after you finish with me, I leave your aquarium without one hair on my body and stroll further down the street, past alcohol chambers, past underground hanging spaces, where assassins get their job orders but never payments. I stop in front of a bakery that sells old and new books. As I can't recognize the language of the sign in the window, I enter the shop to ask for directions. It is hard to explain where I am going, so I order some book-dough with a promising title. It tasted like poetry.

Still cleaning my teeth from stringy letters, I continue walking down this street that looks like a tunnel, that looks like a tube and smells like November. But, in this simple street, a couple of trees are yelling, "spring is coming, spring is coming," and I continue walking, assured of our meeting. You can be that hungry cat that meows old heart-breaking tune, or you can be a broken tile in the sidewalk, a flower pot on the balcony that bushes my head, and you can be any part of this picture, one that I can't translate in words.

The streetcar glides down the crossing street, looking like a singing comb while plowing young girls on bicycles. It almost got me with the cellophane it is wrapped in, but since I forgot to count my steps, I've missed the one that will put me in comb's tracks in harm's way. The primary

reason I missed that step was the greeting from The Soul Tsar, a traffic policeman in a white uniform. He thought I was someone else, smiled at me, touched his nose with his white-gloved fingers, and then, as he realized his mistake, went on with his business, saving bicycle girls. I cross that street, and a young man joins me again. He has a hundred perfectly combed butterflies on his head now. We enter the open market with many stands. The rain is massive, and it melts dreams today, so vendors are all crying over their melted stuff. Besides fruits and herbs on many shelves, we see some antiques dripping, old clocks, women's garments, smoking revolvers... All melted in acidic rain. My young friend picks up a partially melted pocket watch from the ground and turns his hands backward. By the time it starts running forward again, the rain is much lighter, and bicycle girls are still far away. Vendors are saying their mantras, some backward, some very quiet. We are now in a moment just before melting started, so we can enjoy some beauty laying on the stands, some jewels from past lives collected on a landfill, spectacular in my head, and some futuresque items whose future will never happen. A fish choir in a large tank is singing about botched love adventures. Male vendors are singing, too, with their eyes closed. And then, the rain gets more massive, and the whole reality starts melting, with us in it, like giant chewing gum on the revenging sun.

Arrow

I am watching people walking up a wet, clean street, in their oversized shoes, with their hands in the air, like they are trying to catch something from its crisp coldness, with their eyes fixed on something behind me, something I cannot see due to my inability to turn my head. I couldn't get my head around it, so to speak. Many people, walking on a perfectly leveled sidewalk in the direction opposite of mine, seemed uninterested in me. They are walking toward me, but the moment, when one of them is about to crash into me, they disappear. Not like they ran clean through me, but like they were not there at all. Or I wasn't. I am restricted from moving forward by something that took me half-second to understand: it is a screen, made of white fabric, exceptionally nicely woven, although I can feel all vertical and horizontal threads, holding me in place, taking my focus off the people, now looking like moving in loops, and force me to understand the barrier that has taken hold of me. Just now, I got it. It is a movie theatre screen, on which billions of particles of light and shadows are projected, making an illusion of people running up some street. A screen, the one that can be made of soft steel or harsh cotton, but the one that I cannot pass. A two-dimensional moving picture of a crowded street retakes my attention, and I am trying to see if I am part of the image or just an observer. People without substance, running, weaving, maybe even screaming, with their noses

bleeding, with calluses on their fingers, some naked, some wounded... Even though the picture is scary, I don't feel fear or remorse, not a hint of compassion toward a very distracted crowd. They are not my reflection, so to speak. All I am thinking now is how to get out of this trap. I can't move backward for some reason and can't penetrate the screen. Becoming two-dimensional wasn't an option. Although the only sense of the third dimension is given to me by the distance from my eyes to this panel, it is enough to feel separated from those light ghosts from some distant reality.

Then, I start feeling a sharp pain where my heart is supposed to be. I look down, and I see something sticking from my chest; a giant arrow pierces the screen in front of me and lodged itself deep into my chest.

I can see only the last half of the arrow, made of a perfect tree branch with no name. Wait, there is carving on the arrow's body; smooth lines were carved around it, looking like snakes without heads. Or maybe their heads are closer to the tip of the arrow, one that is deep in my... insides. That would be horrible since snakeheads have teeth and poison in them. On the other hand, why should I care? I am dead.

What is more important at this moment is a pierced screen, one that might break completely, allowing me to move forward, away from the two-dimensional reality in which I am presently stuck. I try to push forward, but there is no room for maneuvering. I lean on the screen, but my weight

does not affect it. Now, I feel some pulling in my chest. It looks like the arrow is trying to back up. But, due to a fishhook arrowhead, it can't pull out, seemingly stuck between two of my ribs or something. It is pulling harder, and, before I know it, the screen in front of me is breaking, and I am hauled through what now looks like a dense spider web, soft and forgiving.

It feels like I'm being carried on by a strange, tickling wind, with a thousand cold tentacles, so real I have to check now and then if I have emerged in water. But I am walking down the field full of ear-shaped plants and with no path. The ground under the plants is white and looks like sketchbook paper, making black earlike plants look like drawings. As I walk very carefully, not to step on any of the black, earlike plants on the ground, I approach the edge of the forest. The arrow is pulling me into the darkness of these strange woods. I step into it, and, to my surprise, the light doesn't change. My eyes were able to see all the details around me the same way I could notice everything on the field I'd just left. No adjustment was needed. Trees are looking normal, except there are multiple eyes on their bark. And all of them are looking at me. Although I am not scared, I feel like my steps are getting faster, almost to the point of running. Arrow is pulling me stronger, as it wanted me out of there, spearing me of wondering where I am. Soon, I am on the narrow path leading out of the forest, between two very tall stone walls.

I have a sense of being in the bed of some river that died a long time ago. The only movement I see comes from the feathers on the end of the arrow. It looks like they are sending me some coded messages, but I am not interested in what they have to say. Now, I notice that I am pushing a wheelbarrow in front of me. In it, there is a sack of potatoes. But, as I look closely, those are small human heads. They talked to me, mostly small talk about the weather, prices, and state of affairs in some faraway cities.

“You don’t put ketchup in newspapers,” said the head.

“\$4 cyclones,” said the other.

“It is all about commitment,” came from the bottom of the sack.

But all I can think of is that I never went hunting. It wasn’t me who caught them, severed them from their bodies, and shrank them to the size of regular potatoes. The arrow pulls me at the speed of an average walking pace as I exit the river bed and find myself in the city. There are many small houses around me, each of them in the shape of a cube, with one door and two symmetrical windows on their fronts. Each one I pass, take one of the heads from my wheelbarrow until there is none left, and the wheelbarrow stays abandoned on the side of the road. The arrow is hauling me a bit faster now like it feels the closeness of the end of our travel. The buildings are moving around like they are playing tic-tac-toe with each other, and I am having trouble following the street. But it is not me

who's leading but the arrow, which finally stopped pulling when we appear in front of a house, one very different from all the other houses around it. First, it isn't jumping; second, it has a big sign above the entrance:

CLOCKMAKER

I know, or just have a strong feeling, those clockmakers are not very nice people. Even though I have no idea what they are doing, a curve one experiences while pronouncing that word is a cause for certain anxiety, almost like a natural curve on the road, one which you enter with your brain at full speed. Crush is imminent but moved in another half-second, parallel with the one who finds me in front of the clockmaker store, with an arrow sticking from my chest. It is afternoon, and the rain is green and oily again. Deliberation about entering the store has just ended. Inside, a tin man is destroying a tiny watch with a massive hammer.

"No returns!" He yells without looking at me.

I am sensing two-dimensional people behind me, waving their hands in some kind of threat. The screen they are occupying is getting closer, wiping out the third dimension, the depth of my existence. I see colorful feathers on my arrow trembling. But just before I got flat, I noticed a small framed picture on the wall above the clockmaker's tiny head, a picture of a girl with green eyes, holding an empty bow, like she just released an arrow from it.

Back in court

I am in a court of some kind. People are sitting at their desks made of smudged mahogany, looking very tired. Some of them fall asleep but jerk their heads up just before it happens. White paintings are hanging on all of the walls. I am looking at the guy at the biggest desk, one that is holding a gavel. He must be a judge. He has no features on his face. Eyes, nose, and mouth are there, but they are so generic, so deeply sunk in that face, that it resembled a sheet of photocopy paper stuck in a broken copier. Other faces are similar, with various levels of blankness. They are all looking at the big white painting hanging on the opposite wall across the room. I look at it, and to my surprise, I see some letters written by someone's shaky hand.

CRIME:

DREAMING WHILE DEAD

A half-second later, those words disappear, and all blank faces turn toward me. Some music comes from an unknown source, which struck me as a reason for people's sleepiness. It is some kind of xylophone, very blunt, and incredibly boring. Progression is somewhat familiar. Everyone is silent, but we communicate somehow. It is like pigeon mail but without birds. I asked, if would it be ok if I was alive while dreaming, and the answer was that it is a different sort of crime. Sleeping is a basic crime, dead or alive, and dreaming is punishable by laws of men, desks, and paintings. They can't

turn off the music; so many crimes are committed daily. But no one, NO ONE, dreams while dead. I apologized, but they were looking at the giant painting again. Some blue color is coming up from the bottom of the canvas, like bubbling water or a boiling sea, you know, one with the stairs. But the color stops rising after half-second, leaving a nice thick line at the bottom of the canvas and a trace of surprise on the blank faces of my accusers. They communicate to me that I am vindicated so that the punishment will be more severe. I couldn't find my voice to protest, but it was irrelevant since being in a place like this is a punishment with a capital P. And I know it is going to have a domino effect, involving all the penalties, every next one more serious. But it won't be destruction, pain, or suffering of any kind since that is not in accord with my condition. Discussion about my punishment took less time than expected - half a second. A person with a gavel looks at me, and I swear I can see an evil smile on that blank face. I knew, even before the light went off, and before the canvases started flickering, even before on the main one the word "punishment" in very shaky writing appeared, I knew that they would come up with something which would annoy me, or bore me to death,

PUNISHMENT

I

and suck out any dream left in me. But there is no escape from this. I cannot avert my eyes. I can't close them. So, with icy ants crawling up

my paper-thin skin, with tears coming down on me from the missing ceiling, and with paralyzing looks from my prosecutors, I am waiting for my sentence to appear on the main canvas. I am not scared or even think of this farce as something serious, but I feel I won't like what's coming. The boring xylophone was louder now, and I am pretty sure two of the prosecutors were snoring for a while. We all look at the white surface with the word 'PUNISHMENT' written in someone's shaky hand. And slowly, wiggly lines start appearing, forming, letter by letter, a word that I didn't expect, a word so far from my existence, a term describing a concept strange to me, so much it took me a whole half-second to understand width and depth of my punishment.

Voices

Those voices never cease to interrupt my diner, even when I have just a bit of salty, sandy water brought from the faraway land of the immortal sea. Then I can't feel my hands. As if I ever can. Feeling your hands or any other part of the body depends only on the level of discomfort or even pain. No, no pain for me, thanks. I am dead. But, those voices, they are many. And it looks like all of them are talking in a different language, at an additional time even. Like me, they play a game with each other, feeling in the blanks and allowing me to hear words that I can't understand. Each voice

is saying singular sounds, or sometimes syllables that somehow go together with the sound the previous voice made, and with the next one, making complete words, and then, even sentences. Like:

Voice1: Mo

Voice2: g

Voice3: du

Voice4: z

Voice5: vas

And I hear 'mogduzvas.'

If it continues, it may become:

'Mogduzvasrtire a mojtevreevre?tecvabidisi.'

Loose translation: N/A

But my diner is suffering. I am lusting for some sand on my teeth, for some salty water to attack my entrails. If only those voices could wait till I feed on the deepness of forgotten to see, on its ghostly inhabitants that smell like marmalade, on broken submarines full of echoes. I wish I could waltz with cartoon seahorses, race with zombie sharks, and sing with murderous mermaids. But, all is in vain. Torturing voices continue their prose without even bothering with proper punctuation. They continue while my teeth are falling out, while my ears stop flapping, and go on while my tongue swells to the size of a roast, and my eyes see only crickets. They continue until I start singing in that strange dialect, probably stolen from the library that never existed.

“Ikwakomiruteevyero
 Pasa le menaquordy
 Epelamrtidonzo
 Ekveelepabordy
 Estrumapakhvalanje
 Objatiimelonaasto
 Ejemotirebonye
 Ebelomenebuatooooooooo.”

A woman, dressed in fish scales, is sitting beside me. She is crying. Her arms are like jelly as she is trying to grab something from the air. Rain doesn't help the gloomy atmosphere. Plates on the table are spinning, making additional counterpoint noise. It sounds like the endless tuning of a large orchestra. My singing breaks the plates now, making forks attempt suicide and a wet loaf of bread to do some pushups. It is unbearable, so the woman leaves, taking the dress and the table with her. There are fewer voices now, and sentences are broken, which allows me to conclude that I am crazy and prescribe myself some heavy medications. Being wet is very comfortable. Like swimming in the sea, looking for my fish, telling her I am sorry. The irreversible sun puts raw toothpicks up my nostrils, and an invisible tortoise was talking backward while cum of the day making the forest happy.

And I am back... Where? It may as well be a fishbowl, through which walls I can't see. Or the darkest dept of the ocean. The only thing I know is that I am always wet. Wet like a word. Wet-like space. They keep forgetting my name, although I never in-

troduced myself. A long row of half-second dreams, color-coded and perfumed, wavering on the floor and over the walls and their imaginary shelves. Reminder: what doesn't happen in a half-second never happens. History in half of a second. It is impossible to put those halves in continuation; they can only stand beside each other. And just a specific kind of earthquake can produce a domino effect and make it look animated. Enough said! My toes are giant prunes now, but I manage to pick one of the half-second pebbles and sink my mind into it.

Dystopia

I am standing in the middle of the road that looks more like an airport runway in some dystopian environment, but an old one and somehow abandoned. I am looking to hitch a ride to some university, where I have to present my science project to help humanity in the present chaos. A few cars are passing me by without stopping. My pointing at my notebook, full of numbers and formulas, doesn't help. Finally, a black van stops down the road, and I am running to catch it. As I approach it, someone comes out and forces me into the back of the van, where four other people are already stuffed. Van starts speeding down the road. There is no door on the back of the van. As we are riding, three of the people in the back of the van start behaving strangely, like upset lunatics. They are screaming and scratching themselves

and trying to take off their clothes. The fourth guy is telling me that I am the reason why they are scared. Then, one by one, they are jumping out of the speeding van, and I am watching them die. Only one guy remains with me, and he starts behaving weirdly while holding a blue plastic rope in his hands. When we arrive at the airport, which is on the same side of the city as the university, we leave the van, and I am saying goodbye to a lunatic, who is looking at the ceiling, still squeezing the rope in his hands.

CHAPTER 11

Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt.

— Kurt Vonnegut

Dystopia

Now, I am thinking, wide awake in my lügenstuhl, is reality dystopian? That would partially explain my death. Is violence real? Is it necessary? Is it part of human nature? Did reason go too far from understanding toward ignorance? How long can our fingers be? Oh, masters of philosophy, when did you lose your humanity and start making a monster of individuality? Dehumanization started; you're your propaganda of greed. I've seen many dystopian societies in my dreams, and none of them value human life over higher goals. It looks like the survival of the species lies in something other than pure ego. Superman is not real. He can't be chosen out of individuals closed in their minds. But that is the danger for you: if all of them open their minds, you will not be needed anymore. Choosing a master is never easy. Out of all the intellectual concepts you've invented, there is not one that works toward humanity, toward equality, toward rightness. All those words are used only to establish and distribute power to the rulers. You help them manipulate the masses. You've made The Prince a pop star.

I am back in my pentagon apartment, with vines on the walls and spiders spreading their venom in the rain, and I am thinking about the difference between the life and the death of a cow.

Game

I am sitting at the table with three other men and one woman. The room is small, full of smoke, and without windows. Wallpapers are hanging loosely on the walls, although they're not looking wet. On each wall, there is one door, closed and without a door handle. The table we are sitting at is round, placed in the middle of the room. Over it, the lamp is hanging on a thick spider web, and if I look harder, I can see that the shape of the lamp is reminiscent of a giant spider, with its legs turned upwards and its body shining enough to throw the light on the table and those faces. The table's surface is covered with green baize, and on it, there are some playing cards and some things that I can't recognize at first. Then I look at one of the players: he has a hat on his head, but only one eye on his face. He is holding a few cards in his left hand while picking his nose with the middle finger of the other hand. Where his missing eye was supposed to be, there was smooth skin and an extension of his cheek, and it looked like it was not missing anything. I look at the woman now. She is pulling her white hair and leaving thick curls in the middle of the table. The man on her

other side is murmuring something on his chin, and the hand holding two cards is missing three fingers. The fourth person, a young man with no ears or a hat, holds five cards with both hands, and his whole body is shaking. He is also crying. I look in front of me, and I see my cards on the table, facing down.

“Check,” says the one-eyed man. The ripping sound almost wholly covered his word.

“Are we safe here?” asked the boy while dropping his cards on the table. On one of them, the Queen of diamonds is laughing.

“Perfectly,” says the lady while pulling her nipple through the opening of her blouse. “A nipple,” she says as she throws it in the middle of the table. Now I can see an eye, a couple of earlobes, three fingers, and someone’s testicles, together with a woman’s curls and nipple. Those things were covering something that looked like a piece of a mirror.

“We should go out,” says someone in my voice. Everyone at the table looked in my direction – even the man with no ears.

“It is not the sound, but a movement of the air that draws the attention,” he explained. “By the way, there is Nothing outside.”

“Nothing, Nothing, Nothing...” squalled the crying boy.

“But, there are doors. There must be something behind.” says my voice.

“There is Nothing, trust me. Anyway, we are safe here.” A man with one eye has a convincing voice.

“But, but, butbut, but...” my voice stutters.

“No ‘buts’!” the woman yells. “Pregnancy is poisonous. It is raining on the left, even more on the right. There are colors, they say. And a thing called a bus that takes you wherever.”

“Bbbb-bus?” yells the boy.

“Yes,” she continues, “green one, with numbers.”

“Besides, we are playing the game. I would like, very much to get my fingers back.”

“But, why do you say nothing with capital *n*?”

They all start murmuring like they are trying to find the answer to my question. Even a spider starts blinking under pressure. Testicles are boy’s, I am sure, but that mirror is still in question. I look around. The room is okay, nothing is missing, and nothing is in excess. Or is it Nothing? Why don’t they go outside?

“The doors, as you call them, are locked, anyway. It is how it should be while the game is on,” one eye man says. “And the game,” he says and starts to laugh, “the game, ha-ha-ha, is ALLWAYS on.”

“How long are we here?” I started feeling like a part of the group.

“Long. Half a second.” says the man with no ears. He is moving something shiny between his fingers. Then, the room started flexing, changing its shape, without affecting us or the table. And when movement stopped, walls were different, now made of glass bricks. And the doors are almost see-through now, still without any visible

looks. I almost rose to check if they were locked, but then the woman said some names and started flicking her fingers, making everybody focus back on the game.

“My dogs are always right,” she says, lighting a blue cigarette. For a blink, I find her erotic. I wish she would recite my favorite poet while I enter her from behind.

“Dolccetta ,dolccetta
I voresiprato
me clemaasidio
Quot mezzo dipoli...”

At that moment, the mirror on the table grew bigger. I try to understand what is happening, but images are blurry, and the room is changing its shape and colors, like a wandering soap bubble. It feels like you're trying to remember a code you never knew in the first place, but a code that hangs at the tip of your tongue, anyhow. Although it is just a feeling, I know it is a key to this unusual dream, one that is trying to tell me something.

“Maybe you are not from around here,” says the boy, this time with a calm voice but very suspicious.

“Maybe he is from outside, from Nothing. I can see part of his soul in this mirror he put in a pot.”

The walls are stripped to the foggy windows now, and there were no doors in the door openings.

There is always the moment when the story we are following or the one we are in can go any unexpected way. Half a second of absolute stillness.

A pocket in time in which everyone wants to stay forever. A moment without memory or hope. Blah-blah, if I blink, another reality will disappear.

“Final bets,” says the woman as she puts another nipple on the table. One-eyed man throws his hat in the pot while the boy folds his cards. A man with missing fingers is now missing even more. But then, everybody stops and looks in my direction. They don’t have their poker faces on. They could all feel the pull of Nothing, like some weird gravity or a very fast carousel. Also, the mirror on the table is big enough for all of us to look at it. We all see the big blue surface of a distant sea. There is Nothing more intriguing than a lingering taste of a faded dream.

Giant Woman

With a very good friend of mine, whose name I can’t remember, I sit outside a corner cafe, observing two streets from two different towns. One is a waterfront in some seaside city, and the other is an upward street in some old town. My friend talks to me in two different languages simultaneously, but I still don’t understand his words. Which is beside the point, since we know each other forever, and understanding comes from our pure existence. For a moment that repeats itself, I am sure that I am mincing those words. Sometimes, my friend looks like he is reading from a huge book. Other times, he is not even there. I am sure it is raining, but it

doesn't spoil our very strong drinks. As I sip from a tiny glass, I feel the liquid traveling to the back of my head, through the tunnel full of lights, and splashing all over my inside face.

"If I am not dreaming, I would be drunk," I say quietly, not to disrupt the song my friend is singing. I could not tell what time of day it is since it is all crumpled in half a second. But I could say it is a beautiful day, maybe the beginning of spring or the end of a vacation in a distant oasis. I can smell the life budding in the air, contrasting dead cities around us, entering the pores and nostrils of those paying attention. And with that sharp scent, I smell something else, smooth and exciting, arousing. A woman's scent, her neck, her underarms, her sex... As something starts cooking in my lower stomach, I see my friend's frozen face, like he just saw something incredible. And way above my head. I turn around, and there she was: a giant woman, maybe 50 feet tall, walking up the street. She is naked and gorgeous, looking like a moving statue whose dark marble is sucking all of the existing sun. Her breasts and her tights are slowly bouncing while she is walking toward us. But even in her hugeness, she is subtle, aerie in her movements, making surrounding air take her as its own. She is looking straight ahead, familiar with her surroundings like it is her city, a place where everything is part of her. Then she comes to our corner and, without noticing us, continues down the other street, and again like it is her home.

My friend and I shamelessly looking up her tights, me without the sound, him reciting long poems. Then, as she passes by, we see a tattoo on her butt. It is a drawing of a bird with burn-out wings and an open beak. It is so impressive that we can hear its terrible scream, apocalyptic and finally relieved from any hope. My friend is silent now, and he looks like he is connecting some imaginary dots to understand her appearance. His mind was always like that, analyzing situations to the core, not leaving one move unexplained. If I knew him outside the dream, I wouldn't be able to stand him. But here, he is a reason, or just a reason seeker, a balance to my executive blindness toward the meanings of my dream.

"Next time you see her," he says, "she'll be pregnant."

Oblivion

Suddenly, I am thinking of a circus and some white horses and elephants, but I can't bring up a clear picture of it in my mind since my drink made the back of my head very heavy. I can't move, but also I am not sure if I want to move. Half the second movie of a giant woman repeats a couple of times, but I can't notice any change in her, except that her skin is lighter and shinier every time. As those images fade, I start missing her. At the very end, I almost know her name.

I am rolling out an old carpet stitched by strong smells in some warehouse. Walls are pages of a book written in the language of old anxiety pills. A girl is pulling the string of letters from those walls and, with no effort, rolling it into a perfect hank. There are also pink boxes along the walls, and they are shaking like they contain something live inside, something that wants to get out. As the carpet rolls out, it touches some of the boxes with its ends and immediately starts the fire, which causes wild shaking of the boxes and inhuman screams that make me cover my ears. The girl runs toward me and licks my hand while giving me the hank of black, sharp wire. Her hands are bleeding, and so are mine, now. The carpet turns into a grass field, and it is surrounded by burning trees, with us in the middle. The girl starts to grow, and as soon as she is 30 feet tall, she starts peeing on those trees, successfully extinguishing the fire. Those trees are now metal poles stretching from the ground to the sky, and the two of us find ourselves in some prison. She turns back to normal size and, with her metal fingernails, starts clicking on those poles, making sounds similar to... music. She smells like roses and is not a young girl anymore. She is someone from an old album cover, pictured from the ground, with big hair and covered with a red parachute. She offers me her shoulder to smell, and she smells like coffee and ice-cream, which we eat sitting on the top of a large dining table, a cloud from someone's past, a soft limousine that slides down the slopes of a brand new ocean called Oblivion.

The streets are full of people. They are walking up and down as if they have no purpose, but I think while watching them from above that if this scene lasts long enough, I might see the pattern in their movement. They are all naked, making them look similar, despite the differences in shape, size, and skin color. The next moment, I find myself among them. Despite their great numbers, they are not touching each other while walking, like there is a guide for each of their paths, leading them precisely and safely through space. Some radar or something.

Now I notice another strange thing going on: besides the sidewalk, on benches that look like pillows, some people are sitting or lying, in pairs or small groups. Some of them are touching, some kissing, some even making love. It looks so natural and calm, but I cannot get rid of the thought that something is missing. None of them are talking, although some are singing long notes, and melodies with no words. Singers all have their songs, but they are in absolute sync with other singers, counterpointing each other, making music, and orchestrating it. But that anomaly was not what the oddest thing was. By watching them for a full half-second, examining their precise but gentle movements, and comparing them to ordinary human actions and behavior I've experienced before, I've noticed that they are not following their arms and legs with their eyes. Like dancers don't in well-rehearsed dance. They imagine space around them and their partners, and that imaginary picture

completely occupies their view. Dreamer's eyes. But people usually close their eyes while dreaming or imagining things. These people's eyes are wide open, although not moving or following other movements. I think: those are not seeing eyes. Are they blind? Or do their "eyes" have a different purpose than seeing?

Anyhow, the next thing I notice is their skin. It ranges from snow white to very dark brown. It looks smooth and clean and is almost melted in the surrounding air. It's constantly raining, but raindrops are sliding down those bodies without really touching them like that bond of skin and air is preventing it from getting wet. I think of evolution and how many millenniums they lived like this, naked and blind, without knowing other ways of living.

I feel completely overwhelmed by them, their ways, and their skin. I can't even say where we are. Is it a city? A village? Maybe the forest? Or a cave? Trying to see beyond those sidewalks and those pillow-benches is fruitless since there is nothing over there, save naked, blind, singing people. I want to touch them, kiss them, and sing with them. I am so aroused by their calmness, by the slowness of their movement, their delicate skin! But none of them notices me. I float through their free space without touching them, the only one with eyesight, the only one wanting, needing something.

And then, among all vibrating bodies, I see Her. She is sitting on one of the pillows, close to something that looks like a vast pond filled with dark

water. Her white skin, with countless moles, looked like a negative of the starry night sky. Curves of her body, delicately connected galaxies, unimpressed by rain, were pulsating life in the air. She is breathing deeply and unevenly, like in some trance. Her left hand is between her tights, and she is massaging her clitoris with her little finger. She is not masturbating, though, more like changing evil thoughts, making it easier to fall asleep. As I am looking at her, I switch to another reality, one that looks like a memory, one I don't remember at all.

I am sitting at a small wooden table, from which a thick white layer of paint is peeling. There are a few old kitchen utilities on the table, none of whom have a purpose. The floor is a clay one. Light is coming from a wood stove and a small oil lamp; it falls on her, the one sitting across from me. She looks angry, but I want this moment, half a second before she starts to speak, to last forever. Shadow is dancing on her face, which I can recognize only on a dream level, and keep as a ceiling picture in some faraway hotel.

She is talking about madness and dreams, shattering one's reality into a million sharp pieces, about where I left her, and how I left my coffin with all the water in it and all the empty windows in her suitcase. About broken rhythms of the night, her nipples shining a light on the tattooed ceiling, benches that ran from parks to abandoned beaches, relentless sunshine of her dreams. As she is exploring how many mean vocals she can put in a half-second sentence, I decided to write down some

of the answers I might have for her, but at that moment, my hands turned to a jelly-like mush; there were no bones in them at all. They still have muscles, but they are behaving like completely different animals now. As I try to lift them, I am back in the land of naked people, where I see her entering a pond, slowly immersing into water that immediately becomes clear. I am following her closely; I can almost touch her with my jelly hands. Suddenly, all of the people are around the edges of the pond, ready to enter. I do touch her. I feel her tiny waist, I hold her by her underarms, touching her spine to her bottom... Then, as she goes deeper, I grab her shoulders in a fruitless attempt to keep her above the surface, but my palms are slippery, my hands are powerless, and she goes under the surface. I look around like I'm asking for help, but I see all those people diving into the water, disappearing – the whole civilization of them. I look back for her, but she is not there. All I feel on my hands are cold, cold water.

Now I am back in an apartment full of blood and body parts. It smells like burning plastic. I swear I have never been here before, but I know I cannot go anywhere else after my dreams. Except when I go to another dream right away. But what kind of a dream can this be? Whose bodies are these? It looks fake, like some props in a gory movie. Traces of blood on walls, on screens, everywhere. Or is it paint? From my comfy position, it is hard to say. I wish this was a giant toilet, and it is enough to pull a lever, and it all goes down into the unknown.

If I close my eyes, it may happen. Or, I can start dreaming again. Then, I remember something from a dream. I remember Her. Her eyes. What did she see? Was she aiming for empty spaces, hidden between movements, between colors, between shapes? Is there a secret lightplay that takes all of her attention? If I can go back and look deep into those portals, what kind of world will I see? The value of those eyes is not in what they see but in what they are reflecting – their unique and precious translation of reality. Please, director, I would like to go back and check it out. Can you clean this scene and send me back to Her? Wherever she is, I want to be.

Running

And, with the sound of a flushing toilet, I travel. Through magical tunnels, full of fire and unfriendly winds, through the yellow mist that smells like a volcano, through nights and days mixed into a gray eternity, I travel. Through the fiber and skin rush, through vertigo and ever-changing conscience, I travel, all the way to familiar water, where she left me before. It is cold and soothing, and I feel like I can stay there forever. But I must find her. Strangely, in whichever direction I swim, I can't find the surface. Or Her, or anything concrete to hold on to. Although I don't need to breathe, my mind is panicking, like I will drown for sure if I don't get out of the water soon. Without thinking,

I swim in a direction that looks obvious escape route. But, soon, I bang my head against some metal wall. I try to get around but can't: I am in a metal box now. And it is moving up. It is an elevator! And I think it is good. It will take me out of the water. And it did! But when the door opens, I wish it didn't.

There are multiple machine-gun fires. And some of the bullets are bouncing off the elevator walls. I get out, and instead of laying low, I start running. And I am not at all surprised that the only sound I hear, besides endless gunfire, is laughing from many people, and very loud. Some laughs stop abruptly, but soon it is replaced by another, even more enthusiastic. As I am running, I can hear bullets whizzing around my head, so many of them. It was like music. I almost start laughing. But then, I see some other people running, trying to find a cover. They are not laughing. Only those standing on the street, watching nearby billboard screens, are involved in weird unreality, laughing, and dying on the spot. I see a woman in a white shirt running around the nearby corner. I see just a flash of her shirt and one dark curl of her hair. She is in a hurry to hide but holding, for half a second, the corner of the building with the whiteness of her hand. That is what scared me because she had some blood on it. I am running toward that corner, and when I am around it, all I can see is an empty alley and traces of blood on the walls and the street. She is not there. I continue running since laughter and shots are coming closer. I

run faster, and the sound starts fading out when I am close to the end of the alley. No sign of the woman, though.

Diminishing worlds, replacing each other like in a slide show, with their half-second meaning, with their lemony aftertaste, and their fadeout colors, worlds without one proof of existence but fading memory in the mind of a dreamer, worlds unreachable, unexplainable, without a hand that writes them down, takes them down to the level of reality. Where do they go, and what do they take away with them? Am I, somehow, stuck in the land of lost dreams, with the ability to see and review all of the dreams that I would have otherwise forgotten? But oblivion, so swift and precise in dreams, why doesn't it work in reality? There, we change our memories as we like, make them fit our needs, but here, in dreamland, we don't have control, we can't change a thing, so we just forget.

CHAPTER 12

“We live, as we dream – alone...”

— Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Intro

Am I lost in the universe where all forgotten dreams are twinkling like dead stars, tickling my attention, and lurking me into their distant realities? I always thought that night was a velvet canopy, with little holes in it, so that light, enormous and disturbing light behind the canopy, could spill a little into my subconscious and make a mess there, confusing me in a way only dreams can. But now I see that the dark canopy is the background, and the stars are syringes that poke my skin, one at a time, and feed me with drugs of unknown origins, drugs dark and mysterious, poisonous but intriguing. Anyway, the result is the same. I dream. And by some chance, I remember all those dreams. Not remember, but consciously live them. And, although I am part of them, I don't have any control over them. Most of the time, I am not even an active player in them. Just an observer. I can't recognize any element in dreams I have or any person that appears in them. They are not a part of any individual or collective memory bank I possess or any experience I might be carrying with me. These dreams are coming from

a different place, pure like escaping gas. Pure like the virgin forest. Pure like a shark attack. Straight forward, no excuses. I am bombarded by those images, wounded and maimed in various ways, left in a debilitating search for meaning, here, where there is none. I can't even say what I feel since the focus is always somewhere else, in reality, encoded by lunatics, and in the world created by maniacs. But, like those half-second stories lining up any each way, I see some constants appearing here and there, keeping me alert. I leave it to those who read this confession to list those reoccurring elements since I have something else in mind.

Half a second ago, she was here, holding my dick in her hand, tightly and painfully. She was always saying that my dick is the only part of me alive, which means to react to its surroundings. Meaning: responding to her. The rest of me, she was never sure where it went. That was the only thing I gave her, and she was always happy to take it. Not that she didn't try to get to other parts of me. But they eluded her, and she could take it only for a while. For half a second. Then she left, leaving my empty shell to float down the stream of death, a stream of dreams.

Stop the weird music. Its oil lubricates my understanding, and I like this sandy feeling. We met a man who knew all the side effects of that particular, peculiar drug. He lost his eyes to it. Now, whenever we play pebbles and try to hit the holes, I think of him.

Pain

It is in pain. I feel like my body is dragged over the floor covered with crushed glass. And it is like I am rotating, so all of my skin is exposed to sharp particles. The pain is just below deadly but still unbearable. It hits all of my nerve endings precisely and purposefully. I scream from the inside, through every pore of my skin, each one in a different language, each one louder than the next one. Then we get to a smooth surface without glass. But the pain doesn't go away since millions of glass particles stayed lodged in me. Beyond the pleasure, beyond blissful orgasm, beyond drug rush, feelings overwhelm me, so I involuntarily ejaculate tone of cum and blood that is now sprayed all around me, composing blood orange clouds illuminated by an intense but very distant light. It looks like a sunset on some big dark sea, and that thought amplifies the pain to the level where I could not keep conscious. For half a second, I am in orange darkness, with hundreds of hands touching me, soothing my pain, taking it away. I cry with relief, but then, I am immediately jerked back into pain.

But now, I am polled upward, hooked with a giant hook through my upper jaw and left cheek. It almost caught my left eye, so my vision is blurry, and I can't see where I am going. But, the path sometimes means nothing compared to the suffering endured along the way. The purpose of traveling is in the details, not the destination. This hook is pulling me through a very dense cloud full of sharp

icicles, so the pain from dragging through glass is coming back, intensified with the pain from the hook. I feel like my head is pulsating, ticking like a bomb, with millions of buzzing electric discharges that zip all over my skull, signals that might have a pattern in them, ones that I would kill to understand since there must be a meaning of all this.

Then, it's all quiet for a half-second. As my vision clears out, I find myself in a room with concrete walls. I am sitting or almost lying in a wooden chair, and I cannot move. Around me, there are dozens of robotic arms buzzing and circling, getting closer to my skin with their sharp needles. I understand that those are tattooing machines. They start poking my skin all at the same time, drawing colorful lines and shapes all over me, writing quotes from unknown poets, implementing secret symbols into complicated pictures... But, all the same, they are hurting me badly. I feel like they are drilling into my skull, trying to tattoo my brain! There is no satisfaction in the beauty of those drawings! But, if there is an opposite of orgasm, this state of my body and mind is it. And it lasts forever. Until the colors, once beautiful, start mixing up, producing a black and blue smudge all over me, making me feel and look like a victim of a million earthquakes, like a body washed out from the sea of ink, like a naked traveler caught in a hail storm in the middle of nowhere.

And now, even if I am not surprised at all, those needles with ink turn into syringes, and they deep into my flesh, all at the same time, while so many

plungers start squeezing whatever is in those barrels, acid, opiates, water, or just air. But it hurts, many times stronger than before, when I thought I would explode from pain. I want to yell, 'I am dead already,' but no voice comes from my mouth. I don't, at this moment, even know if I have a mouth. Or any other part of the body. Or a body. But I am starting to feel those liquids mixing up inside me, becoming uncounted blades that swish left and right, up and down, destroying everything inside me, hitting every single nerve ending. And then, I see a metal ball. It is the size of a Ping-Pong ball, and it is shiny.

Right away, I know what it is. In my dreams, I call it baseball. It is a metal device that, when activated, unwraps into multiple long blades. And just when I thought it couldn't be any worse pain vice, I got this thing in my mouth, and it opens and cuts through my trout, my nasals, and, ultimately, my brain... I can hear blades singing inside, like some crazed katanas. And my agony comes to its conclusion. There are only two possible outcomes to this story: I either diminish or fall asleep. And, although I prefer the former...

The Desert

I fall asleep... And I dream... Now I am in the desert, running on hot sand, while hands look like plants are grooving from it, trying to catch my feet. It is not hard enough to run in the sand, under

the scorching sun, so I need these weird things to make it impossible. But, somehow, I manage. Dune after dune, I go up and down, falling flat on my face many times, getting caught by a thousand green hands trying to keep me in place. But I continue, led only by beautiful *fata morganas*, most of which looked like her feet, perfectly shaped alabaster's stones skipping on the surface of this orange sea. I am following these small, barely visible signs of her existence, all the way into a grand illusion of nothingness, a place without the fence, space without space. My soles are burning, and my lower legs are in scars that look like green tattoos (from those evil plants), but I survived the desert, and now, I am walking on a man-made road. It must lead somewhere. And she must have passed through here.

Along this road, on uneven distances, there are poles with golden bells hanging on them. And, as I pass each of them, they ring, making different, cacophonous sounds that hurt my ears. Strange things are happening, though: at some points, I am one of those poles or even one of the bells, and I am watching myself walking the road. And then I ring, and I am back on the road. It goes on and off, without pattern or explanation. That way, I am entering the marketplace full of people, all of whom are aware of my coming. The eyes are following me, all of the green. Somehow, I can tell that they know why I am here. That they know where she is. And also that her secret is safe with them. I am not looking into their eyes since they are the same

color as those hand-plants I've fought in the desert. I look at their colorful clothes, searching for some pattern to tell me where she might be. Those colors are spreading over the white walls of the houses randomly placed all over the place, making the streets impossible to follow. Houses are small and shaped like cubes, with no windows, only half doors. Whatever is inside is protected from the outside. And now, everything is starting to spin, making the colors on the clothes smudge and spreading in long lines, and I am having trouble keeping my eyes open. But when my conscience was about to leave, I see something familiar: the white silk shirt she was wearing before. I look at it, and I think I see a glimpse of her tit under the wave of silk, and it is enough to start running that way. To my surprise, she is not moving, and in half-second, I would be able to see her, her face, her body... With my arms extended forward, I run through the people, I run through the colors, I run through the walls... And, I find myself in someone's backyard, which extends further into the desert. There, clothing lines stretch from the house's wall to small fruit trees at the edge of the backyard, and on those lines are hanging silk bedspreads, shiny white shirts, and beautiful women's underwear. I see them as clouds in a very happy sky, way above the rain.

I've almost touched her hair. We are not quite running on that clobberstone street, but every effort to reach her is in vain. She is always a couple of steps ahead of me. I try to reach with my

arm toward her dancing hair, but it moves away quickly like it is a game it enjoys playing. And it is changing color! It is sunny and raining simultaneously, and as she moves, she goes from sunshine to shadow and back, and different light is coloring her hair from dark black to golden, then burning red, heavy brown, and back to black. At one point, it was albino white, and I was thinking of snow, of some faraway place where we also live, where numerous children and animals are running around, playing, making imprints in the snow that look like butterflies, looks like flowers. The noise is high, but I understand everything that is said by the children or by the animals. It is like a hundred stories told at the same time, and they are merging and running away, and from time to time, for a half-second, becoming one story, the story of us.

Then, I am standing at the edge of a cliff. Way beneath, there is a river that is also changing its color. I extend my arms and try to touch the water, but it runs away from me in huge waves. She gets away from me back on the clobberstone street, and I try not to lose her in the emerging crowd. People are standing in my way, and they are talking to me, cheering me, telling me what to do, and where to go. I walk faster and faster until I'm just sliding down the shiny stones. I don't see her anymore, but her face appears in my head, telling me to let go. Her face is round and white, and her eyes are closed. It looks like she is saying in her sleep. Her lips are moving, and from time to time, they produce a smooching sound. In the street, I feel

DREAMS I HAVE SINCE I'VE DIED

lost, so I kneel and grab one of the stones from the street, and then I throw it toward the flock of white birds. I miss them, but the stone hits the sky, making a hole in it, a spot from which tones of cold rain come pouring on me, washing all the colors of the day off my face.

CHAPTER 13

“Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand on me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off – then, I account it high time to get to the sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for a pistol and ball.”

— Melville, *Moby Dick*

Assassins are after you, she said once, constructing a perpetuum mobile on me. It is a state when you are simultaneously running after and running away. Using your desire, you are running after the object of that desire. Using your fear, you are running away from the danger that threatens your existence. Only if the fear matches the greatness of my desire can I go on like this forever. They feed on each other, making me invent millions of ways to avoid assassination and stay on the path that leads to her. My pursuers are scary, although they don’t have eyes on their palms or mirrors on their chests. They are like an unknown feeling, a bug crawling up my neck, a drop of cold water sliding down my spine... But if she didn’t tell me, it would stay only feeling, annoying but

shapeless, unarticulated, one of many disturbances in my dreams. It was her words that gave them their shape, their purpose, their mean intentions. Among their many abilities, they can change the colors of things. Like the expression that says the grass is not THAT green anymore, everything around me succumbed to a change, sometimes getting darker, sometimes lighter, but always on a gloomy, unhappy side, like a dying day or a starless night, or like when an ordinary dream turns into a nightmare, full of rotten fruits, dead flowers, and unfinished words. And I always have shivers all over my skin, like entering a small dark room full of unfamiliar objects, cloth hangers, hats, despaired shoes. The feeling of falling, drowning, strangulation, anemia, and fever all come at once, like tentacles of a giant, although a bit stupid, octopus. From time to time (or so to speak, since those 'times' have no relation to each other and overlap all of the time,) I can 'see' some entities around me, lurking, sniffing, with eyes searching through their mist, their puzzling existence. They are not there, but they aren't see-through ghosts, and they are not just shadows, following scarce sources of light. They exist in a very peculiar way, somewhere in peripheral vision, the bottom of the end of the eye, so to speak. In their human shape, they look like lost hunters, unsure of what they are hunting and where to find it. They carry different things in their hands, sometimes weapons, sometimes just lamps or mirrors. I wasn't thinking much of them since they seemed to be around forever, but since she entered that sentence in my

mind, I started to feel a certain uneasiness, maybe even the beginning of fear, whenever they are around. If only she didn't say... Before they were just characters in my dreams, meaningless fillers in my subconscious creation, like, there were some people there. Still, they were looking lost, wandering around, barely noticing what is happening. They've never looked at me, never seemed to notice me, looking around like crazy people do, with no purpose, but with the strange passion that applies to everything that surrounds them. Oh, those windows, those clouds, how about these treetops? Wonderful, beautiful, unique, interesting... Like bad actors pretending not to notice the real object of their interest. But my newly acquired knowledge puts them all in a completely different perspective. Awareness of danger, even imaginary ones, adds a weird dimension to your existence, like when you put a heavy stone in the left pocket of your coat or when a nearby tree decides to stand on its head.

For a while, I was able to slide in between them, hoping they wouldn't notice me, but every half-second or so, they will get closer, with their attention more focused on me and with their faces more visible. Among them, I've noticed a guy with a familiar face. He was following me, although walking a few steps in front of me. Now and then, he turned his head toward me, making sure he didn't lose me. It looks like he is searching for something among the treetops and building roofs, something that he would like to connect with my presence. And then the moment comes. He looks at something up in

the sky, and then he looks at me. He is excited. He stops walking, letting me go to him. As I approach him, he pushes me down on the ground, and from somewhere, either in his pocket or the nearby treetop, he pulls a huge revolver with two barrels. He points it toward me, and all I can see are two black eyes, not blinking. I don't hear the shots, but the flash of yellow lights cut through my vision and my brain like a glowing two-blade sword. And then, I find myself at some beach. It is sunset, and even though it is raining, I can see two reddish-yellow suns slowly immersing in the glass ocean. I feel like I've reached the second level of relaxation, brought by a complete absence of fear.

The Beach

I am at the beach, where nothing can sleep. Not the nervous sea, with its constant finger-snapping, not half-drowned sand rocks, with their eternal acoustic shapes, not the wind that is just pretending to be surprised by all the lovemaking between those two. And not I, while changing positions to accommodate the lovers better. Nothing is real here, although it looks real enough to have a doubt. That constant question: am I dreaming, and its opposite, is this real? They are postponing the conclusion forever, making a half-second sequence more magical. I am stuck in it, but without ever feeling awkward. I am in a position to spy on the light from the cover of shadow. I can translate

the writing of the waves. I can talk any gibberish to the wind, and he will understand it and take it further in this unfinished construct.

And then, naked as the night sky, naked as the right word, naked as the sea liberated by wind, she walks into the picture, which might be confusing if her skin is less transparent if the oysters stopped singing if she can say the difference...

It lasted, oh, for half a second, but my existence is laid in it, in its model, which might as well be a tin tab for summer bathing. She is not looking at me. Maybe I don't even know that I'm there. Her hair is an extension of the sun rays, dancing on her shoulders and upper back, and I am thinking: if I look at it directly, I might forget where I am and let this fire burn through the celluloid of this dream, through my pupils, through the mash of my brain. Her figure looks like an extension of a sandstone, her curves, her deep ass, sculptured by her lovers, one invisible, the other ultimate anthropomorf, but both powerful enough to bring her to existence, if only for a precious half-second. It seems that she is floating, although her feet never leave the stony beach, so light is her step. For a moment, I am convinced that she is the handful of sand that I pour from one palm to the other, but I immediately dismiss any different role I might have in this, save the spectator one. She wouldn't want me to get involved. Not now and not here, at the edge of a dream I am not sure is mine.

Finally, she stops at the edge of a huge rock. A fraction of a fear brushes over when I think she

might disappear, but then, she freezes right there and stays forever, allowing me to take her to the other side, even only as a picture.

No, I don't want to go back to my room; however, I can feel safe over there! I am sick of the safety my six walls are giving me! Down with the walls! And the screens! They are such a painful reminder that there are worlds I can be part of, if only I am lucky enough, if only I care the least about being real, being alive. The humming of the air conditioner is making me sick! Who needs air? Especially cold air? Mixed with eternal rain, it freezes any useful thought I might have. And, even though someone is constantly changing the color of the walls, this room represents my tediousness, my melancholy, my boredom. This is the blind spot, this is the cul de sac, and this is the bottom of the bottomless pit. You can't, even with your poisonous poetry, even with your presumptuous algorithms, even with your laser suns, change the uselessness of this place. Prison is not hope. It is a punishment. And whoever thought that I would change my mind in any of the half-second time slots offered is mistaken. You can make it smell like life as much as you want; I still can't wait to get out of here. And it is not that I enjoy being dead. It's just that these dreams are making this state much more interesting than "life" had ever been.

If only I know how I got here, I would tell you, my friend. But knowledge consists only of memories, and you know that I have none. The only memory there is a half-second long, and it is just happen-

ing. Without it, everything would be in still images, photographs (or maybe even only one photograph) that I would not be able to understand or explain fully. But it is not just a movement that makes these sequences 'alive'. They do have a dimension besides obviously those three connected with space, a dimension that is made of time but is not the time itself, only a simple quality that twists the arm of reality while abandoning the reason and functionality of its existence. Imagine a machine that minces reality into tiny cubes that some smart hand can organize as it wishes, randomly, playfully, without concept or agenda, without wish or hope that the new form will last. Pixelated time. Those are my half-second movies! I can put them together in any direction I want, so they defy linear time. They can go back and forth, left and right, up and down. And those rows can consist of one half-second sequence to an infinite number (although I haven't experienced one of those yet.) Possibilities are endless, but that doesn't mean that I can do whatever I want. The main thing between me and those movies is that I don't have control over them. And I am not even sure if they have any connection with my subconscious self, presumably made of knowledge, experience, imagination, or whatever. My friend, you must know by now that I don't have any; I don't CARE for any of those sources. And even if there are some leftovers of those from the life that ended, I have no intention or need to explore them. There is, I am telling you, some unexplained, alien library that feeds these dreams with material far beyond ANYBODY's experiences. And, being in the form

of those half-second clips and pixilated time, they can connect in an endless number of combinations, making stories, pictures, melodies, and languages nobody ever heard before.

Hotel Room

How else I can explain this room I woke up in? It is some kind of hotel room, filled with a few pieces of very impersonal furniture. A small picture above a very plain desk depicts some sort of oral surgery on a subject that is not human. On that same wall, the shadows are dancing, shadows in shapes of some space being, floating in front of an artificial light source outside the window, which annuli conclusion that I am in a hotel room. The adjacent wall is in the dark, but I can tell it is red. There is a white door there, big enough to fit a large dog. I can't see it, but on the next adjacent wall, one that keeps that part of the room in the dark, there must be an entrance to the room. Someone is knocking, but I can't say anything or get up to open the door. Knocking is faint, and it comes in even intervals. Then, a hard banging started on the smaller door. Like someone or something is trying to break into the room. Despite that noise, I keep lying on the bed with a metal headboard touching another wall. There are six walls altogether, and the only one I didn't check is one with the window. Then, she started talking.

My friend, I would be lying if I told you that I ever heard a more beautiful voice. It sounded like I imagine forest sounds in the night when tenants are sure there are no intruders. It sounded like a floating glacier. Like shifting sand. Like a ship surrendering to the waves. The sound is between words and music, and the language is the one she is inventing on the spot, but I understand what she is saying. Or what she wants to say. Her voice is a lullaby, a prayer, providence, and a spell, all in one. It made me close my eyes for half-second, but then, as I was coming from a long, exhausting trip, I look at her...

She is standing by the window. Her shape, her face, her hair, everything is new to my eyes, but I am sure it is *her*. After all, who else could she be? Most of these dreams I have had since I died are about her. Yes, she is a shapeshifter, throwing different disguises to trick me and cover her traces, but now, when she is talking, I am sure it is her. She is naked because I want her to be naked, and she knows what I want, and now she is trying to fulfill my wishes. Over the dreams, we learned about each other's desires and how to respond to them.

"We can hide behind the fact that nothing makes sense, we can drink a double shot of denial, we can pretend to be sleeping when these fires come even closer, close our eyes in our escape, and get instant oblivion from some machine. We can change our clothes, change the season, break the thin glass between worlds, bathe in the emptiness, and swal-

low the galaxies. We can do anything unexpected, anything stupid, anything marvelous, but none of our actions, none of the words, revolutions, lives, or deaths can change what is coming. Those silly attempts to understand are futile and, worst, ignorant – facts before beliefs, understanding before judgment, life before arts. We are not believers in the impossible; we make the subject of our ideas impossible to fathom. We give our strongest hand to our faith while holding the pistol of free will with our weakest one, hidden in our fear pocket. But none of it works; there are no miracles, and our choices are illusions. On a universal scale, there might be some functional god, but we might be too small to get his attention. On a very small scale, in our artificial environment, there might be some choices for us, enough to have a sense of control. But what is there, between the universe and that small room we are all locked in? In that waste space where everything floats, walks, or sails in its way, at its own pace? And any encounter between entities is purely coincidental or even accidental? That way of communication and cooperation is what I consider *freedom*.”

“Excuse me; is this a bus to Free Will?”

“No, the one behind.”

“But, in the same direction?”

“Yes. Just a shorter ride.”

It is not like she is saying that, but my mind connected her with the voice, and that connection stayed. Like in some theatre, everything is behind the white curtain, and the audience can only see

the silhouettes of the actors and the props. It is impossible to see whose lips are moving. And everyone is left to his own devices to conclude who is saying what. You can say ‘she is the only one in the room, save you,’ but, I assure you, that is not correct. An octopus is coming out of the picture, there is a bull (or something) trying to get in the room through the small door, there are shadows on the wall, and, I am pretty sure, someone is hiding in the dark behind the big door that is not visible to me. To be honest, it is very strange that the situation does not petrify me. But fear is part of being alive, and it left me the moment I died. Sometimes, like now, I miss it, but that void cannot quickly be filled. The voice, her voice, my friend, then continue:

“I can see that you placed yourself in something similar to a hotel room. You have a romantic vision of yourself as a traveler, I see. We won’t wait long for it to change. But before that, I just want to tell you something: I never wanted to be this close to you, especially not here. But, we never had a choice, you and me. The big river caught us and did whatever it wanted to us – the big river of coincidences. One of the abilities you’ve gained since you died is your belief that you will find me. In my defense, I never wanted this to happen. You will understand soon. But now, we have to break your illusion and see what this place is, this ‘room’ you are hiding in, this pentagon you’ve built with your mind...”

She continued to talk, but the voice started to fade out until it stayed way behind, in the form of a buzz of a fly, or a wind couth in a forest, or tinnitus I carry since forever in my right ear. I feel a sort of emptiness around me, a lack of air on the open field, a dim light in the middle of the day. And then, the void was filled with a very bright ceiling. It is a vast lamp whose light faded in slowly enough so my eyes can adjust, at least enough, so I don't get blinded by it. The room is now sterile white, and I can smell disinfectants. I hear the beeping of various apparatus, which must mean that I am in a hospital. I feel paralyzed, and I can't move my eye anymore, forced, therefore, to look straight at the lamp. When I hear some movements around me, a weird sense of curiosity starts crawling all over my skin, like insane fire-ants running away from the flood. But that feeling lasted only for half a second. Somebody appears above me, wearing a mask and a cap; I see a person's hands holding some shiny instruments. One is a paper hole punch, and the other is a metal salad thong. A person, or a doctor of some kind, points those things toward where my chest is supposed to be. Some blood squirts on his apron, and then he throws away the hole puncher, and using the thongs, starts pulling stuff from, I assume, my chest.

The first thing he pulls out is a plastic coo-coo clock without a bird (the little door is open and sticking out is just a piece of wire), and with long windup chains, at which ends are hanging heavy weights shaped like pinecones. The doctor tosses

it on the floor and then goes back inside me with the thongs and pulls out the leather mask. Tosses that too. Then comes a pellet gun, a small book, a jazz record, a half-full bottle of whiskey, a few broken fountain pens, a bowie knife, a bunch of marbles, etc. As the doctor is working, I am feeling some sort of relief, some decompression. Like the sea that I am floating on suddenly calms down, and from the storm, we enter *bonaca*, a complete calmness in the sea and the sky. I see some birds flying above, but then I understand that those are words that the doctor is saying to me. "Closing," he says, and "Almost done." Then he and the ample light above both disappear, and I regain the ability to move my eyes.

I am back in the hotel room, where I am telling you this story, my friend. Since there are no slowing things down from now on, please, try to cope with me and this narrative. You know that I would never lie to you nor hide anything from you. I am telling you this as I experience it in real-time.

The banging on a small door continues. *She* is still standing by the window, but she is not naked anymore. She is wearing a white coat and has a stethoscope around her neck. The light coming through the window has changed, and it looks like a beautiful summer day outside. Sunshine, for the first time in thousands of years, the sunshine that I stopped dreaming about a long time ago, the sun, beautiful like a bottom lip, like a memory, like the beginning of an orgasm.

“It is sunny outside,” she says. “Rain has stopped; let it be so. Water that had conquered the fields, the streets, parks, and roads withdrew, leaving no trace of a flood. The grass is singing. Creaks are playing violins. Soon enough, there will be people down there. The last of the clouds are running east, afraid of some invisible hand with an eraser. I can see the roofs releasing the steam. It looks like the whole town, the entire world is burning, but those are just remains of some other world, your world. Your obsession with water is so endearing, that you wear it as a safety blanket, as a birthmark, as a meaningful tattoo. But this is where the construct of your death theory cracks and your disrespect and anger toward life get questionable: you chose the water as your backdrop, as your endless excuse, and your comfort zone. I don’t think that Ishmael would have any argument with you.

You are both running toward the water when death is near. And for both of you, water is a substitute for life. Forgetting that water is life. It is a source, a building material, and the spirit of life. So, how can you be what you are?

I didn’t lie to you when I said that assassins are after you. It was always the truth. They are watching you while you travel through your dreams, wandering through those short films of yours, without a purpose or a goal, like a dead leaf that is offering itself to any wind willing to play with it. It was difficult for them, the assassins. They had to find a way to kill something already dead. But they did KILL you millions of times, only the death of a

dead thing is just a new form of existing. So, you just continue, oblivious and careless, from dream to dream, reminded only by an occasional return to your pentagon apartment that there is something else there besides dreaming. The reality, as you call it, is calling for you. I have to thank you for dreaming about me so often. It is very romantic. Places you took me, things you made me do, or the things you let me do to you!! I am flattered. But, I can't follow you everywhere, or always."

Now, she starts to blow up, like a blowfish or a hot air balloon. The banging on a small door is getting more robust, until, to everybody's surprise, the door collapses, and through it comes the head of a small rhinoceros. Simultaneously, from the shadow beside the main door, a figure emerges, trying to approach my bed, but the shadow holds it, and the creature is stretching it, but it is unable to break free. I recognize the creature's shape. It is still very blurry. I see a floating woman who is touching the ceiling while singing. In my peripheral vision, I see the octopus from the picture coming down its wall. If there is any air in here, it must be very heavy. I am thinking: it would be better to go on a trip around the world, play with sperm whales, or draw houses, anything than lying here, waiting for the moment when I am sent to my corner, sad, wet, and ready for another adventure.

"You are not going anywhere," she says. Now, she is sitting on a chair next to my bed, back to normal shape – the shape of a woman. Sometimes I forget that you are not in my head, my friend,

and it is hard to be sure that you even understand what I am talking about. These are pictures from a dream, and I share them with you the best way I can. I don't know if I am using proper language even! The celebration continues inside the ink smear, where everybody sees what they want to see. A midget, a horde, a penis, a peninsula, a ball, a tractor, a sea urchin... I see her sitting there. Her white hospital coat is open, and I can see her pussy, shaved and ripe, like a magic mushroom, like a piled fruit, a flying snowball. She has a tattoo on her moon pubis. It looks like a moon, but there is some consolation of stars there as well. I know that if I continue looking at it, I might end up going there, but then she says:

“This will not make much sense to you, but you are very well accustomed to such things. This is where your perpetuum mobile comes into action. Remember? The things that you are chasing after and the things that are chasing after you? All those monsters, all the lunatics, assassins I've sent after you. Yes, it was me! I did it knowing that they will be unable to 'kill' you. Oh, an erection! Thank you very much, but we must go on with a dream. With killing, that is. I am here to do it. I am your executioner. Please don't paint the ceiling.”

I am looking into her eyes. They are changing colors, but that is just a diversion from what is happening. With those eyes, she is telling me my future, something I have entirely forgotten. But it is just a feeling: there is no place where I will be, or any physical shape I might end up in. Just a

feeling, like ice cream in a cold metal bowl that won't let it melt. Sure, it doesn't make any sense to me, so I turn my attention back to the room where these things are happening:

- The octopus is on my bed now, crying.
- From the now-empty frame of a picture, the black tick oil is licking.
- The rhinoceros is awake, and it is reciting modern poetry in gibberish.
- The creature from the shadow is eating ice cream.
- The window is singing.
- My bed is now just a narrow plank, and it hurts my spine.
- There is a rumor coming from outside, like many people talking at the same time.
- The ceiling is freshly painted.
- A woman's vagina is saying numbers; some of them are primary.

I see her right hand. It has long, blue nails that are somehow glowing. They look like some kinds of syringes, full of blue poison. Now, that hand is taking me by my lower arm. Those nails are looking for my veins. It is a matter of half a second for them to find it. But then, the octopus grabs the woman's arm, preventing her from continuing. The creature from the shadow is there, and it is pulling the woman by the hair. But the hair is alive and fights back, covering most of the creature's body, which is made of soapstone. Rhinoceros is singing.

Then, everything stops. She is looking at me in the eyes, telling me that this is not a coincidence.

Her eyes, oh, her eyes! I have never been in a forest that deep, in an ocean that big, volcano that hot. Thousands of nebulas merged in one look, millions of icicles pointed toward me, bushes of poisonous eves burning my skin. There is an army of green needles calling for my unconditional surrender, a lot of salty fingers touching my forehead, and an infinite number of ray guns piercing my skull. Those eyes are not hypnotizing, not commanding, just convincing, inviting, and telling me that it is ok, to stop resisting. Have I ever not believed them? Wasn't I always convinced that my death will have her eyes?

I can feel her nails on my arm now, like little snakes, crawling, biting, poisoning.

And there is it, *Nothing*, my dear friend. No, 'the whole death flashed in front of my eyes.' No memories. No tunnel. No light and no darkness. Just pure and simple *Nothing*.

(I've dreamed many times that I will die while making love to her. We are on some water surface, warm and calm. I am on top of her, but our bodies are only meeting on a few points: Our lips are looked at, our chests touching, I can feel her inner tights on my hips, and our genitals are... But I can feel her whole skin on me, every pore, every little hair, every nerve... I am swimming in her eyes, getting lost in her hair, melting into her spine. Her vagina is sucking on my penis with loud thunder-struck noises, in a rhythm never heard before. Her

lips are soft, juicy, and so alive and big; they cover all of me like a wet suit. And that scene lasts forever – thousands of years, millions of moments, an eternity in half-second flashes. We are adjusting to each other, moving closer, and faster. We can feel the tsunami that is coming and our skin hurting, our souls merging. We share the most intense look into each other's eyes, and then...

She is gone. I am on my elbows and my knees, but she is gone. I am looking down at that watery bed, and she is not there. Only my sad, still fully erected penis dangling in the air. Oh, my friend, did I die at that moment, on my own devices.)

Next thing I know...

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