Youth and Mobility
Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Citizenship
A Sea of Words
2021 edition – 14th year

Youth and Mobility:
Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Citizenship
Short stories by 10 young writers
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Foreword

The contest “A Sea of Words” was launched in 2008 by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation. This initiative brings together the voices of young people, who are essential agents of change, on topics of social, cultural, economic or political dialogue, which prompted the 1995 Barcelona Declaration.

This contest gives a voice to young people from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and the European Union, promoting debate around common problems and shared values.

“A Sea of Words” encourages the participation of youths from both shores of the Mediterranean and expresses different challenges and goals of each country in the region. In the 14 years that the contest has taken place, 3,004 stories written by youngsters between 18 and 30 years old have been presented. 1,373 stories came from the northern shore and 1,599 from the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. With the goal of encouraging the voices of youths, the project has the objective of creating new socio-political narratives that strengthen the culture of peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Each edition focuses on different current topics concerning young people from all over the Mediterranean, making their realities and conceptions known with a creative tool: writing. Through stories about real or fictitious experiences, young people provide a personal, historical or anthropological vision of issues and realities that, despite geographical or cultural distances, are common to the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Despite the restrictions derived from the COVID-19 pandemic, 139 young people from 23 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region participated in the fourteenth edition.

The authors of the 10 best texts – selected by an international jury – were invited to Barcelona on 30 November 2021, in the framework of the Mediterranean Day, to participate, for three days, in the awards ceremony, creative workshops and other cultural exchanges to develop common meeting spaces.

Historically, the Mediterranean region has been a place of movements and migrations (sometimes forced) of its populations, which have forged the societies we now share. Mobility enables us to get closer to and know the social and cultural diversity and richness of the two shores in such a way that we discover shared values and challenges. Thanks to the flows of people, differences can become authentic richness, which allows a future of peace and stability in the region to be created together.
Through this edition we wanted to reflect upon the importance of mutual knowledge and exchange to advance towards the creation of a citizenship that embraces the entire Euro-Mediterranean region.

*Mobility means exchanging, getting closer and knowing each other.*

In the 2021 edition “Youth and Mobility: Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Citizenship” the vast majority of the texts had a common base: learning through mobility. It is indeed a learning experience because of the new contexts mobility brings us, on a bus through a city, a motorboat on a sea strait, or in an airport. It takes us to new realities from which we can learn. It is through mobility that we discover new places, new people, and can usually leave difficult life experiences behind.

One clear example is the mobility between the two Mediterranean shores: the way different people contrast in terms of rights, economic stability and personal security shows us the diversity, differences and inequalities that still exist in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

It is through mobility and discovering new contexts that we find out that they are mostly not pleasant but harsh and challenging, as shown by the texts in this year’s contest. The maturity of the authors is reflected in their stories and the courage to move across the Mediterranean in search of new places that provide better opportunities. Mobility is the means to achieve emotional maturity by creating new social relations and overcoming adversity.
Out of Tune

Hala Kabalan. Syria

I

The persistent sunlight tickled her tired eyelids, initiating the undeniable realisation of a new morning. She hesitantly got up to check the world outside the window beside her bed. The Mediterranean was resting peacefully outside, stretching wide and uniting with the horizon in a natural harmony. She listened carefully as the distant music of Soli1 filled the atmosphere with random lyrics: “Il mondo dietro ai vetri sembra un film senza sonoro”.2

Passing by the dusty mandolin behind the door, she poured herself a cup of hot espresso. It used to make things better, she thought to herself, but not anymore. She checked her phone only to find the numbers of her digital clock staring back at her. No messages, emails or exciting missed calls. In that moment, there were only the smell of strong coffee and the salty breeze of August. She could feel herself slipping into the empty space between her own thoughts. The silence was intolerable. Soli came to an end and left her alone with her mind. She has been avoiding this silence for a while now. Her isolation was magnifying the heaviness in her heart. The monster of sadness was sitting there, waiting for any opportunity to take over. In her mind, she was looking for someone or something to blame, only to be faced with nothing but clear facts.

She recalled the memory of her mother occasionally coughing and telling her “It’s just a cold”. She witnessed her deteriorating every day until she was unable to take a single breath. After a short and exhausting fight, her mother finally surrendered. Leaving her behind, alone and terrified. A wave of unpleasant goose bumps ran over her body as the flashbacks disappeared. The scars of loss are yet to be healed, and no one truly understood how it felt. She was allowed to feel numb. These days, she was destined to exist on the margin of life, waiting for time to pass.

A reckless gust of wind blew a blue ticket off the coffee table. She grabbed it quietly, reading the words aloud in her head with a desperate attempt to overcome the deafening silence. There was an exhibition in town. She vaguely remembered buying the blue ticket solely for its colour. It was that specific shade of blue, the one in her mother’s eyes. The blue ticket served as the perfect bookmark for her version of The Prophet. She wasn’t planning to go anywhere, not anymore at least.

Checking the empty capsules of her antidepressants, she realised she had to leave the house today, a simple mission that became rather impossible. The world right outside her house seemed as far away as the sun. Everything required a massive amount of energy that she didn’t have. Getting out of bed, drinking water, sometimes even blinking was too much of an effort to handle. She was in a

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1. Alone; an Italian song by Toto Cutugno.
2. The world outside of the window seems like a silent film.
A continuous state of absolute exhaustion, forgotten and alone. Warmth and happiness turned into a distant memory that calmly, yet surely, dissolved in her heart.

An hour later, she put on her floral sundress, grabbed her book, and headed out to catch a bus.

II

She did not belong.

The streets were crowded with children and their parents since it was the summer break. Happy screams and loud laughs filled the air and distracted her from the music in her ears. The sun was rising majestically over this town near the sea as the breeze tickled her dress and demanded to be acknowledged. She paused the music and listened to random conversations between middle-aged women, who were picking their mandarin oranges with impressive delicacy. Everyone around her belonged to someone or something around, children to their parents, pets to their owners, the sun to the sky. Their loud laughs declared their joy. Still, the world in her eyes seemed like a silent film.

After getting her prescription, she headed back to the bus stop where she grabbed her book to read on.

“That’s one impressive bookmark you got there.” The voice of a stranger caught her off guard. “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.” He recited one of her favourite quotes of The Prophet. “An impressive book as well.”

Unable to process his words, she looked around to make sure he was talking to her. The guy with curly brown hair smiled generously, as if he was expecting her to start singing his favourite song.

The stranger looked like her somehow, she thought, they could braid their hair together and no one will know which is which. He was using his right hand to fix his glasses, while the slim fingers of his left hand rested on the brown mandolin case beside him. His yellow T-shirt and green shorts merged him with the trees and the sun surrounding the street. She glanced at her floral dress. It was black, and just like her, it did not fit the scene either.

For a brief second, she envied him. It must feel good to be the guy in the yellow T-shirt. He looked like he belonged to that specific moment, to that place, to that small town near the sea.

“I’m opening for the exhibition on your bookmark.” He smiled as he patted his mandolin tenderly. “My mother is one of the artists.”

Her envy grew stronger as she grasped all the privileges the guy in the yellow T-shirt was enjoying. How does it feel to easily belong to people and places? she wondered; how does it feel to be okay? Shyly smiling, she nodded in silence. She was not ready for random conversations with lucky strangers. She secretly sighed in relief as the bus showed up with its usual noise. Finally, she’s going back home.
The empty bus stopped with a much-anticipated heaviness. As they got on board, they sat opposite each other. Thankfully, he understood she did not want to be bothered. She opened her book again and stared at the blue ticket. What day was it anyway? She was about to start reading when the guy in the yellow T-shirt played a tune she knew. He was good, she thought, but he failed to notice his mandolin was out of tune.

“Your E string is out of tune.” She found herself pronouncing these words across the empty bus.

“No way, I used an app to tune it just now.”

“Half a note lower than it’s supposed to be,” ignoring his claim completely.

He took his phone out of his pocket to check the tuning. Strumming the double E string, he turned the screen to face her with his eyes in genuine shock. E was half a note lower than it’s supposed to be.

The conversation that followed felt like a dream of some kind. She found herself tuning the mandolin while advising him to check it again before his big performance. She only found herself answering his questions without having the time to ask him anything, not even his name or where he’s from. He kept smiling and greeting every new passenger with his confident Buongiorno! There was something about this stranger who got life figured out. Such a lucky stranger, she thought to herself.

Reaching the 3rd station, he packed his instrument and declared: “Give me a thumbs-up in case tuning is on point. I’m counting on you.” She was puzzled as she looked down to find the blue ticket still in her hand. It’s today, she realised, the exhibition in the national park on 3rd station was about to start.

III

There was a laidback charm to the park that slept in the middle of her town. The great oak tree stretched skywards as the roots were unapologetically making their way between scattered groups of people. She looked around to find sunshine turning into chattering and greetings while everyone spoke a different language. Still, they looked like her somehow. If one braided everyone’s hair together, no one would know which is which.

A number of artists from different ages stood beside their paintings with a sense of pride that was almost materialised into a painting on its own. Walking beside her, the guy in the yellow T-shirt made his way to the humble stage in the middle of the park. People gathered around cheering for the band and went silent after a while. The lucky stranger, who looked like he belonged to every oak tree in her town by the sea, plucked each of the strings of his mandolin. Instantly looking at her, he gently raised his eyebrows and tilted his head to the side asking for her confirmation.
Life stood still for a second. She asked herself what she was doing here, a rush of guilt and uneasiness taking over her veins. She felt the weight of the medications in her bag as she remembered her mother walking underneath the great oak tree. Soli started playing again in her mind, but this time it was out of tune. She was alone, descending into a deep ocean of sorrow and grief. She closed her eyes and wished she did not exist anymore, nothing meant anything anymore. There was nothing but silence.

Plucking his strings with renewed determination, the familiar progression of notes forced her to open her eyes again. He snatched her out of her despair, his strum felt like a life jacket of some kind. He was still there, smiling with raised eyebrows and a tilted head. She raised her right hand in front of her nose in secret, and gave him a thumbs-up. The band started playing a cheerful collection of songs and the crowds were happily applauding whenever they got the chance. Ending the show with a song in a strange language, the band greeted the audience and quickly found their way off stage.

The guy in the yellow T-shirt was heading towards her mouthing the words “thank you”, when a distant voice seemed to call his name. “That’s my mother!” he said as he reached her side. “You have to check her painting. It’s our story.” Unable to shake off her persistent envy, she followed his footsteps in silence. They passed by the big sign at the entrance that said, Crossing the Mediterranean: An Exhibition, and reached the woman with brown hair by the tree. Behind her, a large oil painting was on display.

The painting was horizontally divided into two parts. The lower section portrayed a mess of confusing shades of grey. As she looked closer, she understood it was a scene of ultimate destruction. Bombed buildings, gigantic tanks, scattered tombstones, deadly rockets, and monstrous clouds. This was war. This was death. The terrifying prospect of this scene being real sent a shiver down her spine. Her eyes looked for the upper section in a desperate attempt to find consolation, and they finally did. It was that shade of blue, the one on her ticket, and the one in her mother’s eyes.

It was the sea. It was the Mediterranean that lay by the horizon outside her room. A small orange boat was painted on the blue background of the upper half. A woman and her child stood on board, turning their backs to the destruction behind and looking straight ahead.

“We were the only ones left. My father and sister were killed in an airstrike.”

He said as he wrapped his arm around his mother. “Everyone here has lost someone, but they’re all survivors.” When she looked around at the paintings hanging on old oak trees, the artists from across the sea looked more like her than ever before. She was not alone, she realised, and their pain was the same as hers. The woman interrupted her track of thoughts, murmuring a sentence in that strange language. The guy in the yellow T-shirt smiled and said “She said you look like a survivor too.”

In that specific moment, she almost felt like she belonged somewhere.

The End
بدوي في أرض أوروبا

محمد بنمبارك، المغرب

الساعة تشير إلى السابعة بتوقفية وارسو، كنت أول النازلين من الطائرة، إذ مقعدي بالصف الأخير، نسيم الريح كان غير الذي اعتقدت عليه في صحراناتي، وسأري الصور بصفاتها كأنى آرائها لأول مرة، ابتنعت خطواتي حتى يتقدنى بقية المسافرين إذ لا علم لي بما يجب فعله بعد النزول من الطائرة، اصطففت في طابور طويل مخصص لحاملي الجوازات الغير أوروبية، حتى إذا وصل دوري استقبلني شرطي الحدود باستماعي سريعة سرعان ما ازدادت انشراها لما تقلت نص الدعوة التي وجهتها لي

وتركنا القمة الجامعية حيث وجدنا موظفتين اثنتين في انتظارنا راح بعدها الثالثي النسائي يتحدثن وستينا قبلة على وجنتي

مرحبا بك في وطننا” قالها والفخر يكاد ينطق من

نحوه نتمز دراستي في بولندا منوهة بتميزي الدراسي وموصية بتيسير

في بولندا منوهة بتميزي الدراسي وموصية بتيسير

لأول

حتى وصولنا إلى المالم الشامز، كنت أمشى لرائحة، عطرها، شحيرة، حفيظة، غرامة، مبتسم

المسافرين

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لاعريضة "أجبتها بابتسامة

لاعريضة "أجبتها بابتسامة

لاأذ ابطئت

تركت اليسرى بعدها محرومة.

جواز سفري مع كلمة

جواز سفري مع كلمة

بصفتها

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لا أؤمن اقتفاء خطى من تنتمي من الناس نحو صالنة المعلمة، سحبت حققي لأجد نفسي أمام قاعة أشد

رباهة، مكانة بالناس، صبيحة صغار يركضون من جبالهم تحبصهم ملائكة أطهر، وكبار سن تنکاد تستشف من تقاسمت ووجههم ضراوة الحرب التي عاشتها بولندا بعد الاحتلال النازي غير إنه سرعان ما ينطلق الألف مع مشهد شباب متأقنين منهم من يحمل وردا أ
صدعت النور نحو الطابق الثاني وانقلت بعثة عن غرفتي رقم 206 لأجد في منتصف الممر، فتحت الباب وكأنني أذكر عن آخر باب أغلقت قبل رحلتي السفارة. كان غرفتي بإقامتي الجامعية بعاصمة المغرب الرباط، كان الفرق شاسعا بين الغرفتين وفعلاً المقارنة غير صائبة من أصله، غرفتي الجديدة متسعة في ركنها الأيمن سرير كامل مثابة، وفي الركن الآخر كرسي ومكتب وللغرفة شرفة تطلّ على حديقة خضراء سرعان ما ذكرتني، إذا ما أنت يوما فكرت في أن تظل من إحدى نوافذ غرف إقامتنا الجامعية بالرباط، ساءلت نفسى بعدها من المسؤول؟ وهل يمكن الحلم بعد أفضل؟

لم أدر كيف كيف 나는 بسرعان ما تجلت لي شاشة كلمات موجعة وشرلي الحدود "مرحبا بك في وطننا" وشعرنا المغربي حين يقولونها، أحسنت أن الحكايه إما أنها قائمة على صميم "نا" ولفظ "وطن" إن المرء حين يستشعر انتقاء الوطن باعتباره بيته الأكبر يبدّل لنكل كل جده حتى يكون حال البيت الأكبر كحال بيته الأصغر مؤمناً بأن استقرار الشخصي مرتبط بالاستقرار الوطني وأن رغبة من رغد الوطن ورفاهيته.

لكن يا نفسى، كيف ننفسي ان نقطع جميع الشروبات ومرافق الشعر في بلدنا بذلك؟ كيف لنا أن نتقعهم بأنه يمكن التغيير؟ وأن الأرض إما هو مرتبط بصدهم الردة وقدرته العزيمة. هناك فقط توقف عقلني عن إيجاد جواب في الغليل وأحسست بأن البقاء قد بدأ يذهب في حفظي النحيف، فيناثى الأخطى لأستحم في حمام تقليديه مع غرفتي مجاورة وإذا بي في طرفية بفأة فتاة صغيرة، سوداء الشعر، بдушة الفن، بحفلة خفيفة بكل فرح وسانتي "هل الذي سيستعيد هذه المرة" مشابهة إلى غرفتي رددت "نعم" قالت "مرحبا بك، أنا اسمي بيرغيت، أنا يهودية أمريكية الجنسية وأصلي من هنا بولندا، وأنت؟" قلت اسمي محمد، أنا من صحراء المغرب. فكانت تستطيعها لما سمعت كلمة المغرب قائلة "ذاك موطن جدتي لأمي، دائما ما كنت أتذكر عبطة عن احتضان المغرب الرباط والاحتضار الكبير الذي يحظون به عند عموم الشعب والإسراء الملكية" ردت مشرقة رأسي نعم بإفساحها وظهورها التعب من عبئها، واعتناقت شعور رهيب بأنني جربت هذا كولود جديد يذف لعالم جديد. ودعتي قائلة "دعنا نلتقي مرة أخرى" ردت "نعم، بالتأكيد".

دخلت بعدما جربت غرفتي متجدّداً من ثيابي وفوق عقلي عشرات الأسئلة تكتافر. أين هي أوروبا التي حجزت منها الكثيرون من شبابنا؟ لماذا لم تعاملوا اليهودية تجاهنا وانسلل السلوك وبيننا اختلاف عديم شاسع؟ كيف تسافر بيرغيت وحدها؟ كيف تعلمها بوعيها تلك الشهامة والقدرة على التصرف بشكل يوفق الرجال؟ وأنا في الصحراء يعلق أن النساء خلفن للشراب وإن آثاره المروج بُلّغت توهجها. كيف تمكنها ذلك. ماذا لو رأى أهلي جمال كل من بيرغيت الرفيعة وبيستينا النحيفة، هل ستتفوق عن تفاصيل الزي؟ كان يخاف عجل الأشراف؟

ليست بعدها لياسا وغادرت الحمام وانه أتناول كيف إنه لم يكن مجرد حمام للبنين فقط، وإنما دعوة مستعجلة لحماية للمريض. أيضاً، رميت بجسمي النهلك على سريري وانه أرد دعاء السفر الذي أستمر.

سرعة الإحداث ذكراً.

رن بعدها من القطار، إنها السادسة صباحا من أول صباح لي في بولندا، ليست لياسا وانه تجاهت نحو قاعة المطار حيث صادفت جارية بيرغيت بعيده مريض ونهام أنيق، اقترحت علي أن أطلب الخروج.  

A Sea of Words 14th year

Mohamed Ben Mbarek
فضل صحيًا، تبادلنا الحديث حول التخصص الذي سيدرس كل واحد منا لأنه الآل الثالث في قائمة الفطور. نحن في مدرسة العلوم والتقنية مع اختلاف طفيف في مواعيد بعض الحصص، قررنا لافinden ان كنا نذهب بعد ذلك لتفهم قاعات الدروس التي ستبدأ بعد يومين، كان المسير معها ممتعًا، كان قناة ناضجة على رغم صغر سنها، شديدة الا انفعال والتاريخ، بارع في إعلام فكرتها، دقيقة في اختيار أفكارها، تخطّينا الكثير من الدروب واتصلنا، أحست لحظتها اننا لنتو في أمارس فعل الحياة بصدق، جمال العمارة البولونية أضيف لمسة خاصة على المشهد. وانا المتيم بفن العمارة.

وإذا فجأة بطلت عربية نابية تقع على مسامعي، التفت نحو اتجاه الكلمات، فإذا بشابين يتوسّدان رصيف إحدى الساحات، بجانبة قنينة خمر. فعمرني هذا المشهد بذهول وخيبة أمل حيث سيكون طعمني بيرغيت قائلة "ها قد وصلنا لمبنى الجامعة، انظر هناك يوجد المبنى سرعان ما قا..." ثم قالت "لاهيا بنا إلى مقهى الجامعة لنستريح قلي...". فإذا به ساحة واسعة الفناء، تحيط بها أعمدة حقا من لامطرزة على نمط العمارة الرومية وفي أعلى كل عمود وجه إنسان منحوت فيهمت لافة من الخبرة بيرغيت انهم لمفكرين وعلماء بولونيين، شعور الفخر بالماضي ون Hồ này من هذا المكان.

سأستنعت بعدما بيرغيت "لماذا تجعلني اتحدث أكثر منك؟ وتختار الصمت وايضاً أنا..."، أجابت بكل عفوية وبريق عينيها لآاحب ذلك، لكن نحن هنا لنتبادل الحديث ويشير بعضنا إلى الأخرو. أجبته بكل تفوق عائشة قد زادني تحفزا لذلك "التي في من قتال الصحراء، نشأنا في طبيعة قاسية، أغلب وقتنا في رعي البل واقتفاء أثر الماء، لا نأتي خياما إلا ليالي، وهذا أول يوم لي بأوروبا - أرض غير المسلمين - كما "عرفت دانام". فالتعبت، وهي مبتسمة "لا يهم من أين تأتي وما طبيعة أصلك أو معتقدك، ما هو أن يكون لتي لمي باحث ونتظير الناس جميعا مع الخريجين في الأكاديميات، العالم اليوم يراهن علينا نحن الشباب لقيادة البشرية نحو مستقبل ملهى السلم والرجاء لنا والأجلي القادمة دون إضرار بالموارد الطبيعية للعالم".

ثم توقفت برهة لتبتسم ابتسامة الفتاة العاشقة قائلة "أنت مدين لبولندا..."، أجبت بدون تردد "نعم، وبشكل ليلة التي قضيتها هنا كفيلة بتغيير الكثير من لفظيات والكلمات، لقد كانت هذه الساعات القليلة التي قضيتها هنا كفيلة بتغيير الكثير من المفاهيم وتصحيح الكثير من الأفكار الخاطئة التي كانت تروج بليالي، مشهد الشابين قلب قلبي كان كفيلة لفهم تفوق الحكومات الأوروبية ودعوتها المتكررة لضرورة الاندماج، أدب شرطي المطار كان كفيلة بفهم أن هذه الفترة تحتفل القانون وتحترم كل ما هو قانوني وتعج عليه، الثقة التي منحتي إياها دولة بولندا بتحديد مهارات وخدمة بلداننا، فثقافة حول رغبة الحكومة الأوروبية في إبعاد الهجرة وطرق ترجمة الأفكار، تحتفل بيpaths التي أتى بها في الحالة التي اتى إليها، قبلة يعنى معنى "أنت لست بالهولندي، أو قد ستكون به ثواب مثالي، وأن الأنيث لم تخلى للجزء فقط وإنما هي كان رنان شرطي تطبيق القانون، للنساء وتخطيط بناء الأثري، ويرجى عيني نحو الأعلى، ولاحظا، تحدثت أكثر مني... لندنو بعدا أشهر لبيدي منحة بولندي"، قالت "فريد سخرا، قالت هذه أحب عني من منحة الحكومة"، لنغادر بعدها المفهوم على غير الحال الذي أتى إليه به.

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It was seven o’clock Warsaw time. I was the first to step down from the plane, for my seat was the last row. The breeze was different from what I was used to in our desert. The sky was clear and it seemed like I was seeing it for the first time. I slowed down so the other passengers would step ahead, for I had no idea what I was to do after disembarking. I took my place in a long queue of non-European passports. When it was my turn, the customs officer welcomed me with a quick smile, which soon became more cheerful when he read the invitation extended to me by the Polish Agency for Culture and Education to pursue my studies in Poland. It stated that I was an outstanding student and recommended that all administrative procedures be facilitated for me. He stamped my passport with a warm and proud “Welcome to our country.” I received it with all due love and appreciation. I continued to follow the people in front of me towards the luggage belts, where I soon found my suitcase. I then found myself in an even more spacious hall with a crowd of people. Youngsters, as pretty as angels, were running about; the features of the elderly seemed to reflect the burden of the wars witnessed by Poland under the Nazi occupation. Then you were soon distracted by a group of well-dressed young people who carried flowers, and others who seemed to be dressed in a uniform, carried papers with names printed on them. I soon understood that these were cab drivers. I scanned the papers, wondering if I would find my name, only to find my family name carried by a blond smiling girl. Her sheer look was enough to make one forget the tiredness of the trip. I approached her, waving my right hand, and she met me with a smile. I swear I never saw the likes of. We greeted each other, while my Bedouin heart seemed to explode at her delicacy. My mind was distracted, wondering who the genius was who had engrained in us, the people of the desert, that a woman had to be fat, and that the slim ones did not count as women. Slim women were outcast, and their families driven hard to clear them of such deficiency. At times they would make natural bitter extracts, too hard for camels to digest, not to mention a girl’s liver who was not even ten yet. And at other times, they would force the slim girl to undertake tough exercises. Youstina soon recalled me from my reveries, as she pulled at my suitcase and said “You seem exhausted. Please let me help you with the suitcase.” She then gave me a piece of a sweet, which seemed to be made in their famous cuisine. I swallowed it reluctantly, my mind haunted by the images of the girls in my family who were doomed to slimness. We got onto a public bus, where Youstina informed me that we would reach the university dorms in ten minutes. I smiled back, “Don’t worry. I spent over fourteen hours on the go since I left my house to arrive here.” I told myself that spending one moment in the halls of knowledge was better than centuries in the arms of ignorance and backwardness. We arrived at the university, where we found two lady employees awaiting us. The three ladies then spoke in Polish, firing away, with “tak tak tak” recurring amongst them. They received a copy of my passport, and then one of them
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I climbed the stairs to the second floor, looking left and right in search of my room, number 206. I found it in the middle of the corridor. I opened the door as I remembered the last door I closed before my trip. It was the door to my room in the dorms in Rabat. There was a huge difference between the two rooms. The comparison was not right in the first place. My new room was spacious. In the right corner was the bed, in the other corner a desk and chair. The room had a balcony that overlooked a green garden, which soon reminded me, with grief burning my heart, of the garbage and waste you would see, were you ever to look out one of the windows in the dorm in Rabat. I asked myself who was to blame? Was it possible to dream of a better tomorrow?

I didn’t know how, but soon the words of the dorm employee and of the customs officer materialised in front of me, “Welcome to our country.” The sense of pride as they spoke the words. I felt like the whole issue lay in the pronoun “our” and the word “country”. When one has a sense of belonging, one considers the country like a big home, and all efforts are exerted to make it as wonderful as the small personal home. It was the belief that personal stability was related to the stability of the country. The prosperity of the country was related to their personal prosperity. But my dear self, how are we to convince the young and old in our countries of this? How are we to convince them that change was possible? That it was an issue of honest will and intention? There my mind failed to find a satisfying answer. I felt that the exhaustion was taking over my slim body. I dragged myself into the shower, which was located in a bathroom I shared with the neighbouring room. Suddenly I ran into a short girl, with dark hair, and a light skirt. She welcomed me merrily and asked, “Did you move in here?” She pointed at my room. “Yes,” I replied. “Well, hello. My name is Birgitt. I am an American Jew, from Poland. You?”

“My name is Mohamed,” I said. “I’m from the Moroccan desert.” She seemed to be ecstatic at the mention of Morocco, and said, “That’s my maternal grandmother’s homeland. My mother always told me how Morocco hosted the Jews, and the great respect they enjoy with the people and the royal family.” I nodded and said, “Yes.” My smile seemed tired, but contained an overwhelming feeling that with this experience I was a new-born thrown into a new world. She excused herself saying, “Let’s meet again.”

“Yes, sure,” I said.

I went into the bathroom and took off my clothes, while my mind tossed about hundreds of questions. Where is the Europe everyone was warning me of? Why did the Jewish girl not treat me warily, me the Muslim? There was such a difference between our religions. How could Birgitt travel alone? Where did Youstina learn all this gallantry and the ability to handle any situation better than men did? My people in the desert insisted that women were created for pleasure in the bed. If a woman wanted to go out, the kitchen was good enough for her. What if my folk were to see the beauty of Birgitt the short, or Youstina the slim? Would they cease fattening our girls as if they were cattle, not humans?
I then got dressed and left the bathroom, wondering how it was not only a bath for the body, but a pressing invitation for an intellectual bath, too. I threw my tired body on my bed, reciting the prayer for travelling which the speedy events had made me forget about.

The alarm clock on my phone rang. It was 6 am; my first morning in Poland. I got dressed and went to the breakfast hall. I met my neighbour Brigitt, neatly dressed and a distinctive scent emanating from her. She suggested I order the third option on the menu, saying it was the healthiest. We chatted about the discipline each one of us was specialising in. We discovered that we were both at the faculty of sciences and technology, with a slight difference in the times of our classes. We decided to go together to find out about our lectures, which were due to start after two days. It was fun to walk with her. She was a mature girl, despite her young years. She was well-read about other cultures and history, clever in communicating her thoughts, very accurate in her choice of words. We went through many paths and alleys, not even noticing. I felt like I was only then performing the act of living. The beauty of Polish architecture added a special touch to the scenery, for I was a lover of architectural arts. And then suddenly I heard foul words in Arabic. I turned towards the source where the words came from, to find two young men sitting on the pavement of a square. Next to them was a bottle of wine they were fighting over. I was stunned by the scene and disappointed. Brigitt interrupted me, “Here we are at the university. Look, there’s Building A, where Monday’s class will be.” She then added, “Let’s go to the cafeteria and get some rest.” It was a huge yard surrounded by columns in Roman style. At the top of each column was the engraved face of a human. I later understood from the expert Brigitt that they were Polish thinkers and scientists. It was a sense of pride in the past and the forefathers engrained in every inch of the place. Brigitt later asked me, “Why do you let me speak more than you? Why do you prefer to remain silent and just listen? I, too, love that, but we’re chatting and getting to know each other.” Her shining eyes stimulated me and I said spontaneously, “I’m a man of the desert. We grow up in a tough environment. Most of our time we tend the cattle and search for water. We don’t return to our tents until night. This is my first day in Europe – the land of non-Muslims – as I always knew it.” She interrupted me smilingly. “It doesn’t matter where you are from, or the nature of your origins, or your faith. What counts is that your heart holds love, that you look at all people through humane and friendly eyes. The world today counts on us, the youth, to lead humanity towards a future of peace and prosperity for us and the coming generations, without any harm to the natural resources of the world.”

She paused for a moment, to smile that smile of a loving girl as she said, “You owe it to Poland.” I replied without thinking, “Yes. Beyond the ability of words. The few hours I had spent here were enough to change many concepts, and correct many wrong ideas that occupied my mind. The scene of the two young men a while ago was enough to understand the fear of European governments, and their repetitive call for essential integration. The decency of the customs officer was enough to understand that this continent respected the law and welcomed, and encouraged, anything that was legal. The trust that the Polish state granted me when it offered
a monthly stipend, housing and food was evidence that the European governments wished to extend their hand to the youth of the south to develop their skill and serve their countries. Your culture is far-reaching, your style of conversing, the way you present your ideas, all these showed me that what a woman can reach by far exceeds what the mind of a Bedouin like me could grasp. Females were not created for sex alone. Females are sophisticated humans who can offer a lot.”

Her smile seemed to express victory, her brows moved up, as she said, “At last you spoke more than me.” She then lent closer, taking my hand, and pecking a kiss on my left cheek, which I had been deprived of that night.

I replied, sarcastically, “Your kiss is more precious to me than the scholarship.” We then left the cafeteria, totally different from how we had come.
رسائل لَمْ تُكتب
محمود جمال أحمد مقدادي. الأردن

أمي الحبيبة...

أمل أن تكوني بخير، وأنك ما زلت تراقبين مركبات البحر، متسائلة أبيها ستحملي لوجهتي... لقد خطوت خطوتي الأولى. تبدو قسمًا من النقود، من عملي في محرج قريب من الميناء. والقسم الآخر، أعطاني إياه صاحب بقالة، اعتدت الشراء منها وقت استراحة عملي. بطريقة ما، أدرك حقيقة ما أخطط له. قام بإعطائي النقود قائلًا أنه سيسامحني، إن لم أوفق بمغامري. لكن إن وقفت، وصرت من أصحب الأموال، فلن يقبل فقط بنفس قيمة المبلغ، بل يريد أن أحوِّل قبالتها الصغيرة، لمركز تجاري كبير. قال ذلك وهو يضحكي، لكنى رأيت دموعاً مارياً في أعمق عينيه، فتذكرت.

انتفتت مع صاحب قارب. أشرفت الحصول على النقود مُقدَّماً، بحجة الاتفاق مع جماعة الضفة المقابلة. لم أرتج له. لكنى إن تراجعت الآن، فلن أتقدم ثانية أبداً. مع فجر الغد، يجب أن أكون في القارب، فادع لى.

أمي الحبيبة...

ذُهبتْ لما رأيته فجأة. ربما كنتَ أنا الأوفر حظًا، لأنى وحدي وليست مسؤولاً عن أحد. ظنت أنى سنكون بضعة أشخاص، وبالساحة ما ظننت!

كم شعرت بالأسى يا أمي... رأيت كهلا رفقة امرأة تحمل رضيعًا. لم أدر إن كانت زوجته أمي. كما لم أعرف جنس الرضيع. ما الذي دفعهم للمغامرة برضيع كهذا؟ إن مات، فلن يدر بشيء. وإن عاش، فسيكبر ليعبرنا همها.

هناك شابًا رفقة أخيه الباقع. كُلفني الشاب. أخبرني أن أخاه عبقر، وقد أنهى سنه الدراسية السادسة بتفوق. وسماها قصصًا جديدة، ليجعل أخاه الصغير، يكلل سنته الدراسية السابعة في ألمانيا. قال بثقة مطلقة أن الألمان سيذهلون من نبوع أخيه، وسيصبح مستقبلاً من أبرز علمائنا.

غريبًا يا أمي تتعلق هذا الشاب، لجميع أماله على أخيه الأصغر. أما هو، فلا مشكلة لديه في عيش حياة التسكع، وتهيئة الفرص لأخيه، إلى أن يكبر، ويصبح من أبرز علماء ألمانيا.

هناك طفولة صغيرة تضيق بقوة على دميتها. وعجوز ينقر ببعضه على الأرض نقرات سريعة كما لو يستعين البدء... لماذا يهجي الوطن؟

هناك رجلًا سيئًا، مازحاً آخر قالًا "ستحظى الأشخاص بوليمة دمها". ومخمورًا ألم طويلاً هدوء البحر، ليقول في النهاية "بالسيناء هذا القبرا".
تكمنا في القارب. جلست بين المخمور، والأخ الأصغر. شعر منكوش، وشعر مُسرح. رائحة خمر، ورائحة عطر. أحلام مُغيثة، وأحلام مُحفرة.

انطلقتنا مع إقامة صلاة الفجر، كما لو كنا نؤدي طقسًا دينيًا. كان البحر هادئًا ودائعًا، يحملنا على صفحه ماء رائق. حين الموج كرامة لنا، وافق بالرُّياح آلا تضُنُّه مضعية. لكن بعدما غابت البابسة خلف ظهري، أحسنت بؤخزة في قلبي. كما لو أنني تركت بملء إرادتي ثروة نفيسة، لن أتمكن من استردادها أبدًا.

شعرَ موحش حين يكون الماء فقط في الجهات الأربع. مساحة حرية حركتي بضعة أمطار فقط. سجن جدرانه بشر يسأمون الموت على حياة أفضل. يكي الرضيع، وألمته المرأة ذهبها. مُستثرة بسروة لم تتوقف شفاها من الثمامة بداعة خافتة. ودفقة ريح قوية أاطرت الدمية من يدي الطفلا. حاولت اللحاق بها، فأفهموها أنها ستغرق، وتموت إن فعلت. أكانت تعي عنى الغرق؟ أي فكرة تحملها طفولة صغيرة من الموت؟ نظرت لأصابعي الغضة الطَّريقة، وقد شاختت دفعة واحدة بعدما فارقتها الدمية. ثم نظرت للدمية تنتهك فوق الماء، قبل أن تدفعها موجة للأعاصم!..أولى الصحايا.

فجأة دون سابق إعداد، اختفى الوضع كلّيًا، اضطرَب البحر. وبدأت موجات غاضبة تُطَّرخ القارب بمنه وسربته. بكاء، صراخ، عويل، تعالي دفعة واحدة. الشاب احتضن أخاه الأصغر. المخمور انكش عند قدمي، وراح يَّقُمُّين من الله سيترك الشرب. والشعور رفع غُمَازه عاليًا، صارخًا "هو الذي أنجاك من البحر... وخذوا الله... أدعو الله! وحين نظرت في حيّة، رأيتُ طيف بابسة. ها هي جنتنا تلوّح أمامنا، لكنّنا لا نضمن عبر الصراط المؤدي إليها.

أمي الحبيبة...  

نصف بحرنا، كان رؤوفًا بنا. حتى ونحُن نهاجره ونرفضه، لم تطعُوه نفسه بإيذاننا. وعلى العكس منه، النصف الآخر. لم ينسغنا. لم تعجبنا. ولا ملامحنا المصبوبة بالبقاء والفائي المستحيلة. أي قلب لهذا البحر! لا يلين لبئس النساء، ولا صرخات الأطفال. أرسل أفراد تُقَرَّبًا من البابسة أكثر، وفي الآن ذاته، تُهَبُّ رُسُل الموت لحصد الأرواح. البابسة تكبر أكثر وأكثر، وسعى البحر لقبول القارب براحة ضرامة! أشرّت للجَّمع بالثبات، قلناً أنا قاربنا على النجاة. رحبت أبحث عن جماعة الضفة الأخرى الذين تكلّم عن النجاة، فلم أرى أحدًا. توجهت للتاجر ليستفسر من، وكم كنت صدمتُ موجة حين تبتزتُ للمرة الأولى أنه ليس بيننا. أدركت عندما كم كنت ساذجاً. أدرتُ طدر الظهر من داخلي بصرخة، لكنّ موجة كبرى كانت أقرب. قلبُ القارب رأسًا على عقب. صار الماء فقط ما يطرقني، وأبصري عبره كيّانات سوداء، هم رفاق قاريبي. الماء يجريهم، والموم يحترقهم. أمامي، وأنا عاجز عن إنقاذي. كانت هناك أيّة تمتد من هنا وهناك، تبحث عن شفاحة. أنذرّين حين أخبرت أن أديراً روسيًا قال أن الإنسان عند لحظات الموت، قد يجيل بخاطره شيئًا. أبعد ما تكون من رهبة اللحظة؟ هذا بالضبط ما حصل معي. فحين شعرت بالأيدي الكبيرة، جال بخاطري حول محمود درويش "قد يخيل الغرقي بِدَا تمثِّلُ كي تحمي من الغرقي". انتشرتُ يداً، وسبحت بها للسطح. كان...
الأخ الأصغر. بعدما أفاق من صدمته، راح يسألني عن أخيه، ويبكي صائحاً باسمه. الوقت لم يكن مسالمًا لمواساته. رحّط أبحث عن البقية. في البداية، رأيت الرجل السمين، يُعرفه الماء التدريجياً. كانت الطفولة بين يديه، كما الدمية التي كانت بين يدي الطفلة. رفعها عاليًا فوق رأسه، على أمل اكتفاء البحر بابتلاعه، لكن عيبي، غرقته في الأخرى. حاولت الإدراك، لولا الموج المعاكس لرغبتي، والأخ الأصغر المتشبث برفقتي. الرضيع رفع ماء البحر. والسمين سيسحن فعلاً وليمة الأسدماك.

لقد وصلنا. إنها الجنة التي طالما طمنحت إليها. إلا أن هناك مشكلة، فهي محاطة بحاجز كهروائي، ومن وراء الحاجز رجال مجهزون بأحدث الأسلحة النارية... أيقظني الأخ الأصغر، قالتاً كن لا

يضيق نفسه "الشط.. الشط...". جربوا ونحن نصرخ فرحاً وطلبوا المساعدة. ثم توقفنا لرؤيتها

الرجال، والحاجز الذي يقدهم، أشبه ما يكون باسلك شائكة. قاموا بالبقاء شبيهًا عليه، فاحتقر

بحركون أن الكهرباء ستمفرقهكم، إن تقدمتم. فألن نذهب إذاً؟ حتى القمة، ضروبوه بحرية، رمادًا. أخافوا عودتي والأخ الأصغر إليه؟ أم خافوا جليبه لمزيد من أمثالنا؟ وربما كان يرأيه غيري.

ويجب إداعيه؟ لا أديه. ما أديه هو أننا ظلنا أينما على هذه البقعة الصغيرة من الرمال الصفراء.

كحربة من أمامنا، وبحر

من خلفنا. تدحرت صحة الأخ الأصغر. صار بكلمتي عن الموت والجنة والحياة ذلك. يسألني هل أهان

في الجنة. ثم يبيكي متسولاً لي الاجتماع به في الجنة، وكاذن أماك له ذلك. جعلت شغفنا، وغارت

وجنئنا. صار يقبض على يدي، ويشد عليها ما يبنياني له من قوة وعاهة. أنظر للرجال، أصرخ وأبي
"أنقذوني الطفل، إنه يموت. إن كنت لا تبالونين بذاته، ولا يبودون أي ردة فعل، لدرجة شككت معنا بأنهم

آئناً. فرع رأسه للأعلى مبتسماً، وقال بسرور 'النظر، إنه أخي عزامةً. إننا فقط عرفت اسم الأخ

الأكبر. أما الأخ الأصغر، فقله اسمه مجهولًا بالنسبة لي. لقد ذهب مع أخيه، وتركني وحيداً. حفرت

له قبرًا في الرمال الصفراء. وأثناء قيامي بذلك، رأيت إمرأة كانت تمر بسيارتها. نزلت وشرعت

بالتصوير.

أمي الحبيبة...

ليست المعضلة في الأشخاص، بل في القوانين والتعليمات. أول إمرأة مرّت من هذه المنطقة الثانية،
جعلها قيلة للجميع. رأيت الناس يتجهرون ويتكدسون. يرفعون لافتات عليها صورتي وآنا أدنى الأخ
الأصغر. كاميرات تسلطت على من كل مكان. محاولات لرمي الطعام والشراب إلىّ، لكن للأسف، بحروف الحاجز الكهربياني، مع هذا أشعر بالشعور والارتباك. هتافات قيادات مرتفعة. لكن الحال فعلياً لم يتغير. فالرجال لم يسمحوا لنا بالاقتراب كثيراً. سمحوا لهم بالتعبير عمّا يجول في وجدانهم، لكن منعوهم من تقديم مساعدة حقيقية. الغرب أن الرجال المسلمون، كانوا يضمنون لجمهور الناس، عقب انتهاه دواهم، ويعربون عن رفضهم لما أعانيه، ثم يعودون لتأدية وظيفتهم، عندما يحين عملهم! أترى يا أمي؟ لقد أخبرتك أن الصلة في التعليمات والقوانين، أمّا الأشخاص، فالجميع يحلم بالعيش في عالم يكون الجميع فيه سعداء، لكن كيف وصلنا لهذا الحال؟

أمي الحبيبة...

لقد مّلّ الناس. الأمر مشابه تماماً لما يحصل في بلداننا العربية. قضية رأي عام، تأخذ صدى لأيام قليلة، ثم تستقرّ كأنّها لم تكن. يعود الجميع لحيواتهم الشخصية، والاهتمام بمشاكلهم الصغرى. ليست ألوهم في ذلك، ففي هذا العالم من المأسى والمعاناة، ما يفيق طاقاتهم على التفرغ لها بشكل كامل.

بضع أيام فقط، تزداد ضماناتهم، وتشعرهم بأنهم أدوا واجبهم تجاه تلك القضية أو تلك.

تدربيًّا، بدأ يعود المكان لملاكك الحقيقيين، الرجال، الحاجز الكهربياني، أنا. اختفت الكاميرات. رحل الناس. والقيادات المرتفعة نزلت. حتى الرجال، صارون يعودون لمنازلهم، عقب انتهاء دواهم، بدلاً من الوقوف قريباً، ومناصرينا.

لا أقصد فطر فلكيّاً أمي. لكنّها نهاية. أنا موفقّ بذلك. أنا متأكد أنّ شفتني بسنا، و겼ني غاراً.

وأكثر ما يحزني، أنّ لا أخ وأنا جبل سبكيّ للجنة، لباني ويأخذني إليها.

الآن فقط أندم على الرمال، لاملياً بما سيجيء

أمي الحبيبة...

استيقظت على وقع أقدام. نظرت للبحر، ورأيت عليه أنشاً بخوض سباق ماراثون. كانوا يقصصون. وحن وصولوني، ساعدوني على النهوض، وجعلوني أجري أمامهم، حتى وصلت خط النهاية. كانت الجماهير تصفق وتتخفى لي، وبعض قفز من بين المدرجات، وركض لمعانقتي وتفتيقلي. اعتُبنت المنصة، وتم تكريمي بالميدالية الذهبية، وباقية ورد. كانت فرحني لا توصف. إلا أنني تعبت أيضاً من كثرة الجُرّي، فسقفتُ مغشيّاً على...

أمي الحبيبة...

فحتت عينيّ في مستشفى. لم أتمكن من التحرك والتكلم. ربما هو مخدّر، أو راحة لم أنّها بعد. الطبيب بجانبي فهمّته قوله لطبيب آخر "الكهربياء لم تؤثر على بعض الأعضاء. ما زال بمبادئنا الاستفادة منها". الطبيب الآخر قال متأثراً "يرفضونك حيّاً، ويقبلونك ميتاً". للحق، لم أفهم مغزى كلامهم بالكامل. سانترت استعادة عافية، لأاسالهم.
أمي الحبيبة...

غريب هذا المستشفى. لا يتقدون مرضاه. فأنا منذ أيام، لم يدخل أحد غرفتي. لكن اليوم استعدت قدرتي على الحركة والكلام. ناديت بداية على أي طبيب أو ممرض، فلم أتلقِ إجابة. ففتحت الباب، وسرت في ردهة لم تلبث أن غرقت في ظلام دامس. عدت أدراجي صوب الباب، فما وجدته. بحثت عنه كثيراً دون طائل. أنا الآن في عالم من الظلام. أمشي فيه كما لومشي في أرض شاسعة لاحدود لها. منذ أيام وأنا على هذا الحال. وربما منذ سنوات... ما هذا؟ مرحلي يا أمي، مرحلي. أرى في البعيد مساحة خضراء، يملؤها الشجر والورود والماء. سأسير إليها يا أمي. لكن أتنمى منك أن تدع لي. ادع لي ألا يكون هنالك رجالاً مسلحون ولا حاجزاً كهربانياً... أرجوك يا أمي ادع لي... ادع لي...
Letters Unwritten

Mahmoud Jamal Ahmed Miqdadi. Jordan

Dearest Mother,

I hope you are well, and are still watching the boats, wondering which will carry me to my destination. I have taken my first steps. I managed to secure part of the money, working in the stone-pits near the port. The other part I got from the grocer’s. I used to do my shopping there in my lunch breaks. He realised the reality of what I was planning, and gave me the money saying he would forgive me if I did not succeed in my adventure. But if I were to make it, and became wealthy, he would not only expect the same sum back. Rather, he would expect me to transform his little shop into a huge mall. He said so laughingly, but I caught a glimpse of a tear hiding at the bottom of his eye. And I remembered you.

I made a deal with the boat owner. He insisted on getting the cash up front, claiming there was a deal with the guys on the other shore. I didn’t like him. But if I pulled out now, I would never make progress again. With the crack of dawn, I have to be on board. Pray for me.

Dearest Mother,

I was amazed at what I saw at dawn. Maybe I was lucky because I was alone and not in charge of anyone. I thought we would be a number of people. How naïve!

I felt so sorry, Mother. I saw an old man with a woman who carried a baby. I didn’t know if she was his wife or daughter. Nor did I know if the baby was a boy or a girl. What made them venture with the baby like that? If it died, it would know no better. If it lived, it would consider us savages.

There was a young man with his adolescent brother. The young man approached me, saying what a genius his brother was. He had just completed his sixth school year with flying colours and he would exert his utmost efforts, to get his little brother the chance to pass Grade 7 in Germany. He spoke with utter confidence, believing the Germans would be amazed by his brother’s genius. In the future he would become one of their most prominent scientists.

It was weird, Mother, how this young man placed all his hopes on his little brother. As for himself, he didn’t mind living an idle life, creating opportunities for his brother. Until he grew up and became a prominent scientist in Germany.

There’s a little girl who holds on to her doll. And an old man who tapped along in rapid knocks with his crutch, as if in a hurry to get started. Why would he emigrate?

There is an obese man. Another told him jokingly, “The fish will get a feast.” And a drunkard, who looks long at the calm sea, to say in the end, “How serene this grave!”
We crowded on the boat. I sat between the drunkard and the little brother. Dishevelled hair, combed hair. The smell of booze, the scent of perfume. Frustrated dreams, encouraged dreams.

We set sail with the dawn prayers, as if we were performing a ritual. The sea was calm and gentle; it carried us on its clear surface. The waves held some dignity for us, for they agreed with the winds not to disrupt our sleep. But once the land vanished behind me, I felt a pang in my heart, as if I had just, of my own free will, left a wealth behind me. A wealth I would never retrieve.

It’s a dreary feeling when only water rules the four corners. The space for free movement was only a couple of metres. A prison whose walls were humans who were haggling with death for a better life. The baby cried, and the woman gave it her breast, finding refuge behind the other women whose lips didn’t stop murmuring prayers. A strong gust of wind snatched the doll from the girl’s hand. She tried to catch it, but they explained to her that she would drown. She would die if she did. Did she even grasp the meaning of drowning? What idea did the child have of death? I looked at her tiny soft fingers; they aged suddenly when they lost the doll. I looked at the doll floating in the sea, before a wave swallowed it into the depths. The first victim.

Suddenly, without any warnings, the situation changed. The sea roughened, and the angry waves started tossing the boat left and right. Weeping. Crying. Wailing. All at once. The young man hugged his little brother. The drunkard shrunk at my feet. He swore to sober up. The old man raised his crutch and shouted: “He saves you from the sea. Pray to God.” When I checked the boat’s direction, I glimpsed the silhouette of land. There was our paradise, hovering ahead of us. But we were not sure we would be able to cross to it.

Dearest Mother,

Half our sea. It was merciful to us. Even when we desert and reject it. It would never hurt us. The other half was very different. It did not like us. It was offended by our smell. It did not like our features, coloured with suffering and impossible wishes. What heart did that sea have! It did not soften to women’s tears or children’s crying. It sent its waves to throw us towards the shore, and at the same time it prepared the messengers of death to reap our souls. Land grew, but the sea sought to capsize the boat more and more ferociously. I told the people to remain calm, for we were very close to survival. I looked out for the people of the other shore, the ones the merchant had spoken of. I saw no one. I turned to the merchant to ask him, but alas! I was shocked to realise for the first time that he was not among us. Only then did I realise how naive I had been. I wanted to vent the frustration within me in a scream. But a huge wave was faster. It capsized the boat, and all that surrounded me was water. I glimpsed black figures through it. My boatmates. The current was sweeping them away. Death was reaping them in front of my eyes. I was helpless to save them. Hands reached out from here and there, searching for a saviour. Do you remember when I told you of a Russian writer who once said that Man at the moment of death sees things in his mind’s eye that were farthest from the horror of the moment? That is exactly what happened with me. When I sensed the many hands, my mind wandered to Mahmoud Darwiche: “Those drowning extend a hand
to protect them from drowning.” I grabbed a hand, and pulled it to the surface. It was the little brother. When he came to, he asked for his brother. He wept as he called his brother’s name. It was not the right time to console him. I went in search of the rest. Far away, I saw the fat man. The water was pulling him down gradually. He held the little girl in his arms, like the doll she had been holding. He held her above his head, hoping the sea would be satisfied in swallowing him alone. But to no avail. She drowned, too. I tried to manage. Had it not been for the waves working against me, and the little brother clinging around my neck. The baby had sucked the water of the sea. The fat man was indeed becoming a feast for the fish. I hoped the drunkard would find serenity in his watery grave. Everyone was gone, Mother. Only the little brother and I remained afloat. And the old man’s crutch. And the drunkard’s bottle. Two gravestones of this mass grave. The boat suddenly bobbed up. Just like that, Mother. You may not believe it if I told you that it was no longer upside down. But this time it was empty. I pushed the little brother to it, then I climbed in myself. It seemed spacious now, allowing me to move as I wished. But it made my chest contract. As if it crouched on my chest. The sea calmed, and the little brother put his head on my chest. I watched the land getting closer and becoming clearer. Until I fell asleep.

Dearest Mother,

We had arrived. The paradise I had always aspired to. But there was a problem. It was fenced in with an electrified fence. Behind it were men armed with the latest weapons. The little brother woke me, saying as if he did not believe himself, “Land, land.”

We ran, shrieking with happiness, calling for help. We halted when we saw the men and the fence between us. It was more like barbed wire. They threw something on it, and it burnt. They tell us the electricity would burn us if we approached. Where should we go then? Even the boat they had shelled, and it was powdered. Had they feared that the little brother and I would return to it? Or had they feared it would bring more like us? Was it a criminal in their eyes and needed to be executed? I don’t know. What I know is that we remained for days in this tiny spot of sand. The electricity in front of us, and the sea behind us.

The little brother’s health deteriorated. He started talking of death and God and heaven and hell. He asked if his brother was in heaven. Then he cried begging me to be rejoined with him in heaven. As if I could fulfill that wish. His lips dried up. His cheeks hollowed out. He held onto my hand with what little strength he had left. I would look at the men, and cry and weep, “Please save the child. He’s dying.” But they couldn’t care less. They showed no reaction, so much so that I suspected they may be robots. He raised his head and smiled. Then he said joyfully, “Look. My brother Azzam.” Only now did I learn his brother’s name. But the little brother’s name remains unknown to me. He’s gone to his brother, and he left me alone. I dug a grave for him in the sand. As I did, a woman passing by in her car saw me. She got out and started filming me.

Dearest Mother,

The issue is not in the people but in the laws and regulations. The first woman who passed by this remote place made it a destination for...
everyone else. I saw the people gathering and crowding. They put up banners with a photo of me as I buried the little brother. Cameras were pointed at me from every direction. There were attempts at throwing food and drink to me. Unfortunately, the electrified fence burnt everything. And yet I felt sated. Cheers. Raised fists. But the situation did not change. The men did not allow the people to come closer. They allowed them to express what they felt, but they prevented them from offering real help. The strange thing is that the armed men joined the crowds after hours. They voiced their rejection of what I suffered from. Then they would return to their duties when it was time to work again. Can you see that, Mother? I told you, the problem was the regulations and the laws. But the people – everyone dreams of living in a world where we can all be happy. How did we ever get here?

Dearest Mother,

The people got bored. Just like what happens in the Arab World. An issue of public opinion. It echoes for a few days. Then it is forgotten as if it never was. Each returns to their personal lives. Caring for their petty problems. I don’t blame them. In this world of suffering and grief there is so much that is beyond their ability to control. Just a few days to appease their conscience. It makes them feel they have done what they can for this cause.

Gradually the place returned to its real owners. The men. The electrified fence. Me. The cameras vanished. The people left. The raised fists were lowered. Even the men. They returned home after work, rather than standing by and supporting me.

I don’t mean to break your heart, Mother. But this is my end. I am certain of it. I am sure my lips are dried. My cheeks are hollowed. And, what saddens me most, there is no brother or beloved who preceded me to paradise to come and take me.

Only now I lay down on the sand. I don’t care about what is to come.

Dearest Mother,

I woke to the sound of footsteps. I looked at the sea and saw people running a marathon. They were heading towards me. When they reached me, they helped me up, and made me run in front of them. And I reached the finishing line. The public were cheering. Some jumped down from the seats and ran to embrace and kiss me. I ascended the platform, and received the gold medal. And flowers. I was over the moon. But I was also exhausted with the running and lost consciousness.

Dearest Mother,

I opened my eyes in the hospital. I couldn’t move or speak. It may be the anaesthesia or the lack of rest. I heard the doctor telling his colleague: “The electricity did not affect some organs. We can still make use of them.”

The other doctor said sadly, “They refuse you alive, and accept you dead.” To be honest, I didn’t understand all they said. I’ll wait until I’m well again and ask them.
Dearest Mother,

This hospital is very strange. They do not check on the patients. I’ve been here for days, but no one entered my room. Today I regained my ability to move and speak. At first I called for any doctor or nurse. But I got no reply. I opened the door and walked down the corridor, which was soon drowned in darkness. I retraced my steps to the door. What I had found, I had searched for often but to no avail. Now I was in the world of darkness. I walk through it as if through a vast wasteland. I have been like that for days. Or maybe for years. What is this? Mother, dear Mother. I see much green in the distance. It is full of trees and flowers and water. I’ll walk there, Mother. But I hope you will pray for me. Pray for me that there won’t be any armed men or electrified fences. Please, Mother, pray for me. Pray for me.
Гласовете Им Чувам

Кристина Станкова. България

Тихо. Излагаш ни. Излагаш се. Нищо не разбираш. Махни се оттам. Барабар Петко с мъжете. На момичетата не им е тука мястото.

Сега ми се струва съвсем логично, че искам да избягам. Да си тръгна. Да не съм там по-вече.

Отратнах зле. Не достатъчно, че да се намеси някой, но точното количество, за да погледна от ръба на менталното си здраве и да заливам към бездната. Родих се в София, в семейство от средната класа и растях на територията на голям, мръсен и стар апартамент. По-големият ми брат ме пребиваше редовно. Не на шега. Майка ми мразеше свекър си, с когото живеехме и съответно се караха непрекъснато. Не знам кой спечели в крайна сметка. Баща ми беше (отскоро имаме напредък) неспособен да изразява емоции вербално.

За пръв път чух от него думите „Обичам те“, когато преди месец решиш да му споделя всичко, което чувствам. Разговорите ни до този момент обикновено се изчерпваха с това кой какво е сготвил. Страст, която споделямте. А! И да не забравя да добавя, че първият ми сексуален контакт беше насилствен. Бях на петнайсет и не казах на никого. Беше ме срам и бях сигурна, че или ще ми се подиграват или няма да ми повярват. Чувствах, че на всички преч и нещо не ми е наред, за това ми се струващо заслужено да се отнасят зле с мен и с тялото ми. На никого не пожелавам да се чувства така. Трябвах ми години в развито и толерантно общество, само за да си дам сметка, че случилите се неща са нередни. Хората не бива да се държат така един с друг. Просто не е нужно. После прочетох една книга: „Посттравматичен стрес“ на Христо Попов. Изсмуках триста и четиридесет страници сякаш му бяха поверили тайната на живота. Бях изумена колко просто е всичко, а само колко необратимо и неразрешимо ми се струва. Всяка една мисъл, емоционално състояние, реакция, дисфункционалност, които бях приписвала на характера ми, на мен самата – бяха там. Изредени като симптоми на хроничен посттравматичен стрес.

Така си мечтаех някой да ми каже, че съм нормална. Прекарах толкова време в мъгла, страх и унижение.

Питаш ми какво е мобилност за мен? – Надежда за живот.

Сега съм далеч и всички спомени ми се струват мъгляви и объркани. Но помня съвсем ясно мечтите ми. Никога не мечтаех за лъскава сватба, съпруг, деца или семейство. Мечтаех да пътувам. Четях много и си представях моите бъдещи приключения из целия свят. Виждах се като изследовател, учен или спортист. Искам бяха отговорни за всичко и да отида навсякъде! Да вече операта, да танцувах валс във Виенската опера, да плувам с ветро-
ход в Балеарско море, да катеря испанските Пиринеи с колело, да видя океана, да спя под дърветата, да пиша, да живея свободно!

Мисля че е чудо, че всичко изредено (с изключение на валса...за сега) е част от настоящата ми реалност. Успях! Тръгнах си от тази болна държава България и последвам мечтите си. Прекрачих прега и оставих старата тъмна лепкава реалност. Замених я със слънчевите брегове на Каталунция. Без дори да си давам сметка колко ми е тежало бремето на гърдите ми. Просто грабваха всяка възможност, която ми се изпречваше, защото бях убедена, че на четиридесет ще изгубя разсъдъка си. Тъй че гледах да не губя време. Кандидатствам за какво ли не и се съгласявам на всякакви предизвикателства.

Живея в Испания от четири години и пътувам из Европа от шест. Обожавам живота си тук. Имам приятели от целия свят, които често ми предлагат невероятни приключения. Говоря четири езика почти всеки ден и ям храна от всички къщички на планетата ни. Чувствам се на мястото си и съм щастлив. Там, където се родих не беше за мен и ми беше позволено да опитам пак на ново място. Приеха ме, дадоха ми образование, работа, социален живот и никой не протестира срещу моето присъствие. Благодаря на себе си за всеки еден ден от решението, което съм взела, но истината е, че не беше никак трудно. Все пак съм била жена, която се е родила на територията на държава членка по настоящем на Европейския съюз. Аз не съм допринесла особено за придобиването на тези мои характеристики и не мога да не се замисля колко е чудно тези с по-лош късмет. Колко ли по-страшни истории от моята имат съвсем различен край? Колко ли жени и мъже са в бездната и нямат същото това право – на надежда? Не успяват никога да си тръгнат от това, което ги дърпа надолу. Прекарват животите си на място, към което не принадлежат. И какво ли не, много по-страшно. А малициите, които поемат риска на нелегалната миграция едва ли знаят, че с пристигането им, мъките им тепърва започват. Години без дори надежда за документи и легална работа. Непрестанно появявашата се мисъл: „Ще ме върнат ли насила?“ Чудя се аз дали бих могла да се справя с това напрежение, знаех колко е неправедливо.

Понякога никак не разбирам хората. Имам чувството, че умишлено си създаваме проблеми и след това прекарваме дълго време прергивайки се, че не можем да намерим решението им. Човешката мобилност е факт от началото на съществуването ни. Вътрешният порив да изследваме и откриваме нови земи, да срещаме различни хора, да търсим спасение, образование, работа, любов е нещо, което почти никога не е било споделено успешно от законодателната власт на която и да е държава в Европа. Не знам защо продължаваме да се преструваме, че има смисъл от рестриционни политики в областта на миграцията, след като те хората си се движат. Те са тук. Барселона например е пълна с нелегални имигранти дотолкова, че навсякъде по стените из града можех да видиш графити надписа sin papeles (без документи). Тези хора остават, въпреки всички трудности на неуреденото им легално пребиваване. Доказателство за това колко сме склонни да жертваме за възможността за ново начало.
Quiet. You are embarrassing us. You are embarrassing yourself. You don’t understand a thing. Get out of there. You don’t belong with men. Girls don’t belong here.

Now it seems quite logical that I wanted to run away. To leave. Not to be there anymore.

I grew up badly. Not enough for someone to intervene, but the right amount for me to look from the edge of my mental health and stumble into the abyss. I was born in Sofia, in a middle-class family and grew up in a big, dirty and old apartment. My older brother beat me regularly. And seriously. My mother hated her father-in-law, with whom we lived, and so they quarrelled constantly. I don’t know who won in the end. My father was (recently making progress) unable to express emotions verbally. I first heard the words “I love you” from him when I decided, a month ago, to share everything I felt with him. Up to then, our conversations had usually been about who cooked what. A passion we share. Ah! And I mustn’t forget to add that my first sexual contact was violent. I was fifteen and I didn’t tell anyone. I was ashamed and I was sure they would either make fun of me or not believe me. I felt that I was bothering everyone and something was wrong with me, so I thought I deserved to be treated badly – me and my body. I don’t want anyone to feel that way. It took me years in a developed and tolerant society, only to realise that what had happened to me was wrong. People should not behave like that with each other. You just don’t have to. Then I read a book: Post-Traumatic Stress by Hristo Popov. I devoured the three hundred and forty pages as if he had been entrusted with the secret of life. I was amazed at how simple everything was, after seeming so irreversible and insoluble to me. Every thought, emotional state, reaction, dysfunction that I had attributed to my character, to myself, was there. Listed as symptoms of chronic post-traumatic stress.

I so dreamed of someone telling me I was normal. I spent so much time in fog, fear and humiliation.

You are asking me what mobility is for me? – Hope for life.

I am far away now and all my memories seem hazy and confused. But I remember my dreams quite clearly. I never dreamed of a shiny wedding, husband, children or family. I dreamed of travelling. I read a lot and imagined my future adventures around the world. I saw myself as a researcher, scientist or athlete. I wanted to try everything and go everywhere! To have dinner in Paris, to waltz at the Vienna Opera, to sail in the Balearic Sea, to ride the Spanish Pyrenees on a bicycle, to see the ocean, to sleep under the trees, to write, to live freely!

I think it’s a miracle that everything listed above (except for the waltz... for now) is part of my current reality. I made it! I left this sick country of Bulgaria and followed my dreams. I crossed the threshold and left the old dark sticky reality. I replaced it with the sunny
shores of Catalonia. Without even realising how heavy the burden on my chest was. I just grabbed every opportunity that came my way because I was convinced that at forty I would lose my mind. So I tried not to waste time. I applied for everything and agreed to all kinds of challenges.

I have been living in Spain for four years now and have been travelling around Europe for six. I love my life here. I have friends from all over the world who often offer me amazing adventures. I speak four languages almost every day and eat food from all over our planet. I feel that I am at my place and I am happy. Where I was born was not for me and I was allowed to try again in a new place. I was accepted, given an education, a job, a social life and no one protested against my presence. I thank myself for each of the decisions I made, but the truth is that it was not difficult at all. After all, I am a white woman who was born in the territory of a current member state of the European Union. I haven’t contributed much to the acquisition of these characteristics of mine, and I can’t help but think how unfair it is to those with less luck. How many scarier stories than mine have a completely different ending? How many women and men are in the abyss and do not have the same right to hope? They never manage to get away from what pulls them down. They spend their lives in a place they don’t belong to. And, maybe more, much scarier. And the few who take the risk of illegal emigration hardly know that with their arrival, their suffering is just beginning. Years without even hope of documents and legal work. The constantly re-occurring thought, “Will I be forcibly sent back?” I wonder if I could handle this tension, knowing how unfair it is.

Sometimes I don’t understand people at all. I have the feeling that we are deliberately creating problems for ourselves and then spend too much time pretending that we can’t find a solution. Human mobility has been a fact since the beginning of our existence. The inner urge to explore and discover new lands, to meet different people, to seek salvation, education, work, love, is something that has almost never been completely stopped by the legislature of any country in Europe. I don’t know why we continue to pretend that there is a sense in restrictive migration policies once these people are moving. They’re here. Barcelona, for example, is so crowded with illegal immigrants that you can see graffiti on the walls of the city, with the inscription sin papeles (without documents). These people remain, despite all the difficulties of their unsettled legal residence. Proof of how much we are willing to sacrifice for the possibility of a new beginning.
Μέχρι το επόμενο κύμα

Γιώργος Γεράσιμος Μαντζιώκας. Ελλάδα

Ο ουρανός είχε ένα γκρίζο χρώμα που προκαλούσε κατάθλιψη. Το ίδιο χρώμα είχε πάρει και η θάλασσα, μιμούμενη στην εντέλεια το ουράνιο στερέωμα. Πάνω από την θάλασσα περνούσε ένα κρύο αεράκι που πάγωνε το σώμα και προκαλούσε ανατριχίλα.

Οι συνθήκες δεν ήταν ιδανικές για μπάνιο, παρόλα αυτά ο Τάσος ήταν αποφασισμένος πως δεν θα έφευγε από την μικρή παραλία χωρίς να βουτήξει στο νερό. Στην τελική είχε κάνει μπάνιο και σε πιο μουντές ημέρες στο παρελθόν.

«Ετσι είναι η λιακάδα στην Νορβηγία», αστειεύτηκε και χαμογελώντας στραβά έβγαλε τη μπλούζα του και διπλώνοντας την προσεκτικά την άφησε πάνω στην ξεφτισμένη ψάθα, που είχε φέρει μαζί του. Ύστερα στερέωσε πάνω της τέσσερα γόνατα για να μην την πάρει ο αέρας.

Κατευθύνθηκε αργά προς την θάλασσα κουνώντας δεξιά και αριστερά τα χέρια του για να ζεσταθεί. Το κορμί του τρεμόταν κάθε φορά, αλλά δεν του έδινε ιδιαίτερη σημασία.

Το νερό άγγιξε δειλά τα πόδια του και πανάθεμα το ήταν σκέτος πάγος. Τι θέλει και αυτός; Μάιο μήνα να πάει για κολύμπι; Σε εγκύμωσε κυρ Τάσο η αρχική καλοκαιριά και νόμιζε πως θα πάει όλος ο μήνας έτσι; Ή μήπως πίστεψε πως η ζέστη της άνοιξης θα είχε θερμάνει την θάλασσα; Η θάλασσα, κυρ Τάσο μου, είναι πάντα κρύα και θα πρέπει να το είχες μάθει τόσα χρόνια πριν.

Ο Τάσος έκατσε για λίγο ακίνητος, με το νερό σχεδόν να καλύπτει τα γόνατα του. Μπροστά του απλωνόταν η πελώρια θάλασσα, απέραντη και μουντές. Άλλοι θα είχαν σηκωθεί να φύγουν, εκείνος όμως παρέμενε. Του φαινόταν σαν πρόκληση, σαν μια μικρή περιπέτεια.

Τελικά, το αποφάσισε. Προχώρησε και βούτηξε το γερασμένο του κορμί μέσα στο κρύο νερό. Η αίσθηση του παγωμένου νερού που τον τύλιγε ήταν αναζωογονητική. Αρχίσεις να κινείται γρήγορα μέσα στο νερό, μέχρι να ξεσταθεί το σώμα του και να συνηθίσει τη θερμοκρασία. Ύστερα αφού συνήθισε άπλωσε τα χέρια του και κολυμπώντας γοργά ξανοίχτηκε στην θάλασσα.

Έχοντας φτάσει στην Ικανοποιητική για εκείνον απόσταση από την ακτή, άλλαξε πορεία και άρχισε να κολυμπάει παράλληλα στην αμμουδιά. Συχνά, μικρά κύματα έρχονταν από τα βαθιά και έπεφταν πάνω του. Όμως μέχρι και αυτά εκείνοι τα λάτρευε. Του άρεσε που κάθε φορά καλούνταν να τα αντιμετωπίσει, να τα ξεπεράσει, αν και γνώριζε ενδόμυχα πως δεν αποτελούσαν σοβαρά κίνδυνο, ίσως ούτε και πρόκληση.
Μα να, ένα νέο κύμα εμφανίστηκε πάλι στον θαλάσσιο ορίζοντα, ούτε πέντε μέτρα μακριά. Ήταν μεγαλύτερο από τα προηγούμενα, κάτι που κέντρισε ακόμα περισσότερο την διάθεση του Τάσου να αναμετρηθεί μαζί του. Προκειμένου να το προλάβει, άρχισε να ανεβοκατεβάζει τα χέρια του πάνω στο νερό με μεγαλύτερη ταχύτητα. Βιαζόταν να πέσει πάνω του, να νιώσει την βία της θάλασσας και να την νικήσει τελικά στο γήπεδο της.

Υπήρχε όμως και ένας άλλος λόγος που του άρεσε αυτή η αναμέτρηση με τα κύματα. Όταν πλησιάζει το κύμα αρχικά σε κατεβάζει σε ένα χαμηλότερο επίπεδο από αυτό που βρίσκοσουν μέχρι τώρα. Η θέση σου δυσχεραίνει. Προσωρινά όμως, Γιατί, αν καταφέρεις να κρατήσεις πάνω από την επιφάνεια της θάλασσας, τότε στην έξοδό του το κύμα σε ανυψώνει πιο υψηλά από εκεί που βρισκόσουν αρχικά. Σου δίνει μια άθικη προς τα πάνω και μια δύναμη που πριν δεν είχες.

Τελικά, ο Τάσος προλάβει το κύμα λίγο πριν αυτό τον προσπεράσει, διαπιστώνοντας κάπως αργοπορημένα πως ήταν μεγαλύτερο από αυτό που είχε φανεί αρχικά. Το νερό έπεσε πάνω του με μεγάλη ορμή καταφέρνοντας να τον τυλίξει μέσα στην υγρή του χούφτα. Απροετοίμαστος καθώς ήταν δεν πρόλαβε να αντιδράσει και η δύναμη του νερού κατάφερε να τον βυθίσει γυρίζοντας τον ανάσκελα.

Καταβάλλοντας μια όχι κακή αμελητέα για την ηλικία του, προσπάθεια, βγήκε ξανά στην επιφάνεια της θάλασσας. Η καρδιά του χτυπούσε γρήγορα και η αναπνοή του έβγαινε με δυσκολία. Αποφάσισε να περιμένει λίγα λεπτά μέχρι να επιστρέψει η καρδιά του στην θέση της.

Αθέλα του το βλέμμα του περιπλανήθηκε στον ορίζοντα και σταμάτησε πάνω στην ακτή. Ένιωσε την καρδιά του να σφίγγεται από κάποιο συναίσθημα που δεν ήθελε να αναλύσει περισσότερο. Το προσώπου του συσπάστηκε σε μια γκριμάτσα δυσαρέσκειας.

Η ακτή του θύμιζε ότι σε λίγη ώρα θα έπρεπε να βγει από το νερό και να φύγει για να γυρίσει στο σπίτι του.

Η ακτή του θύμιζε ότι την Δευτέρα θα έπρεπε να γυρίσει πάλι στο γραφείο και στις υποθέσεις της δουλειάς.

Η ακτή του θύμιζε ότι ο η Μαρίνα, η κόρη του, μάλλον τελικά θα έπαιρνε διαζύγιο από τον άντρα της.

Η ακτή του θύμιζε ότι η τράπεζα είχε απαντήσει αρνητικά στην αίτηση του για επιχειρηματικό δάνειο.

Η ακτή του θύμιζε ότι...Θεέ μου...το σπίτι ήταν άδειο και ότι την προηγούμενη Κυριακή είχαν κάνει το μνημόσυνο της Αναστασίας, της γυναίκας του.

Ο Τάσος γύρισε την πλάτη στην μικρή ακτή και άρχισε θυμωμένος να κολυμπάει προς τα βαθιά. Ήθελε να ξεφύγει, έστω και για λίγο αν ήταν δυνατόν, από αυτές τις σκέψεις, από αυτές τις ανάγκες.
Έβαλε το κεφάλι κάτω και άρχισε να κολυμπάει μανιασμένα, αλλάζοντας πολλές φορές κατεύθυνση πότε στα δεξιά, πότε στα αριστερά και πότε ευθεία μέσα στην θάλασσα, αλλά ποτέ προς τα πίσω στην ακτή.

Κάποια στιγμή ένιωσε μια κρύα και βαριά σταγόνα νερού να πέφτει με δύναμη πάνω στο κεφάλι του. Ένιωσε το σώμα του να ανατριχίαζε. Σταμάτησε το κολύμπι και έκατσε για λίγο ακίνητος. Πολύ γρήγορα, μια δεύτερη σταγόνα κατέβηκε με φόρα από τον ουρανό και έπεσε με δύναμη στο κεφάλι του. Ύστερα και άλλη και μετά άλλη μια και ξανά κι ‘άλλη. Μέχρι να το καταλάβει, μια δυνατή μπόρα ξέσπασε.

Ένα μπουμπουκάζι αντήχησε από μακριά και σε λίγο μια αστραπή χαράκτησε στον ουρανό. Ο Τάσος γύρισε το σώμα του προς την ακτή και άρχισε να κολυμπάει μανιασμένα. Όμως η ακτή ήταν πολύ μακριά.

Μεγάλα κύματα άρχισαν να σηκώνονται σαν μικροί λόφοι από τον δυνατό άνεμο που έφερε μαζί της η μπόρα. Έτσι αν έπεφταν πάνω του με μανία, το ένα μετά το άλλο και τον βυθίζαν μέσα στο νερό. Κάθε φορά που έβγαζε κολύμπι από το σκοτεινό νερό έβρισκε πως το κύμα τον είχε μεταφέρει πολύ μακριά από την προηγούμενη θέση του.

Αυτό έκανε την κατάσταση του ακόμα πιο επικίνδυνη. Ο άνεμος άφησε μικρή και μετά από λίγα μέτρα τελείωσε να αποκτήσει ευκαιρία να πετάξει έπεται στα διαλύοντας κύματα. Σταμάτησε και άρχισε να κολυμπάει μανιασμένα. Όμως η ακτή ήταν πολύ μακριά και έτσι αν έπεφταν από λίγα μέτρα τελείωσε να αποκτήσει ευκαιρία να πετάξει έπεται στα διαλύοντας κύματα. Κάθε φορά που έβγαζε κολύμπι από το σκοτεινό νερό έβρισκε πως το κύμα τον είχε μεταφέρει πολύ μακριά από την προηγούμενη θέση του.

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Προσπάθησε να παρέμβει και έτσι αν έπεφταν από λίγα μέτρα τελείωσε να αποκτήσει ευκαιρία να πετάξει έπεται στα διαλύοντας κύματα. Έτσι αν έπεφταν από λίγα μέτρα τελείωσε να αποκτήσει ευκαιρία να πετάξει έπεται στα διαλύοντας κύματα. Κάθε φορά που έβγαζε κολύμπι από το σκοτεινό νερό έβρισκε πως το κύμα τον είχε μεταφέρει πολύ μακριά από την προηγούμενη θέση του.

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Από τον άνεμο έπεφταν από λίγα μέτρα τελείωσε να αποκτήσει ευκαιρία να πετάξει έπεται στα διαλύοντας κύματα. Κάθε φορά που έβγαζε κολύμπι από το σκοτεινό νερό έβρισκε πως το κύμα τον είχε μεταφέρει πολύ μακριά από την προηγούμενη θέση του. Κάθε φορά που έβγαζε κολύμπι από το σκοτεινό νερό έβρισκε πως το κύμα τον είχε μεταφέρει πολύ μακριά από την προηγούμενη θέση του.
έχει και πως πρέπει να προσέλθει για διακανονισμό. «Δεν θα σας το φέρω μαλακά κύριε Ανδρικόπουλε, πολύ δύσκολα θα διασώσετε την επιχείρησή σας», ήταν τα λόγια του υπάλληλου της τράπεζας. Αυτό ήταν και το πρώτο χτύπημα που είχε δεχτεί ο Τάσος. Το μαγαζί, η κληρονομιά από τον πατέρα του, σαρωμένο από το κύμα της οικονομικής κρίσης.

Με κόπο έβγαλε το κεφάλι του πάνω από το νερό, μα πριν προλάβει να διώξει τους αφρούς από τα μάτια του, ένα δεύτερο κύμα τον έχωσε πάλι μέσα στο νερό.

Η Μαρίνα, τους είχε χτυπήσει το κουδούνι έντεκα ώρα τη νύχτα. «Δεν τον αντέχω, όλη την ώρα τσακωνόμαστε», τους είχε πει. Χαζοί καβγάδες ως προς την αιτία, αλλά με ιδιαίτερα σοβαρή ένταση. Τελικά, η Μαρίνα τα ξαναβρήκε με τον Αλέκο και επέστρεψε πίσω στο σπίτι τους.

Η εκεχείρια όμως δεν κράτησε για πολύ. Ύστερα, από δύο μήνες επέστρεψε πάλι στο πατρικό της και αυτή την φορά η παραμονή κράτησε περισσότερο. Ύστερα έφυγε, αλλά δεν άργησε να επιστρέψει και πάλι.

Η αίσθηση ότι η οικογένεια της κόρης τους διαλύεται ήταν ένας διαρκής πόνος για τους δυο γονείς. Μια πικρή γεύση που δεν φεύγει ποτέ από το στόμα.

Όμως το τρίτο κύμα, που χτύπησε τον Τάσο ήταν και το πιο δυνατό. Αυτό τον εξάντλησε σχεδόν ολοκληρωτικά.

Η Αναστασία, η γυναίκα του, στα εξήντα δύο της χρόνια υπέστη ένα ιδιαίτερα σοβαρό εγκεφαλικό και ύστερα από λίγες μέρες σε κωματώδη κατάσταση, κατέληξε. Εκείνος είχε αισθανθεί σαν να έχει την άγκυρα του. Το μικρό λιμάνι που τον περίμενε γεμίζοντας τον ασφάλεια και σιγουριά.

Ο Τάσος βυθιζόταν μέσα στο παγωμένο νερό ολοένα και περισσότερο. Τα πόδια του είχαν στα ματήσει να κλωτσάνε το νερό για να τον ανυψώσουν. Σκέφτηκε, πως αυτό ήταν. Είχε νικηθεί. Τα κύματα είχαν αποδειχτεί πολύ δυνατά και εκείνος πολύ αδύναμος για να ανταπεξέλθει. «Θεέ μου», σκέφτηκε, «αν τα παρατήσω τώρα; Αν σταματήσω να παλεύω ενάντια στα κρύα και ανελέητα κύματα, θα φτάιω; Έχω άραγε κάποιο λόγο για να παλέψω ακόμα;»

Ο Τάσος άκουσε, ή νόμιζε πως άκουσε, πάντως οι λέξεις στο μυαλό του δεν αντήχησαν με την δική του φωνή. «Ο Ιώβ είπε: Ο Κύριος έδωσε. Ο Κύριος πήρε. Ευλογημένο να είναι το όνομά Του στους αιώνες». Και τότε κατάλαβε. Δεν έφταιγε εκείνος για όλα όσα του είχαν συμβεί. Θα έφταιγε μόνο όταν δεν θα προσπαθούσε. Θα έφταιγε μόνο όταν θα παρατούσε την προσπάθεια. Καταθέτοντας τα όπλα πραγματοποιούσε μια μεγάλη αμαρτία. Αρνιόταν την πρόνοια του Θεού. Αντιθέτως, έπρεπε να παλέψει και να αφήσει τα υπόλοιπα σε Εκείνον, γιατί Εκείνος ξέρει.
Προσπάθησε να κουνήσει τα πόδια του για να πάει προς τα πάνω, και τότε τα πόδια του κινήθηκαν με μια δύναμη που δεν ήξερε πως την είχαν. Έφτασε στην επιφάνεια της θάλασσας πολύ γρήγορα, και εκεί αντίκρυσε ξανά τα πελώρια κύματα.

Δεν ήξερε πόσο μακριά τον είχε παρασύρει η θάλασσα αλλά σίγουρα βρισκόταν μακριά από την ακτή. Λίγα μέτρα μακριά τον πρόσεξε λίγες βάρκες που παρέσχε συχνά μια δύναμη που δεν ήξερε πως την είχαν. Οι καρίνες τους ανεβοκατέβαιναν μανιασμένα, ακολουθώντας της προσταγής των κυμάτων, αλλά παρέμεναν σταθερά προσηλωμένες στις θέσεις τους, όντας δεμένες γερά σε βαριές άγκυρες.

O Τάσος προσέγγισε την πιο κοντινή με προσοχή και κατάφερε να γράψει τα χέρια του πάνω της. Στην μικρή της πλώρη διάβασε, το όνομα της ζωγραφισμένο με μεγάλα κόκκινα γράμματα, «Άγιος Νικόλαος».

Όμως η θέση του δεν ήταν καλή, με κάθε ταρακούνημα της βαρκούλας αυτός κινδύνευε να χάσει το κράτημα του και να βυθιστεί στο νερό. Έτσι αποφάσισε να ανεβεί μέσα στην βάρκα.

Έσφιξε τα δόντια του, και έβαλε όλη την δύναμη στα χέρια. Σηκώθηκε και έσπρωξε όλο το βάρος του μέσα στην βάρκα, καταφέροντας να κυλήσει μέσα.

Γύρισε ανάσκελα και κοίταξε τον, καλυμμένο από μαύρα σύννεφα ουρανό. Σταδιακά η βροχή που έπεφτε πάνω του άρχισε να μοιάζει με χάδι δροσερό από απαλό χέρι. Λίγες χρυσές αχτίνες ξέφυγαν από τα σύννεφα και έφτασαν μέχρι το πρόσωπό του. O Τάσος άνοιξε τα μάτια του και αντίκρυσε τα σύννεφα να αποχωρούν το ένα μετά το άλλο. Δίνοντας την θέση τους στον ήλιο, που κάπως δειλά πρόβαλε φωτιζόντας θάλασσα και ακτή.

Ένα αχνό, κουρασμένο χαμόγελο φάνηκε στο πρόσωπο του.

«Τελικά, ήταν μόνο ένα μπουρίνι», ψιθύρισε.
The sky was depressingly grey. The sea was the same glum colour, perfectly mimicking the celestial dome, a cold breeze sweeping over it, freezing his body and giving him the chills.

The circumstances were anything but ideal for swimming, but Tassos was determined to not leave the small beach unless he first took a dip. After all, he had gone swimming on much more overcast days than this before.

“This is what a sunny day must be like in Norway,” he said in jest, a crooked smile on his face while taking his shirt off, folding it neatly and placing it on the old beach mat he had brought with him. He placed a stone on the mat to keep the wind from sweeping it off.

He made his way leisurely to the water, swinging his arms left and right to warm himself up. His body was shaking at the touch of the cold wind but he took no notice.

The water timidly touched his feet and, boy, was it ice-cold! Why on earth had he decided to go swimming in May? Did the first sunny break fool you, old man, and you thought the entire month would be like that? Or did you perhaps think the seasonal torridity of springtime could warm up the sea? I say, the sea, old man, is always cold; you should have known this by now.

Tassos stood still for a while, the water almost up to his knees. An immense sea was all around, infinite and overcast. Others would up and leave, not him though. It all felt like a challenge, a bit of an adventure to him.

He made up his mind. He went ahead and plunged his old body into the cold sea. The feeling of chilled water enveloping him was refreshing. He started moving fast inside the water to get his body warm and accustomed to the temperature. Then, he spread his arms out and by swimming swiftly he went further out at sea.

Being now at a distance from the beach he was content with, he shifted and began to swim parallel to the shore. Often little waves would come from afar and crash against him. He loved this anyway. He enjoyed it every time he had to measure up and take on the waves, although he knew, deep down inside, they were no real danger, maybe not even a challenge.

There it was, another wave rearing up on the horizon, hardly five metres off from where he was. It was bigger than the previous ones, which made Tassos even keener on tackling it. To catch this wave, he started swimming faster, pulling at an even greater speed, looking forward to throwing himself onto it, to feel the violent force of the sea and then to beat it at its own game, on its own turf.

There was yet another reason why he loved this showdown with the waves. Wherever a wave closes in, at first it gets you to a level that is inferior to where you originally were. You’re in trouble but it’s only temporary. If
you manage to keep yourself afloat, above sea level, the wave, upon subsiding, will eventually get you even higher compared to where you had been when it first found you. It gives you a boost upwards and a power you did not have before.

Tassos finally caught the wave just before it passed him by, and what struck him, albeit belatedly, was that it was bigger than he had expected. The water crashed on to him with sheer force and caught him in its wet grasp. Totally unprepared, he had no time to react as the overwhelming power of the water flipped him over.

By making an effort, hardly negligible given his age, he managed to resurface. His heart was racing. He could hardly breathe. He thought he’d better wait for a couple of minutes until he got his heartbeat back in rhythm.

Unconsciously, his gaze wandered off and around before it stopped at the sight of the shore. A feeling which he didn’t really wish to explore was wringing his heart, the sharp contortion of his face indicating his disenchantment.

The shore was reminding him that he had to get out of the water soon in order to leave the beach and go back home.

The shore was reminding him that he needed to be back at the office on Monday to deal with business affairs.

The shore was reminding him that Marina, his daughter, was probably going to divorce her husband.

The shore was reminding him that the bank has turned down his request for a business loan.

The shore was reminding him that... Oh Lord... the house was empty and last Sunday was the day when they had organised a memorial service for Anastasia, his wife.

Tassos turned his back on the beach and started swimming angrily towards the deep ocean. He wanted, even for a little while, to escape his thoughts and needs.

He immersed his head and started swimming frenziedly, shifting his direction multiple times, sometimes going left, sometimes right and sometimes straight out towards the open sea but never once heading back to the shore.

There came a moment when he felt a cold and heavy drop of water fall hard on to his head. He could feel the goose bumps all over his skin. He paused and stayed still for a little. Pretty soon, another drop fell right down from the sky and bumped into his head, and then another and another and then came more. Before he knew it, there was a big storm.

The sound of thunder came from afar and momentarily a thunderbolt lit up the sky. Tassos turned around to face the shore and started to swim like a maniac. But the shore was too far away.

Huge waves began to rear up like little hills owing to the powerful winds the storm was bringing with it. Now, no matter how much he tried, it was impossible to escape the waves. They were pounding him with fury, one after the other, engulfing and submerging him. Every time he anxiously reared his head from the dark waters it would turn out the waves had carried him even further than where he had been last.
This was making his predicament more dangerous. The shore was small and after a handful of metres of sand there was a bunch of sharp rocks. If he, by any chance, got too close, a strong wave could send him crashing against the rocks.

He tried to fight the waves and to swim against the winds but he got tired and eventually gave up trying to beat them. Soon he was at the mercy of the waves which kept coming by the score, pulling and lifting him up only to submerge him with sheer force and violence into the salty sea that frothed and foamed.

Each time he thought there was a window for him to swim back to the tiny beach, the wind would grow stronger and another wave would appear, cutting him off and taking him further away.

But isn’t life like that? Whenever you think you have made it, when you have managed to do something great, the next wave rolls and sweeps everything off, dragging you along, taking you back to the starting point, if not further backwards. And Tassos had been hit by too many waves in recent years.

His own business, the clothes store his late father had opened back in the 70s, when they moved to Athens from Areopoli, Laconia, the very store where Tassos himself had been working all along after his graduation, had gone under. All that time he had been doing his job the way he knew he should, and he always had enough to pay off debts on time. Out of the blue, there came a year when he couldn’t meet payments, so he took out a loan. The next year he had to take another to repay the previous year’s loan, which is how he got himself caught up in this mess. And now, after ten years of battling loans and creditors, he was told there can be no more loans and he must come to the bank to settle his debt and negotiate the terms. “I will be blunt, Mr. Andrikopoulos, it will be very difficult for you to save your business,” was the very first thing the bank clerk had told him. That was the first blow Tassos had taken. The store, his father’s legacy, had gone under the waves of the economic crisis.

He worked hard to get his head above water. Hardly had he had time to clear the salty froth from his eyes when another wave came along, drowning him once more.

One evening Marina had knocked on her parents’ door at eleven. “I cannot take this anymore; we are arguing all the time,” she said. Those stupid quarrels were really intense. Neither Tassos nor Anastasia ever figured out what the last straw had been or who was to blame. All they saw was their distraught daughter, which was enough. Subsequently, Marina worked things out with Alekos, and went back to her home. The ceasefire didn’t last long. Two months later she was back in her parents’ place and she stayed on. Then she left again but before long she was back, living with them, once more.

The feeling that their daughter’s family was falling apart was a source of constant pain for the couple. There was this bitter aftertaste which lingered.

But the third wave was the hardest of them all. It drained Tassos.

Anastasia, his wife, suffered a major stroke, age sixty-two. After a few days in a coma she passed. It felt like he had lost his anchor. The small haven, which had always been there to make him feel safe and secure, was no more.
Tassos was sinking deeper and deeper into the ice-cold waters. He was no longer kicking to go up. A thought crossed his mind: that was it, he had been defeated. The waves had turned out to be too strong and he had been too weak to cope.

“Oh, God”, he thought, “what if I gave up now? What if I stopped fighting off these cold, merciless waves? Would that be my fault? I wonder whether there might be a reason for me to keep on fighting?”

Tassos heard, or thought he heard, in his head, an utterance from a voice that he knew was not his. “And Job said: ‘The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’”

And then he knew. What had happened was not his fault. It would have been his fault had he failed to make an effort. It would have been his fault had he given up trying. By surrendering his weapons, he would be committing a huge sin. He would be refusing God’s providence. He needed to keep on fighting and let God take care of everything else for He knows best.

He tried to shake his legs to go upwards and he kicked with a force he never knew was there. Having reached the surface really fast, he was facing the huge waves again.

He had no idea how far the sea had taken him but he was definitely far from the shore. He noticed, a few feet from where he was, a handful of boats being rocked dreadfully by the waves. Their keels were going up and down in a frenzy, at the pace the waves set and yet they stayed on, right where they were, thanks to their heavy anchors.

Tassos carefully got to the nearest boat and managed to grasp and hold on to it. Its little bow read, in big red letters, “St. Nicholas”, the patron saint of seamen.

He was not safe as with every jolt he risked losing his grip and sinking deeper. So, he decided to get on the boat.

His jaw clenched, he applied all the physical strength he had to his arms. He lifted and pushed himself into the boat, leaning forward to climb inside.

He then rolled over, looked up and saw a sky full of black clouds. Gradually the rain started to feel like a soft caress. Some golden sun-rays were slipping through the cracks of the clouds straight to his face. Tassos, his eyes wide open, saw the clouds disappear one after another. They were giving their place to the sun, which was shyly emerging, illuminating sea and shore.

A faint, tired smile appeared on his face.

“It was just a squall,” he whispered.
البقرة والبحر
جنى سليفة، لبنان

كانت حزينة جدًا عاصي ذلك اليوم، أميل برأسه نحو ظلّي المترامي على المقعد الخشبيِّ قبالة بحر بيروت، أعظم عيناي وأسمع إلى صوت الأمواج كمن يصغي إلى أغنية. قفدت عيناي في أشياء رأيت يدا سراء اللون، متناثرة الزرقاءِ عطسني قطعة حلوى. رفعت رأسي قليلاً، إذ بي أراها إنها هي تلك العجوز الجميلة جارتي في البحر. منذ شهرين وأنا أتقني بها في مثل هذا الوقت كأننا على موعد ما تجلس على المقعد المجاور لمقدعي، ونقتسم البحر، معًا كن ظننت أن أرافقها دائمًا وأعتني أن أتواصل معها. وها هي اليوم تقدم لي بسمة مع قطة شوكولا قالت الجدة: "إنها شوكولا بلجيكيَّة، إنها بلجيكيَّة فنحن البلجيكيون مشهورون في صناعة الشوكولا، الشوكولا سحر خاص... إنها بارعة في المواساة، تتناول هذه الحبيبة يابنيتي، تتناول القائمة اللذيذة بخيل، ابتسمت للجدة، ابتسمت هي وعضت مشرعت بحمس مفايًا. استطعت أن تفهم حزني وتتصفح مثلما يفعل البحر دائمًا... تلك الجدة الطيفية!

هي بلجيكيَّة إذا!؟ بالأمس فقط حظر كبير أن أكون أ Lehrنجاً لأنّ ملامحها لا تشي بكونها لبنانَّية. كانت تقرأ رواية باللغةُ الترجمية. تمسك الكتاب بين يديها كأنها طفل مألِ، تعبت بصفحتها قليلاً، ثم تكونَ على صفحة واحدة، تطالعها يجب، توقف في منتصفها تقريباً، ثم تغلق الكتاب نصف إغلاقًا... تحكي شيئًا للبحر. وتعود قراءة الصفحة. أعتقد أنها قرأت عشرة صفحة مثل هذه غابات عن دافعي تنتهي إلى أنثى أمراض العصر كله و أنا أراقها متجاهلة البحر النابض في الحياة الممتدة أمامي. هذه الجدة تجبر من رآها على تأملها بلا توقف أو مثل تامًا مثلما يفعل البحر.

قبل يومين، ظننتها إسبانيَّة. كانت صاحبة طفل في الثامنة على أربع تقدير. تحاول إعطاءه درسًا في الرسم. قالت له بلعبة عربية مكرزة: "نحن الإسبان معروفون بعقرتنا في الرسم. تذكر، ميتكو، سلفادور دالي، باروسو، وغيرهم. إرسلت شيئًا أمامه، تفهم أنما رسمه كان مميزًا لأنها ضحكت من أعمال قبليها. في مساء ذلك اليوم، عندما أنتهت زيارتي إلى البحر، حاولت رسم أشياء كثيرة، بوردة تتفتح في الفجر، شمس تضخعت ليل فتغيب، أو أعزوس يشكو غريته للمجمر. غريب أمر هذه الجدة، إنها تذكرني بالفن، بالأحلام الجميلة، بالورود، بالأطفال والعجائز، بالبدايات والتهابات... تمامًا مثلما يفعل البحر.

هيرتني تلك الجدة... غزور في الثمانين من العمر على الأقل. كيف تعرف كل هذه الأشياء؟ كيف تواجه الحياة مثل هذا الأمر؟ إنها تتحدى الصورة النمطيّة للعجوزات التي أعرفها. العجوز الغابضات، اللواتي يزجن الحياة ببعضهم المهمشة، يمتنن الصيغ بسبع البرغش، واللثة بسبع الخوف، والشتاء بدأي البرد، وينزعجن من البحر لأنه غدار، ومن الأطفال لأنهم صاحبون ومن
التركيبة الجينية لأنها لينة...العجائز اللواتي يشعّن حديث الدّواء والألم ويعتقد أن حياتهم توقفت عند ماض بعيد غني بالذكريات والأحلام.

كنت متأكدًا أنه تختبئ قصصًا وأسرارًا كثيرة مثلما يفعل البحر. نعطيه أسرارنا مجانًا مطلعين لكونه بلا حنجرة فيجفف بها في أعماقنا لتبذلها عمقاً. أسرار بحرية وسائحة، أخرى خالقة وممّددة. أسرار تتوافق إلى صوت وآخرنا تفضل الصمت. هذه المرّة، كنت مسرّة أن أعرف السّر الذي يربط الجدة بالبحر، وأنها ترجمانًا لوطنيّتنا جميلة، ولهجتها العربّيّة ممّهدة، وأحاديثها تزيد من فضولي. ولذلك عزمت على محاكاتها في اليوم التالي. سوف يبدأ الحديث بها على الشوكولا البليجيكية!

هذا ما حصل، شعرت ثُمّ سألتها عن وطنها. قالت الجدة أنها تمتلك أوطانًا كثيرة، تحفظها في قلبيها بعناية. قالت أنه ليس مهمًا في أي لندن، المهمل إلى أي أرض تقرر أن تنتمي، وأن أنتمي لبلاد كثيرة ليس نيد لبلداننا بل هو غزل لطيف بها، وهو ليس انتقاصًا من وطنيّتنا بل إناغها لها... ثمّ حديثنا عن أوطانها تلك، وكانت منكّرة في كل وقت. نثرت انتقالاتها في كل وقت. تذكرت النّساء، في عينيهنّ نزعة حماسة كبيرة حين أخبرتني عن حضارة اليونان العظيمة، فلاستقامت عن تاريخ بريطانيا، وعن فراشة مصر وأساطيرها. ثمّ اذبتها حزن مباغتًا، وازداد عمق الأخاذية في وجهها حين ذكرت الحرب في وطنها سوريا على حدّ قولها. ما أسرع ما تحلّى وجه هذه الحجوز من الهدوء إلى الغضب، ومن الإشراع إلى الفلق... تمامًا مثل أمواج البحر التي تثور وتتسكن بين الفينة والأخرى، وفي ثورتها غضب، وفي سكونها رقة.

كيف يمكن للمرء أن يشبه البحر؟ أكاد أزعم أن هذه المرأة تشبهها. لها هيئة وشوبها وصدقها، وتحفظها في مخيلتي من الشاطئ، وانتفاخهم حين تذتي الزّرّاح كل ما ينوها. لها القدرة على قول الكثير دون أن تقول شيئًا. تضم روحها شمساً مشروّعة وليلًا طويلة مثلما يطوي البحر النّشّم. ثمّ الليل كلّ نساء، وهي مثل هكّل محاولة لفهمها غير مجدية، تعرّفني أنّ أجهلها أكثر كلّ مرة وتجعلني أوّلًا بغزير، أو جزّر بعدم حقيقتها.

دعتي الجدة إلى بيتها في اليوم التالي. استقبلتني رائحة شهية عند الباب، وحلف قدوم أثار في حنينا غريباً. قالت لاحقًا أنّ هذا الزّراعة هو رائحة تولب مغربيّة تجذبها الجدة وتعتبرها في وصفاتها كثيرة. وأنّ المروة هي عزوفة رومناّية قديمة تتقن الجدة عرفها بشكل لا يصدق، وتبينها رائعة ويشبهها، لا شيء فيه اعتباطيّ، بل كل شيء مهندس ومصوود جيدًا على أحد رفوف مكتبتها. دعوتها إلى مجموعة صور متنوعة بشكل ثير الدهشة... تمامًا كأنّ صورة وردة صغيرة. تقول الجدة أنها تحتلّ الزّراعة كثيرًا وأن كل منا زارتها تذكرها بوردة، وأن عبر تلك الوردة هو امتداد لوجود المدينة بالنسبة لها، فالزرّتين يذكرها بيوت، والجزيرة يذكرها بباريس. وهي تربط الادنامك بزهرة دار الشمس التي تبعث البهجة باستمرار، وبيروت زهرة الرجس التي تمنح الحب دون مقابل... صورة واحدة أثارت انتباهين بشدّة من بين الصور، صورة لفتاة عشيّبة رائعة الجمال تجلس في سبيليف مع رجل مسن، أمامها زهرة ببيضاء ذاية.

قالت الجدة أنها هي تلك الفتاة، وأن الرجل المسن هو والدها. كان والدها بحارة وأمضيت شبابها كلهما بالسّحر إلى البلاد التي يضمنها البحر الأبيض المتوسط. قالت الجدة أن البحر لا هوّية محددة له، ولكنه...
يجمع هويّات كثيرة. إنه متمرّد ومدلّل يختار وطنًا كل يوم حسب مراحل الصباحي، مثلما ننتقي نحن.

فطورنا... فيمّا يكون بحر بيروت، وآخر بحر فرنسا أو إسبانيا أو مصر. البحر يجمع معروف كل تلك الأوطان لأنه ينتمي إليها جميعها، مثلما يجمع ضوء الشمس ألوان الطيف لأنها كلها جزء منه. قال المجرّة أنها أحبّت البحر، حتى صارت تشتهيه، وصار وطنها الذي يذكّرها بأبيها وطفلتها وراحته.

النجاحات والإنخفاضات الأولى ... السفر أساذاً الذي علمها أن ننتقي من كل وطن أفضل ما فيه، لأنّ كلّ وطن جميل ومتفونق على طريقته الخاصة... السفر علّمه الطّيف، واللغات، والفن، الموسيقى، والرسم، الكتابة، الزراعة... وأهم من ذلك كله: الشغف. التجدّد، الشعور بالسماح الأرض وثرة الإحتمالات. لقد علمت ما دامت تعيش. وعندما سألتها عن حلمها، أشرق في عينيها لون البحر وقالت: أن أساعد الشباب أمثالك على اكتساب العلوم وفهم الحياة بالسفر... وحلم آخر، حلم والدي... أن يجمع البحر ما فرقته الحدود.
I was very upset that afternoon. I turn my head to my shadow, which was extending across the wooden seat along Beirut’s sea. I close my eyes and listen to the sound of the waves like one listening to a song. When I suddenly open my eyes, I see a tanned hand very gently giving me a sweet. I lift my head a bit and see her. It was her. That pretty old woman. My neighbour in the sea. I’ve been meeting her for two months now, always at this time, as if we had an appointment. She would sit on the seat next to me and we would share the sea. I always watch her, and wish to speak with her. Here she is today, offering a smile with the chocolate. The grandma said, “It’s Belgian chocolate. We Belgians are famous for chocolate. Chocolate has a special magic. It consoles. Have a piece, my child.” I shyly took the delightful piece and smiled. Grandma smiled back and went. I suddenly felt better. She had understood my sadness, and had absorbed it as the sea always did. That’s the sweet grandma!

She is Belgian, then. Only yesterday it crossed my mind that she may be Turkish, on a temporary visit to Lebanon. Her features were not Lebanese. And she was reading a novel in Turkish. She held the book in her hands like a spoilt child, fiddling with the pages and then turning to one in particular. She looked at it with love, and then halted about midway. She half closed the book, said something to the sea, and then returned to her reading. I think she finished around twenty pages like that. Then she put the book, with her mobile phone, into her straw handbag and walked away. When she was gone, I realised I had spent the whole afternoon watching her. I had neglected the vivacious sea stretching out in front of me. This grandma demanded the full attention of anyone who saw her. They would look at her ceaselessly, just like the sea did.

A couple of days ago, I thought she may be Spanish. A child of no more than eight was with her, and she was trying to teach him how to draw. She said in broken Arabic, “We Spaniards are known for our genius in painting. Remember Picasso, Salvador Dalí, Velázquez and others.” She drew something, and the boy traced the lines. It must have been very special, for she laughed from the bottom of her heart. That evening, when my visit to the sea was over, I tried drawing many things. A flower blossoming at dawn. A sun succumbing to night and setting. An old man complaining to the stars of his loneliness. What a grandma! She reminded me of art, of wonderful dreams, of flowers, of children and old people, of beginnings and ends. Just like the sea did.

The grandma was very confusing for me. She was in her eighties. How did she know all these things? How did she face life with all this hope? She challenged the stereotype of the elderly I was familiar with. Angry elderly who grumbled at life with their sticks, who hated summer because of the mosquitoes, and hated night because of their fear, and hated winter because of the cold. They got disturbed by the sea because it was treacherous. And by children because they were
noisy. And by technology because it was a curse. My stereotype of elderly women who loved discussing their medication, their pain and who believed their lives had come to a standstill in some distant past redolent with memories and dreams.

I was certain she hid stories and secrets, as plentiful as did the sea. We give it our secrets gratis, in the firm belief that it has no tongue. It would keep them in its depths. Innocent and naïve secrets; dangerous and destructive secrets. Secrets that seek to find a voice, others that prefer to remain silent. This time, I insisted on finding out the secret that links the grandma and the sea, and to find out about her origins. Her features were mysterious, her accent enigmatic, her talk whetted my curiosity. That is why I made up my mind to talk to her the following day. I would start by thanking her for the Belgian chocolate!

And that is how it happened. I thanked her and then asked her about her homeland. The grandma said she had many homelands. She kept them in her heart. She said it was not important where we were born, but to which land we decide to belong. Our belonging to many countries is not a rejection of our own but rather a gentle flirtation. It is not a detraction from our patriotism but rather an enrichment. She then told me of these homelands. Her features changed with every homeland. The joy in her eyes sowed atoms of great enthusiasm when she told me of the great Greek civilisation and its philosophers, of the history of Britain, of the Pharaohs of Egypt and their legends. Then she was suddenly overcome with sadness, which etched more wrinkles into her face, as she told of the war in her homeland Syria. How quickly the old woman’s face changed from serenity to anger, from joy to anxiety. Just like the sea waves that would rise one moment and then calm the next. In their arousal there was anger and in their calmness was gentleness.

How could a person be so like the sea? I vow the woman was very much like it. She had the form, the features, the sound of the sea. Her face reflected the visage of fishermen but also their patience. Her eyes held the pleasure of children as they built their sandcastles on the beach. But also their disappointment when they are scattered to the wind. She had the ability to say so much without saying anything. She embraced bright suns in her soul and long nights, just like the sea would engulf the sun and then the night with every evening. Like the sea, every attempt to understand her was futile. With every attempt, I felt more ignorant, and she made me admit incompetence in the face of her reality.

The grandma invited me to her house the next day. An appetising aroma welcomed me at the door. And an old tune that evoked a strange nostalgia in me. Later, I discovered it was the aroma of Moroccan spices, which the grandma loved and used in many a recipe. The tune was an old Romanian melody, which the grandma mastered to perfection. Her house was wonderful, just like her. Nothing was haphazard. Everything was in its place with full intention. On one shelf of her huge library was a set of nicely ordered photos. In front of each photo was a tiny flower. Grandma said she loved gardening, and every city she visited reminded her of a flower, and the scent of the flower was an extension of the city for her. Lilies reminded her of Tunisia. Damask roses reminded her of Paris. She connected Denmark with the sunflower, which evoked constant joy. Beirut was connected to amaryllis, which offers uncondi-
tional love. One photo stood out; the photo of a beautiful girl in her twenties. She sat on a boat with an elderly man. In front of her was a white wilted flower.

Grandma said she was the girl, and the elderly man was her father. He had been a sailor, and she had spent all her youth travelling and visiting the countries embracing the Mediterranean Sea. Grandma said the sea had no specific identity. It brought together many identities. It was rebellious and spoilt, choosing a different homeland every morning. Just as we selected our breakfast. One day it would be the sea of Beirut; another the sea of France; or Spain; or of Egypt. The sea brought together all these homelands for it belonged to them all. Like the rays of the sun brought together the colours of the spectrum, for they were all part of the sun. Grandma said she had loved the sea, until she became like it. It became her home that reminded her of her father, her childhood, the smell of the first successes and failures. Travelling was her master, who had taught her to pick from every homeland the best it had to offer. For every homeland is beautiful, and stands out in its own way. Travelling has taught her to cook, languages, art, music, painting, writing, gardening. But most importantly, it taught her passion, renewal, perceiving the spaciousness of the earth and the potentials it had to offer. It taught her to dream for as long as she lived. When I asked her about her dream, the colour of the sea touched her eyes, and she said, “To help young people like you acquire knowledge and to learn about life through travelling. The other dream is my father’s dream. To allow the sea to rejoin what the borders have put asunder.”
حوار في المطار
أحمد عمران بن عمران
ليبيا

في المطار، أعدادًا كبيرةً من المسافرين بين قادم وغادر، كلٌ منهم يحمل معه حقيبته أو يجرها خلفه، ملايين الوجوه، وفي كل حقيقة حكاهية، وفي كل وجه إذا دققت رواية، في طرف مساحة التدخين، يجلس شاب عشريني أشقر يضع أمامه كوبًا من القهوة، يفترش الأرض، يراقب هبوط وإقلاع الطائرات في عتمة الليل، يستمتع بنسبة صيفية تلطف قليلاً من حرارة الصيف، يشعل سجارته بينما يستمر في مراقبة الطائرات، بجانبه حقيقة ظهر يندأ ذراعه عليها، أمامه جهاز حاسوب محمول يضعه على قدميه، يقترب منه شاب آخر يرجح أنه ما بست، أسود الشعر، طويل القامة، ينظر الشاب الأشقر نحوه، يبتسم الشاب الأشقر قبل أن يقول:

- "كرسي جميل"

يضحك الشاب الأشقر قليلاً قبل أن يجيبه وهو يشير إلى الأرض:

- "خذ واحداً"
- "أخاف أن أعطلك عن شيء"

يرد عليه الشاب الواقف:

- "لا، إطلاقاً"

يزيح الشاب الواقف حقيبته عن كتفه قبل أن يضعها أرضاً ويجلس بجانبها، يتبادل الشاب الواقف حقيبته من على كتفه قبل أن يضعها أرضاً ويجلس بجانبها، ينظر الشاب الأشقر إلى الكرسي:

- "تخين؟"

يسأل الشاب الأشقر وهو يقدم علب السجائر نحو الجالس بجانبه، يسحب منها السجارة الأخرى سجارة:

- "في مجتمع المدخنين لنا نفس العادات باختلاف ثقافتنا"

يبتسم الجالس بجنبه مواقفاً إياه الرأي قبل أن يقول:

- "كأننا متحدون"
صمت الشابان قليلاً قبل أن يسأل ذو الشعر الأسود:

- "رأيتاك قبل قليل في البوابة 212، هل انت من هناك؟"

يجيبه الأشقر:

- "هل تقصد من البوابة ذاتها؟ أم من الواجهة المنطقية من تلك البوابة؟"

- "لا يمكن أن تكون من تلك البوابة؟ تخيل أن تعيش في بوابة مطار؟"

يضحك الاثنان معاً قبل أن يقول الأشقر:

- "في الواقع لقد عشت في بوابة مطار لثلاثة أيام ذات مرة، تأخرت حدث عطل في الطائرة قبل الإقلاع، ولم تستطع شركة الطيران ارسال طائرة بديلة قبل ثلاثة أيام."

- "ولم تعرضكم الشركة أو تنقلكم لفندق ما؟"

- "في الواقع عرضت الشركة نقتننا لفندق خارج المطار، ولم أستطع الخروج لأن جوازي يحتاج تأشيرة دخول، وجدت نفسي عالقاً في المطار أنتظر المجهول.

صدق الbash ذو الشعر الاسود قليلاً فسأل بنبرة استغراب:

- "لم يبلغكم بموعد عودتكم."

- "ولم بيثوكم بموعد عودتكم.

ابتسام الشاب الآخر قليلاً ثم أجاب قائلاً:

- "سألنا موظفة الشركة فأخبرنا بأنه لا يعرف وأن الأمر خارج سيطرته لكننا معتادون عليه مثل هذه الأشياء في بلادنا."

- "ومن أين انت?"

"أنا من برلاد كثيرة الأزمات والمشاكل، يموت فيها المريض دون أن يجد علاجاً، ويموت فيها مواطنها جوعاً دون أن يجد غذاء، أنا من بلاد يضربها الفقر والجهل، دون أن يفكر أحد في إيجاد حل لكل هذا."

"المضحك المبكي هنا أن هذه المواصفات تتطبيقي على عدد كبير من الدول بما فيها بلادي، لا يمكن أن تكون من بلادي أليس كذلك؟ لماذا نتكلم بالإنجليزية إذن؟"
يضحك الإنسان معاً قبل أن يعود ذو الشعر الأسود للحديث قائلً:

- "إذا كنت لا تريد الإفصاح عن بلادك فأن أفهم ذلك، لكن قرب لي المسافة على الأقل، فلتأخذ البحر المتوسط مرجعاً مثلاً وحدد لي منه في أي اتجاه تعيش".

- "أعيش في ساحل الجنوب، وأنت؟"

- "شعرت أنك تعيش في دولة مثل دولتي، أنا اعيش في ساحل الشمالي"

ينظر الجنوبي نحو الآخر قليلاً ثم يقول:

- "أتسمي نفسك أوربياً بهذا الشعر الأسود؟ يا صديقي أنا أوربي أكثر منك"

يعودان للضحك مرة أخرى.

يسأل الشمالي من جديد:

- "إلى أين وجهتك؟"

- "عند بلادي حتى أقضي الصيف هنا، وبالعودة إلى سؤالك، نعم كنت في تلك البوابة أنتظر طائرتي".

- "لا أؤمن بالصدف كثيرًا، ولكن هذه حقًا صدفة، فأن أ أيضاً في انتظار تلك الطائرة؟"

- "عمل أم سياحة؟"

- "في الواقع سياحة"

- "انتترك كل دول العالم وتقصِّد بلادي للسياحة؟"

- "بلادكم جميلة!"

- "من الخارج فقط جميلة، أنت مسح السياح لا ترون الجانب المظلم في الدول التي تقصدونها".

استغرب الجنوبي قليلاً قائلًا قائلًا.
"ماذا تعني؟"

"أعني أنكم لا ترون معانتنا، تذهبون لأماكن لا يمكن للمواطن العادي دخولها، تشترون هدايا وتذكارات لا تعرفون كم من شخص عانى حتى تصنعونها."

"ولكن هذا الأمر في كل الدول، أنت مثلاً إذا ذهبت إلى بلادي كسائح ستفعل نفس الأشياء.

"عزيزي أنا من جنوب المتوسط، حتى أزور بلادك أنا أحتاج لملحق مالي، لتأشيرة، ومجموعة من الأوراق حتى أحصل على تأشيرة، ثم موعد في السفارة ثم بعد كل هذا، من الممكن جداً أن يتم رفض طلبي بحجة أن شخصاً من نفس بلدي قام ذات يوم بمهمة إرهابية.

يعم الصمت بين الإثنين قبل أن يعود الجنوبي للحديث مرة أخرى.

"أنتم ترون بلادنا كمكان تقضون فيه إجازة الصيف، بينما نحن نرى بلادكم أرضاً لتحقيق أحلامنا البسيطة.

"وماهي أحلامكم؟"

"أن أدرس، أن أتزوج، أن أعمل، أن أحقق ذاتي، عندما كنت صغيراً كنت أحلم أن أصبح لاعب كرة قدم محترف يمثل منتخب بلاده ويجلب لها الأمجاد.

"هيم مثل من أحلامنا، أنا أيضاً أحلم بكل هذا، أحلم ربما بكل ما تحلم به، عندما كنت صغيراً كنت أحلم أن أكون أيها بذلك الأحلام.

"قد كانوا يخبروني بذلك الشيء، بأن أنتظر قطار الأحلام والحق بقطار العمل.

"ومالذي حدث؟"

"لم يكن هناك قطارات في بلادي، فنحن لا نمتلك سكة حديدية أصلاً.

يضحك الإنسان مرة أخرى قبل أن يقول الشمالي:

"أنا من جنوب المتوسط، حتى أزور بلادك أنا أحتاج لملحق مالي، لتأشيرة، ومجموعة من الأوراق حتى أحصل على تأشيرة، ثم موعد في السفارة ثم بعد كل هذا، من الممكن جداً أن يتم رفض طلبي بحجة أن شخصاً من نفس بلدي قام ذات يوم بمهمة إرهابية.

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يضحك الإنسان مرة أخرى قبل أن يقول الشمالي:
"سعيد حقا للقائك، لم أكن أتصور أبدا أنه بالرغم من البحر الفاصل إلا أننا نتشارك ذات الأحلام والطموحات ربما.

"إنه سر من أسرار المتوسط يا صديقي، ربما لو كانت حركتنا لبلادكم أسهل لما اعتقنا بوجود فوارق بيننا.

"صحيح، ربما لوجدنا فعلا بأننا نتشارك في أشياء عديدة، ولركزنا مثلا على هذه القواسم المشتركة.

ينظر الشمالي لساعته قبل أن ينهض مسيراً قادماً في هلع:

"سرعة يجب أن نلحق بالطائرة" يجيب الجنوبي بهدوء

"هؤلاء الطائرات كالقطارات التي ننتظرها، ستتأخر" وما أدرك بذلك.

"لو كانت هذه الطائرة يا عزيزي القادم من شمال المتوسط من شمالي القادمين من شمال المتوسط متجهة لبلادك، لخرجت مسرعة في موعدها، ولكنها تعود لبلادي، وكعادة كل الطائرات القادمة بلادي، ستخرج متأخرة، حتى الطائرات تشعر بأن بلادكم أفضل، أجلس الآن ودعوني أدعوك على كوب قهوة ولنكم نستثنا عن أحلامنا.

عاد الشمالي للجلوس في إنتظر طائرتهما، يتبدآن أطراف الحديث، يضحكان من حين لآخر، بينما ظلت الطائرات في الخارج تقلع وتهبط حاملة العديد من المسافرين الذين يحملون قصصاً مختلفة ربما تشبه قصتنا هذه، ربما تختلف عنها، الأكيد، هو أنه بإختلاف الساحل الذي نعيش عليه، سنظل من سكان المتوسط، وستجمعنا ذات الأفكار والأحلام كما جمعنا ذات البحر.

أحمد بن منوران
A Conversation at the Airport

Ahmed O. Benomran. Libya

At the airport, there are huge crowds of travelers, arriving, leaving. Each is carrying a bag or pulling a suitcase behind them. Millions of faces, and every suitcase tells a story. Every face, if you look closer, is a novel. In the smoking area, a young man in his twenties, with blond hair, sits on the floor with a cup of coffee in front of him. He is watching the take-off and landing of the planes in the dark night, enjoying a soft summer breeze as it soothes the summer heat. He lights a cigarette as he continues to watch the planes. His backpack lies next to him and he leans on it, while his laptop rests on his legs. Another tall young man, slightly older with dark hair, approaches him. The blond man looks up, and the other young man smiles as he says, “Nice seat.”

The blond one laughs, then waves at the floor and says: “Be my guest.”

“I don’t want to distract you.”

“No, not at all.”

The standing man takes off his backpack, places it on the floor and sits down next to it.

“A smoke?” the blond one asks, offering his cigarettes to the one sitting next to him. Taking one, the blond man lights it for him.

The other one pats his hand, thanking him for lighting the cigarette.

The blond one smiles.

“As smokers we all have the same habits, even if we come from different cultures.”

The young man next to him smiles in agreement, and then says: “As if we were united.”

The two young men fall silent, and then the dark-haired one asks: “I just saw you at Gate 212. Are you from there?”

The blond one asks in turn: “You mean the gate itself? Or the destination designated by that gate?”

“It can’t be the gate itself. Imagine living at an airport gate!”

They laugh. Then the blond one explains, “In fact, I did once live at an airport gate for three days. It was late, and there was something wrong with the plane just before takeoff. And the airline could not send a replacement flight until three days later.”

“And you were never recompensated? Or at least taken to some hotel?”

“They did offer to take us to a hotel outside the airport. But I couldn’t go because my passport requires an entry visa. So I found myself stuck at the airport, awaiting the unknown.”

The dark-haired man was taken aback and wondered: “And they never told you of the time?”
The other one smiled. “We asked the airline officer in charge, but he claimed he didn’t know and that it was out of his hands. We’re used to these things in our country.”

“Where are you from?”

“From a country abounding in crises and problems. A country where the diseased die for lack of treatment, where the citizen dies of hunger for lack of food. I am from a country where poverty and ignorance prevail. And no one thinks of finding a solution.”

“It’s funny, but this description applies to many a country, including my own. It can’t be my country, can it? Why do we speak in English, then?”

They laugh, and then the dark-haired one resumes their chat. “If you don’t want to name your country, I understand. But help me along. Let’s take the Mediterranean as a reference point – in which direction do you live?”

“The southern shore. And you?”

“I felt it was a country like mine. I live on the northern shore.”

The southerner looks at the other one a while, then asks: “You call yourself European with that dark hair? My friend, I’m far more European than you are.”

They laugh again.

The northerner asks: “Where are you headed?”

“Back home for the summer holidays. To go back to your question, yes, I was at that gate awaiting my flight.”

“I don’t believe much in coincidences, but this one is certainly a coincidence. I, too, am awaiting that flight.”

“Business or pleasure?”

“Pleasure, to be honest.”

“Of all the countries of the world, you come to my country for tourism?”

“Your country is beautiful!”

“Only on the outside. You tourists never get to see the dark side of the countries you visit.”

The southerner was a bit surprised, and then asked: “How do you mean?”

“I mean you don’t see our suffering. You go to places no regular citizen can access. You buy gifts and souvenirs, but you don’t know how many people toiled to produce them.”

“But that applies to all countries. If you come to my country, for instance, as a tourist, you would do the same.”

“My dear friend, I’m from the southern shores of the Mediterranean. To visit your country, I would need oodles of money, a visa, endless paperwork to get the visa, an appointment at the embassy. And after all that, they may simply reject my application under the pretext that one day a man from my country committed a terrorist attack.”

Silence falls for a while before the southerner continues: “You see our countries as a place to spend your summer holiday. We see your countries as the land where we may fulfil our simplest dreams.”
“What would those dreams be?”

“To pursue my education. To get married. To find a job. To settle down. To fulfil myself. When I was little, I dreamed of becoming a professional football player who would play with the national team and achieve glorious victories for my country.”

“We have the same dreams. I, too, used to dream of this. I probably dream the same dreams as you do. When I was little, I, too, dreamt of playing with the national team. But back then my dad thought that my education was more important. He always said focus on the path towards education. The path to your dreams will come later. When I completed my education and thought I could now change to my dream path, I found myself on the path towards a career and marriage. I found myself moving from one waiting point to the next. The paths I was waiting for had multiplied endlessly, and I forgot about the path of my dreams.”

“They used to tell me the same. To take the career path and let the dream path wait.”

“And what happened?”

“There aren’t any paths in my country to follow!”

They, yet again, and the northerner says: “I’m really glad I met you. I never imagined that despite the big blue sea that separates us, we have so many dreams and aspirations in common.”

“It’s one of the charms of the Mediterranean, my friend. Maybe if the mobility towards your countries were a bit easier, we would not believe that there were so many differences between us.”

“True. We may, indeed, find that we have many things in common, and we would focus more on these commonalities.”

The northerner looks at his watch, only to get up in a hurry, panicking. “Hurry up, we have a plane to catch.”

But the southerner looks at him calmly and says: “Calm down. This plane, like the trains and paths that we’re awaiting – they are always late.”

“How would you know?”

“My dear friend who comes from the north of the Mediterranean. If this plane were en route to your country, it would leave on time. But it’s heading back to my country. Like all planes heading towards my country, it will be delayed. Even the flights know that your country is better. Now sit down and let me get you another cup of coffee and we can chat a bit more about our dreams.”

The northerner sits down again, and they wait for their flight. They chat and they laugh, while the planes outside take off and land, carrying travellers with diverse stories. They may be very similar to our story, or very different. But no doubt, regardless of the shore we live on, we’ll remain the inhabitants of the Mediterranean. And we’ll be brought together by similar thoughts and dreams, just as that sea has brought us together.

The End
Domy na hraniciach

Miroslava Kulková. Slovensko

Mikelis zastal uprostred cesty. Autá trúbili, vodiči naňho kričali vlákas!, ale on nič z toho nevnimal. Po chodníku na druhej strane kráčala jeho matka, ibaže o tridsať rokov mladšia.

Odlepil jednu nohu, potom druhú a vykročil k prízraku. Bol čoraz zmätenejší. Pred ním totiž kráčali rovnaké šaty, ako mala jeho matka na starej fotke. Gombíky na tých istých miestach, zaštite roztrhnutie na sukni, keď jeho matka preliezala susedov plot kvôli nezrelým pomelám. Iba opasok chýbal, no na šatách ostali putká, ktoré si ho pamätali. Žena mala dokonca rovnaký zostrih vlasov, ako v mladosti nosievala jeho matka. Až keď ho do nosa udrela asfaltové výpary a pach hnijúcej zeleniny, uveril, že to nie je sen a on sa skutočne nachádza blízko trhoviska v starej časti Nicosie.

Načiahol ruku. Šaty boli na dotyk prekvapivo drsné a trochu vlhké od potu.


„Ahoj, ja som Mikelis. Môžem ťa pozvať na frappé?“

V páse zeme pár desiatok metrov širokom a niekoľko kilometrov dlhom je zakonzervovaná minulosť. V zaprášených výkladoch bledne sortiment zo sedemdesiatych rokov. Červená Toyota Corolla, úplne novučičká v sedemdesiatom štvrtom, má na tachometri už desaťročia 32 mil. V medzičase sú uväznené automobily, veľké televízory s anténou či rádiá.

vyhodila do vzduchu i krehkú rovnováhu na rozdelenom ostrove. Okrem výbušnín sú pre vojakov Spojených národov najváčším nebezpečenstvom padajúce časti budov, ktoré bez ľudskej ruky chátrajú. Hrdza pomaly rozpožiera vývesné štíty, reklamy a ploty.

Modré barety deň za dňom osamelo hliadkujú v zemi duchov.

Ani mačky, mýtické tuláčky, týmto časopriestorom neprechádzajú.

Pred domom s hnedou doškovou strechou stál mŕtvy strom. Z mora ho ovieval slaný vzduch a horúce cyperské slnko ho zafarbilo do čierna. Vyzeral ako z pekla, ale to v sedemdesiatom štvrtom pripomínal celý Cyprus.


Cemaliyin otec bol turecký Cyperećan z Pafosu, mama Turkyňa z pevniny, ktorá sem pred rokmi prišla za prácou. Na juhu ostať nemohli.


Po narodení Cemalyie si uvedomili, že ostrov sa rozdelil nenávratne. Nikto sa už do rodného domu nevráti.

Na jeseň, keď začala Cemo chodiť do školy, dom prvý raz premaľovali.

Na mŕtvom strome sa objavil zelený púčik.

Mikelis Cemaliye ukázal komiks Sandman asi po polroku chodenia. Bol to jeho najobľúbenejší predajný artikl v knihkupectve blízko hraničného prechodu Ledras v rozdelenom hlavnom

Mačkám v tureckej časti trčali rebrá, tváre mali býť zdravo zavierať zavážnymi javami a v očiach lačný výraz divých šliam. Ludi sa báli. V gréckej Nicosii sa mačkám lesli kožušky, jasné oči im nekali hlad ani choroby. Boli to malé domáce bohyne, ktoré kdekoľvek nakrmiti a kedykoľvek pohladiť. Raz sa so svojím pozorovaním zdôverila Mikelisovi. „To je jasné, keď sa Turci nevedia postarať o ľudí, ľahký sa budú o mačky.“ Potom vstal, objal ju a do vlasov jej zašepkal prepáč.

Cemaliye pracovala v neziskovke, ktorej cieľom bolo naviazať dialóg medzi mladými z oboch komunít. Mikelis bol pre ňu malým zázrakom. Nadchla ho pre rôzne projekty a rád jej s nimi pripadali ako Rómeo a Júlia, ktorí svojou láskou spoja rozprávané rodiny.

Cemaliye je vzrušená a nedočkavá. Konečne je to tu.

Mikelis sedí v aute vedľа nej a s rozšírenými zreničkami sleduje každý detail cesty. Odfrkné nad niekoľko desiatok metrov veľkou tureckou vlajkou, namaľovanou na kopci pri diaľnici z Nicosie. Provokácia. Cemaliye sa zahanbene pomrví na sedadle.

Dnes predstaví Mikelisa svojim rodičom. Ukáže mu svoj rodný dom a Kyréniu. Cestu lemujú vysoké hory, je jar a všetko kvitne. V diaľkе sa ligoce azúrovo modré more.

Cemaliye sa chce vyhnúť tradičnej zápche na hlavnej ceste do Kyrénie, a tak to vezme po bočných cestách cestách cez chudobnejšie predmestie. Hrá jazz na CD – grécke rádio po prechode hranice vystrieda zrnenie a turecké púšťať nechce.

Mikelis ohrámen pozoruje rozostavané budovy a špinavé ulice.

Pozrie sa na ňu a Cemaliye nemôže ignorovať ten krátky záblesk zadostučinenia, ktorý si ani on sám neuviedomil. „Vedel som, že nič nemáte!“

Vysvetlí mu, že na tureckej strane sa veľmi dlho budovy neopravovali, pretože dodnes nie sú vyriešené majetkové vzťahy. A Severocyperskú tureckú republiku okrem Turecka nikto ako samostatný štát neuznáva. Nemôžu teda žiadať o žiadne fondy a dotácie od Európskej únie, ako ich gréckí bratia. V poslednom čase sa tu ale buduje vo veľkom, najmä obrovské hotely pre turistov.

Po chvíli ju Mikelis nežne pohládl a nechá dlaň na jej kolene.
Cemo uvidí známe obrysy stromu i doškovej strechy a srdce sa jej rozbúši. Rodičia vyjdú na prah, oblečený vo sviatočnom. Usmievajú sa. Mama drží otca za ruku. Až keď Cemo zaparkuje blízko dverí, všimne si, že mamine hánky sú od pevného stisku úplne biele.

„Cemo, toto je váš dom?“ Mikelis ju pustí a strnulo hľadí pred seba.

Cemaliye nechápavo prisvedčí.

„Odvez ma naspáť.“

„Čo sa deje, láska?“

„Cheem sa vrátiť.“

Cemaliye ho chytí za ruku, Mikelis sa vytrhne.

„Keď moji rodičia utekali pred tureckými vojakmi z Kyrénie, vzali si so sebou iba jednu malú tašku. Iba to, čo za pár minút stihli pozbierať. Bol v nej jeden kabát, zopár fotiek a mamine šperky. Tie fotky máme zarámované. Visia v kuchyni. Na tento dom sa dívam odmalička.“

Cemaliye sa mu vystrašene pozrie do očí. Tuší, že ju do svojho prenajatého bytu v Nicosii už nepustí.

Mikelis s tichou rozhodnosťou nastúpi do auta a prekríži si na prsiach ruky. Cemaliye vykročí k rodičom, objíme ich a zašepká: „Nepôjde to. Bývame v dome jeho rodičov.“

Strom sa začína triasť a na auto padajú sýtozelené listy. Cemaliye nastúpi, naštartuje a pomaly vезie svojho Rómea naspáť, odkiaľ prišiel.

Necháva za sebou lysejúci strom, ktorý ešte dlho nezarastie, a plačúcich rodičov, ktorí jej za- nedlho vyrozprávajú skutočný pôvod šiat v podkroví.
Mikelis stopped in the middle of the road. The cars were honking and the drivers were yelling vlákas! at him, but he heard none of that. His mother was walking down the street on the other side of the road, but she was thirty years younger.

He lifted one foot, then the other and he walked towards the apparition. He was growing more and more confused. Walking in front of him was the same dress that his mother was wearing in an old photograph. The buttons were in the same places, there was that sewn-up part that she had ripped when she was climbing over the neighbour’s fence to pick a few unripe grapefruits. Only the belt was missing, but the belt loops that recalled the belt were still on the dress. Even the lady’s hair was in the same style that his mother used to wear it when she was young. It was only when the smell of tar and the stench of rotting vegetables hit him on the nose that he realised that he wasn’t dreaming and that he was actually near the marketplace in the old part of Nicosia.

He reached out with his hand. The dress was surprisingly rough and also a little moist with sweat.

Cemaliye was startled and instinctively jumped back. She was so shocked that she didn’t even start screaming. She simply took a good look at the olive-skinned youth with her big dark eyes. Why is he looking at me as if he was seeing an apparition? She took a look at herself, all the way from her sandals up to her breasts – nothing, she looked completely normal.

Mikelis was standing there with his hand stretched out and his eyes wide open. Cemaliye thought to herself that he was looking rather silly, but pretty harmless. He was very attractive. She was quite interested in finding out why he was staring at her like this.

“Hi, my name is Mikelis. Can I invite you for a frappé?”

The past is conserved in a strip of land that is several metres wide and several tens of kilometres long. Goods from the 1970’s are growing pale in dusty shopping windows. A red Toyota Corolla, which was brand new in 1974, has shown 32 miles on the mile counter for decades now. There are cars, large TV sets with antennas or radios trapped in this temporal limbo.

Only soldiers wearing blue berets carefully walk through the Dead Zone, which is what the locals call this place. They are more diplomats than fighters, getting more training in peace-making than in close combat. Young Brits, who were trained to survive in explosive arid areas, learn about nuance here. They carefully guard bags of sand that mark the border between the Greek and Turkish part. If they find they have been moved by a couple of centimetres in the morning, they move them back to their original position. A quick inter-
vention can save lives. In winter, they are on the lookout for people who come to pick wild asparagus that grows in the untouched land between the trenches. They watch out for smugglers and poachers. A forgotten landmine that would blow any Cypriot to pieces would also blow up the fragile equilibrium on the divided island. Apart from explosives, the greatest threat to UN soldiers is falling parts of buildings, which have been falling into a state of disrepair without humans to take care of them. Rust is slowly eating away at signs, ads and fences.

Day after day, the lonely blue berets guard this land of ghosts.

Not even cats, the mythical wanderers, walk through this space-time.

There was a dead tree standing in front of the house with a thatched roof. Salty air was blowing at it from the sea and the scalding Cypriot sun turned it black. It looked like a tree from hell, but the whole of Cyprus resembled hell in 1974.

To Cemaliye’s parents, the house resembled their own house they had abandoned in Paphos in the south. They ran away from the fighting. Greek Cypriots had been longing for independence for ages and when the international community refused to grant it to them, they took matters into their own hands. Then Turkish soldiers arrived in the north of the island with orders to protect their language compatriots. Greek Cypriots had to leave their homes in the north in their pyjamas and only with a few family photos they managed to grab. The cruelty of the Turkish soldiers will never be forgotten among the Greek Cypriots. Many of them have never learnt what had happened to their family members.

Cemaliye’s father was a Turkish Cypriot from Paphos and her mother was from mainland Turkey and she had come to the island seeking work years ago. There was no way they could stay in the south.

For the first few years, they kept imagining what the family who had lived here before them may have looked like. The lady of the house had beautiful dresses but Cemaliye’s mother was ashamed to wear them. It was Cemo who found them hidden in the attic later and decided to give them a go. The only thing her mother had told her about where the dress had come from was that she had found it at the waste dump in Kyrenia.

For ten years they lived in the house as if they were ghosts. Every day they expected the original owners to return and they were always ready to leave immediately. They made no changes, no repairs.

After Cemaliye was born they realised the island had been divided for good. Nobody was coming back to their house ever.

In the autumn, when Cemo first started going to school, they redecorated the walls in the house for the first time.

A little green bud appeared on the dead tree.

Mikelis showed Cemaliye the Sandman comic book about half a year after they started dating. It was his favourite item that was sold at the bookstore near the Ledras border crossing in the divided capital city where he
worked. Cemaliye fell for the story of Dream immediately. She also felt like a traveller between worlds. Every morning on her way to work on the span of several hundreds of metres, she changed her SIM card and switched the alphabet on her phone. She replaced the lengthy singing of the muezzin with Greek pop songs. She travelled light years. Compared to the Greek part, the Turkish part of the divided Nicosia was like a scary dream where everything seems familiar, but at the same time absolutely strange.

The cats in the Turkish part were so skinny you could see their ribs. Their faces were covered in scars and they had in their eyes the hungry look of wild beasts. They were even scared of people. The cats in Greek Nicosia had shiny coats and their bright eyes weren’t dimmed by hunger or disease. They were little domestic goddesses who were getting fed and cuddled everywhere they went. She once shared this discovery with Mikelis. “It’s simple. If the Turks cannot take care of their own people, they will hardly be able to take care of cats.” Then he got up, hugged her and whispered “Sorry” into her hair.

Cemaliye worked for a non-profit organisation that was trying to start a dialogue between young people in both communities. Mikelis was a small miracle for her. She got him excited about various projects and he liked to help her with them. They felt like Romeo and Juliet whose love would bring together two quarrelling houses.

Cemaliye is giddy and excited. The moment has finally arrived.

Mikelis is sitting in the car next to her and, with his eyes wide open, he is watching every detail of the road. He scoffs at a huge Turkish flag that somebody had painted on the hill next to the highway from Nicosia. Provocation. Cemaliye squirms in her seat with shame.

Today, she will introduce Mikelis to the parents. She will show him her birth-house and Kyrenia. The road is surrounded by high mountains, it’s spring and everything is in full bloom. In the distance, you can see the sky-blue sea.

Cemaliye wants to avoid the traditional traffic jams on the main road to Kyrenia, so she is taking the back roads through the poor neighbourhoods. Jazz music is playing from a CD – the Greek radio was replaced with static after they crossed the border and she doesn’t want to turn on a Turkish radio.

Mikelis is watching the buildings under construction and the dirty streets with amazement.

He looks at her and Cemaliye cannot ignore the short moment of satisfaction he himself failed to realise. “I knew you guys had nothing at all!”

She explains to him that the buildings on the Turkish side haven’t been repaired for a long time because the ownership issues haven’t been settled yet. And the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus isn’t recognised as an independent state by anybody but Turkey. This means they cannot apply for funds and subsidies from the European Union, as opposed to their Greek brothers. However, recently there has been a lot of construction activity going on, mainly huge hotels for tourists.
After a while, Mikelis gives her a tender caress and leaves the palm of his hand on her knee.

Cemo sees the familiar outline of the tree and the thatched roof and her heart starts pounding. Her parents walk out onto the doorstep, dressed in their Sunday clothes. They are smiling. Mother and father are holding hands. It’s only when Cemo parks close enough to the door that she notices that mum’s knuckles are all white from how hard she is clutching father’s hand.

“Cema, is this your house?” Mikelis lets go of her and keeps looking motionlessly.

Cemaliye agrees, not understanding what he means.

“Take me back home.”

“What’s going on, my love?”

“I want to go back home.”

Cemaliye grabs his hand, but Mikelis breaks free.

“When my parents were running away from Turkish soldiers from Kyrenia, they only managed to take with them a small bag. Only the things they managed to put into it in a few minutes. One coat, a couple of photos and my mum’s jewellery. My parents had those photos framed. They are hung in the kitchen. I’ve been looking at this house since I was a little boy.”

Cemaliye looks him in the eyes, frightened. She feels he won’t be letting her back into his rented apartment in Nicosia.

With silent resolve, Mikelis gets into the car and folds his arms over his chest. Cemaliye walks towards her parents, hugs them and whispers: “It won’t work. We are living in his parents’ house.”

The tree starts trembling and dark green leaves start falling on the car. Cemaliye gets into the car, starts the engine and slowly drives her Romeo back to where he came from.

She leaves behind a bare tree that will not be covered in leaves for a long time to come and her crying parents, who will shortly be telling her about the true origin of the dress in the attic.
Confío en ti

Patricia Jimeno Fernández. España

Hace frío, a pesar de que el sol brilla en el cielo; siento mi cuerpo pesado, pero son mis ropas las que me fuerzan a hundirme; yo, tengo miedo.

Y ahora, me arrepiento.

Solo había seis espacios en el bote, y ellos me regalaron uno; me miraron a los ojos, y me dijeron que confiaban en mí, me dieron lo último que les quedaba, la esperanza de seguir vivos, al menos, hasta el día que yo muriera. Parece mentira que esto tan solo haya pasado unas horas atrás.

¿Qué habrá sido de ellos?

Era aún de noche cuando la barcaza comenzaba a hundirse, yo estaba dormida, el movimiento de las olas me relajaba, y sobre el regazo de mi madre descansaba confiando que este viaje sería el inicio de una vida mejor para ambas. Mi padre había desaparecido un día, llevaba mucho tiempo diciéndonos que viajaría hasta España, y que una vez llegase nos ayudaría a nosotras, primero con dinero, y luego sacándonos de Libia. No sé si llegó a España, no sé qué le hizo pensar que estaríamos mejor sin él, pero con dinero; mi papá nunca más regresó, y ahora, mi mamá, nunca más regresaría.

Estoy cansada, pero aún siento sus ojos mirándome, mientras me levantaban en volandas, y rápidamente me sacaban de la barcaza. Creo que nunca seré capaz de transmitir lo que en ese momento sentí; no espero que el que hoy me escucha lo entienda, solo necesito contarlo, y compartir este peso que me honrará de por vida.

Cuando la incertidumbre acecha, el ser humano solo puede reaccionar de dos formas, con miedo, o con amor.

– Malak, hija, ¿y tú? ¿Cuántos años tienes? – Una voz me gritó desde la otra punta de la noche.

– Tengo catorce, los cumplí hace unos meses. – Nos estábamos hundiendo, y estas personas solo hablaban de sueños y anhelos. Teníamos poco tiempo para salir de allí, el capitán de la barca nos dijo que había un bote salvavidas, y que solo salvaría a cinco personas junto a él.

– ¿Y por qué quieres vivir, Malak? – Me gritó otra voz. Mi madre llevaba un rato congelada, sin decir nada, llorando en silencio, mojándose la cara ya húmeda por las salpicaduras de las olas. Sus lágrimas no tardaron en mezclarse con las mías, cuando contesté:
– No lo sé, solo sé que no quiero morir aquí. – Ahora me pregunto, por qué no dije lo que sentía, por qué no salvé a mi madre conmigo, yo solo quería que nuestro sueño se hiciese realidad, y poder empezar juntas nuestra nueva vida.

Un silencio sepulcral catacumbó los últimos momentos de esperanza, cuando las manos empezaron a levantarse, en votación de los elegidos para ocupar esos cinco puestos en el bote salvavidas. Eran cuatro los que habían convencido al resto de que, a pesar de que sus vidas eran tan valiosas como las de ellos, ese día el cielo estaba de su parte. La barcaza se hundía lentamente cada vez más, como el frío del agua que se introducía en nuestros tobillos.

– Malak no merece morir aquí. Tiene que descubrir aún por qué ha de vivir, y nadie merece morir sin saberlo. – Dijo en voz grave y potente el hombre que se sentaba a nuestro lado. No paraba de mirarnos a mi madre y a mí, y yo no supe qué decir. – Soy médico, y mi vida es valiosa porque seré capaz de salvar muchas otras, pero qué clase de médico sería, si no soy capaz de entregar mi vida, mi cuerpo y mi alma, por alguien que la necesita más que yo mismo. Cógetela y llévate la barquero, y asegúrate de que llega a buen puerto, porque en su nombre está escrito, ella es el ángel que llevará nuestras almas hasta la gloria del cielo.

– Malak, sé feliz y fuerte, recuerda de dónde vienes, y quiénes dieron la vida por ti. – Una persona que no atiné a ver, me susurró mientras cruzaba la barcaza.

– Chica, que tu vida honre la vida de la hija que perdí por las fiebres en Libia. – Gritó una mujer mientras llevaba mi mano a su frente, y con un alarido desgarrador comenzó a llorar.

– Te quiero.- Y con un beso, mi madre soltó mi mano, para que me sacaran de una vez de aquel ataúd en el que se había convertido nuestro pasaje de ensueño.

Recuerdo esta sensación, tengo la boca muy salada, como si aún siguiera en el regazo de mi madre, mientras ella lloraba y sus lágrimas llegaban a mis labios.

Nadie piensa que ese será el día en el que tenga que morir, nadie imagina que haya que hacer una entrevista con la parca, para explicarle si es tu vida o la de tu vecino la que tiene que tomar. No puedo olvidar cómo subimos al bote, habíamos ganado esa partida, pero a cambio de cargar el mayor peso que imaginamos sobre nuestros hombros.

Estoy cansada, mis piernas cada vez se mueven menos.

El barquero nos había engañado, y nos obligó a saltar en mitad del mar, cerca de la costa que aún no divisábamos, y a punta de pistola, nos dijo que él ya había cumplido, y que fuera Dios el que ahora se apiadase de nuestras almas.
Tengo miedo. ¿Ahora qué? Si muero, todos habremos muerto, nunca podré ser médico, y salvar las vidas de otras personas, nunca podré tratar de encontrar la felicidad y honrar la memoria de aquella hija. Yo… nunca más abriré los ojos, y entonces, mi madre tampoco. ¡No!

—¡Ayuda! ¡Por favor! Por favor… sacadme de aquí. — Mi boca se llena de nuevo de agua, toso, y me callo.

No sé si es el sonido de las olas invadiendo mis oídos, o el eco que aún sigue retumbando dentro de mí. Pero mi madre está gritando “Te quiero”, mientras me alejo, y escucho poco a poco su voz apagándose. Mamá, gracias… Gracias por todo, porque has sido tú la que me ha enseñado a ser fuerte, a estar orgullosa de estar viva, y a luchar por la vida que todos nos merecemos. Todas esas personas, murieron aquel día en el Mediterráneo, en una barcaza que no había sido diseñada para cruzar en mar abierto a cincuenta pasajeros. Cada uno de ellos había pagado religiosamente su billete, para un viaje de no retorno, hasta la muerte.

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—El Mediterráneo se ha convertido en el cementerio del mundo. La incertidumbre de si mañana también podremos comer, de si mis hijos podrán seguir estudiando, o si mi mujer no morirá dando a luz, empuja a una orilla del Mediterráneo a cruzar todo el mar con la esperanza de que sus miedos desaparezcan, y encontrar el sueño europeo, que los mismos europeos queríamos años atrás encontrar en Estados Unidos. Yo he sido superviviente de una barcaza que naufragó 20 años atrás, y he sido superviviente de un traficante de vidas humanas, que me obligó a saltar de un bote en plena mar. No pido que entendáis mi sufrimiento, solo pido que me ayudéis a cumplir todos los deseos que aquel día mis compañeros de viaje depositaron en mí, solo quiero que me brindéis vuestro apoyo, y busquemos entre todos una solución al éxodo que presencia cada pocas semanas el Mediterráneo. No necesito vivir muchos años, porque es humanamente imposible cumplir todos los que aquel día esas personas de sus vidas me entregaron. Pero, por favor, hagamos algo. Porque aunque me llamo Malak, que significa ángel en árabe, es aquel pesca dor el ángel que me salvó la vida, y, por desgracia, no hay tantos ángeles para vidas que salvar.

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Hola, me llamo Patricia, soy de Granada y siempre he tenido una vida feliz. Tuve la suerte de nacer en España, el lugar que muchas personas desean alcanzar. Os preguntaréis por qué he decidido escribir esta historia, y tengo una buena explicación que dar.

Decidí realizar un voluntariado en el cuerpo solidario Europeo en Turquía, en Ankara, y allí hicimos una actividad que me marcaría para siempre.
Todos los voluntarios nos sentamos en círculo en una habitación, y cerramos los ojos, pensamos en nuestros familiares, en las personas que más queríamos, y a las que más nos dolería no volver a ver. Escribimos cómo nos despediríamos de ellas en una carta, y solo nos dieron tres minutos para ello. Recreábamos que nos encontrábamos en una barcaza a punto de hundirse, y era el momento de explicar por qué los demás deberían salvar nuestras vidas. Yo no supe qué decir en ese momento, solo que deseaba vivir, y deseaba que todos lo hicieran, y que nunca habría razón suficiente para condenar a otra persona en mi lugar. Votamos, pero lo hicimos entregando un papel a cada una de las personas que pensábamos que merecían vivir, y mientras las mirábamos a los ojos, les decíamos: “Confío en ti”. Este acto, tenía un doble filo, porque al mismo tiempo, mientras mirabas a los ojos de los que condenabas, debías decir: “Lo siento, no confío en ti”.

Todo el mundo había explicado por qué su momento aún no había llegado, pero aún así, de algún modo, estábamos ignorándolos, y juzgando qué vida era más valiosa. No esperaba ser salvada, pero cuando abrí la mano para contar los votos que había recibido, una plaza del bote salvavidas era mía. Me subí al bote, y mientras mis compañeros me miraban con tristeza y confianza, ese día supe que mi vida había cambiado; y que siempre, y cuando menos te lo esperas, tienes que estar lista para luchar por ti y por todas las personas que alguna vez en ti han depositado sus esperanzas, que te han confiado sus secretos.

No fui capaz de mirarlos a los ojos sin que los míos se llenasen de lágrimas, y con toda la gratitud que pude mostrar en ese momento de fragilidad, les agradecí uno a uno su voto. Aún a día de hoy, me imagino que esta historia que aquí escribo hubiese sido realidad, y entonces recuerdo que lo es, y que son miles de personas las que a diario dejan su casa para, con esperanza, encontrar un lugar mejor, si al menos no para ellos, para sus hijos o compañeros.

Las casualidades solo existen para que un bien mayor se haga realidad, y este es mi momento para contarte mi historia.

Gracias
I Trust You

Patricia Jimeno Fernández. Spain

It’s cold, even though the sun is shining in the sky; my body feels heavy but it’s my clothes that make me sink; I’m afraid.

And now I regret it.

There were only six places in the boat, and they gave me one. They looked me in the eye and told me that they trusted me; they gave me the last thing they had left, the hope of staying alive, at least until the day I died. It seems incredible that this only happened a few hours ago.

What happened to them?

It was still night-time when the barge began to sink. I was asleep, the movement of the waves lulled me, and I rested on my mother’s lap, trusting that this journey would be the beginning of a better life for both of us. My father had disappeared one day, he had been telling us for a long time that he would travel to Spain, and that once he got there he would help us, first with money and then by getting us out of Libya. I don’t know if he got to Spain, I don’t know what made him think that we’d be better off without him but with money. My dad never came back, and now my mum would never return.

I’m tired, but I still feel their eyes staring at me, as they lifted me up, and quickly pulled me off the barge. I don’t believe I will ever be able to explain what I felt at that moment, I don’t expect anyone listening to me today to understand, I just need to tell the story, and share this burden that will honour me for life.

When uncertainty lurks, human beings can only react in two ways, with fear or with love.

“Malak, daughter, what about you? How old are you?” A voice shouts at me from the other end of the night.

“I’m 14, my birthday was a couple of months ago.” We were sinking, and these people were just talking about dreams and longings. We had little time to get out of there, the captain of the boat told us that there was a lifeboat, and that it would only save five people along with him.

“So why do you want to live, Malak?” another voice shouted to me. My mother had been frozen for a while, saying nothing, silently crying, wetting my face already damp from the splashes of the waves. Her tears were soon mixed with mine, when I answered:

“I don’t know, I just know I don’t want to die here.” Now I wonder why I didn’t say what I felt, why I didn’t save my mother with me, I just wanted our dream to come true, and to be able to start our new life together.

A deathly silence buried the last moments of hope, when the hands began to rise, voting for those chosen to occupy the five places in the lifeboat. There were four of them who had convinced the rest that even though their lives were as valuable as theirs, on that day
heaven was on their side. The barge slowly sank more and more, like the cold of the water that was creeping up our ankles.

“Malak doesn’t deserve to die here. She still has to discover why she has to live, and no one deserves to die without knowing that,” said the man sitting next to us in a serious and powerful voice. He kept looking at me and my mother and I didn’t know what to say. “I’m a doctor, and my life is valuable because I’ll be able to save many others, but what kind of doctor would I be if I couldn’t give my life, my body and my soul for someone who needs it more. Take her, boatman, and be sure she makes it, because in her name it is written, she is the angel who will take our souls to the glory of heaven.”

“Malak, be happy and strong, remember where you come from, and those who gave their lives for you,” whispered a person I couldn’t see as I crossed the barge.

“Girl, may your life honour the life of the daughter I lost to the fevers in Libya,” a woman yelled as she put my hand on her forehead, and with a heartbreaking scream began to cry.

“I love you.” And with a kiss, my mother released my hand, so that they would take me out of the coffin our dream passage had become.

I remember this feeling, a very salty taste in my mouth, as if I was still in my mother’s lap, while she cried and her tears reached my lips.

Nobody thinks that this will be the day they have to die; nobody imagines that they have to have an interview with the grim reaper; to explain to him if it is your or your neighbour’s life he has to take. I can’t forget how we got into the boat; we had won that game but in exchange for carrying the heaviest burden imaginable on our shoulders.

I’m tired, my legs move less and less.

The boatman had deceived us, and forced us to jump in the middle of the sea, near the coast that we still couldn’t see; and, at gunpoint, he told us that he had already done his part, and that it was now God who must have mercy on our souls.

I’m afraid. Now what? If I die, we will all have died, I can never be a doctor, and save other people’s lives, I can never try to find happiness and honour the memory of that daughter. I… will never open my eyes again, so neither will my mother. No

“Help! Please! Please… get me out of here.” My mouth fills with water again, I cough, and I fall silent.

I don’t know if it is the sound of the waves invading my ears, or the echo that is still rumbling inside me. But my mother is screaming “I love you” as I move away, and I hear her voice fading little by little. Mum, thank you… Thank you for everything, because you have been the one who has taught me to be strong, to be proud to be alive, and to fight for the life that we all deserve. All those people died that day in the Mediterranean, in a barge that had not been designed to take fifty passengers on the open sea. Each of them had dutifully paid their ticket, for a journey of no return, until death.

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The Mediterranean has become the graveyard of the world. The uncertainty of wheth-
er tomorrow we will also be able to eat, whether my children will be able to continue studying, or whether my wife will die giving birth, pushes one shore of the Mediterranean to cross the entire sea in the hope that their fears will vanish, and find the European dream, that those same Europeans wanted to find in America years ago. I was a survivor of a barge that sank 20 years ago, and I have been a survivor of a human trafficker, who forced me to jump out of a boat into the open sea. I don’t ask that you understand my suffering; I only ask that you help me to fulfil all the wishes that my travel companions placed in me that day. I only want you to give me your support, and for all of us to seek a solution to the exodus that the Mediterranean witnesses every few weeks. I don’t need to live for many years, because it is humanly impossible to fulfil all the years given to me by those people that day. But please, let’s do something. Because although my name is Malak, which means angel in Arabic, it is that fisherman who saved my life who is the angel and, unfortunately, there are not enough angels for all the lives that need to be saved.

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Hello, my name is Patricia, I’m from Granada and I have always had a happy life. I was lucky to be born in Spain, the place that many people want to reach. You may wonder why I decided to write this story, and I have a good explanation.

I decided to volunteer for the European Solidarity Corps in Turkey, in Ankara, where we did an activity that would mark me forever.

All the volunteers sat in a circle in a room, and we closed our eyes. We thought of our relatives, of the people we loved the most, and those who it would hurt the most not to see again. We wrote how we would say goodbye to them in a letter, and they only gave us three minutes for it. We recreated a scenario where we were on a barge about to sink, and had to explain why others should save our lives. I didn’t know what to say at the time, only that I wanted to live, and I wanted everyone else to live, and that there would never be enough reason to condemn someone else in my place. We voted, but we did so by giving a piece of paper to each of the people we thought deserved to live, as we looked them in the eye, and said: “I trust you.” This was a double-edged act because, at the same time, while looking into the eyes of those you condemned, you had to say: “I’m sorry, I don’t trust you.”

Everyone had explained why their time had not yet come, but still, somehow, we ignored them, and judged which life was more valuable. I didn’t expect to be saved, but when I opened my hand to count the votes I had received, a place in the lifeboat was mine. I got on the boat, and while my companions looked at me with sadness and trust, that day I knew that my life had changed; and that always, and when you least expect it, you have to be ready to fight for yourself and for all the people who have ever placed their hopes in you, who have entrusted their secrets to you.

I was unable to look them in the eye without tears filling mine; and, with all the gratitude that I could muster in that moment of fragility, I thanked them one by one for their vote. Even today, I imagine that this story I’m writing here would not have been a reality, and then I remember that it is, and that thousands of people leave their home.
every day in the hope of finding a better place, if not for them, at least for their children or companions.

Coincidences only exist to make a greater good come true, and this is my time to tell you my story.

Thank you
"Gracias" Arkadaşım

Alara Tuğçe Egesoy. Türkiye


“Feta peyniri” dedi ev sahibi Nuran, “Bir arkadaşımız geçen gün gittiği Yunanistan’daki köyünden.”


Birkaç gün sonra elli beşinci yaşımı bitirecek olmama tezat bir şekilde kendimi çocuklar gibi hissediyordum. Oradan oraya koşurma isteğime mani olamıyordu. Sadece bir yaşama daha burada basmamın değil, burada yaşamam istiyordum.


Radyodan “Avgoustos” şarkısı yükselirken yine kendimi geçmişe dönmuş bulдум. Tipki buraya ilk kez geldiğim o ağustos ayında duydüğüm hisleri yaşadığım. Geçmiş beni hiç tanımımadım...
bunca insanla bir araya getirmişti ve ben geçmişe dalıp giderken şimdi çevremdeki bu gençler o hayali yaşamakla meşguldüler. Bu zamanların ne kadar değerli olduğunu bilmelerini diledim.

“Gracias”, My Friend

Alara Tugce Egesoy. Turkey

In the week of my fifty-fifth birthday, I attended a breakfast planned with my friends. Finally, we were able to decide on a weekend where we could come together amid the hustle and bustle. Well, even though few people call in the rest of the year, everyone would find time for birthdays and to be with you. The gatherings did not exceed ten people. When we were young, we had a stable group that didn’t change much over time, while people were added and dropped frequently. Recently, the conversations in these rare meetings had become no more than the agenda of the country and our complaints about various issues. As the table was being set, several of my friends seemed about to have a heated argument. Even when we agreed, everyone was raising their voices in the excitement of the discussion. This was as ridiculous as it was tiring.

Everyone started to fill their plates with all kinds of food. When one sees these breakfast tables in our house, one’s appetite would be whetted immediately. I haven’t been keen on eating and drinking lately, like I used to. A piece of cheese, some olives, some jam. Ever since I was a child, I have loved eating sour cherry jam and cheese together. When another topic was brought up, I was busy taking a bite of feta cheese on my plate, and when I put it in my mouth, I couldn’t hear anything. Some tastes and smells have carried me to other places, sometimes they have taken me into a memory, sometimes a feeling, sometimes a period of my life. Now I was in a completely different place where I experienced them all together.

“Feta cheese,” said the host, Nuran, “a friend of ours brought it to us from his village in Greece, where he went the other day.”

Now, with the letter inside, I went there again, drained like a cork-cap glass bottle thrown into the sea. That was exactly thirty years ago. I grew up in a big city and had visited many cities in Turkey. However, when I was going to volunteer for a project in Xylokastron, a small Greek town I had never heard of, I was both excited and worried about being in an unfamiliar environment. Besides, I had never travelled to any part of Greece before. I knew that we shared a lot with these people we once lived with, but I also didn’t know them at all. I was confident in my foreign language but I was afraid of being a foreigner.

It was the beginning of August, when the sun was the hottest in the hottest year. I was going to take some transfers from Athens airport. My first impression surprised me. They weren’t as blonde as we thought but even looked quite like us. It was already dark when I finally arrived in this town, where I was going to spend the few months of my life that had a profound effect on me.

While I was thinking about this, I heard my friends talking about my distraction. However, it was starting to feel so unnatural to be here right now. I gathered myself and joined in their conversation. But once I had a desire to walk away, not from this table but from this huge city where I was born and grew up. I barely waited until the end of the meeting. I
hugged and said goodbye to everyone one by one and accepted their good wishes.

I knew what to do when I got home. The thought of going on a trip had taken over my mind, along with my overwhelming enthusiasm. It was the place where I felt most at home in that short time and I was amazed at how long it was before I went again. While taking my passport from the shelf, I dropped a notebook with a picture of a donkey on the floor in the excitement of the moment. I bought this in a small bookstore in Corinth. I couldn’t help laughing when I opened it and read a page. “I don’t understand why people speak Spanish here. In the bakery I went to this morning, in small boutiques, in the supermarket, in short, everywhere I go, people greet me by saying “gracias”. Besides, doesn’t that word mean thank you? Do they want to say thank you for coming to our shop? Still, I accepted the situation and started saying “gracias” to people wherever I went. However, I later learned that the correct word for what I understood as “gracias” was “yia sou”, meaning “hello” and “goodbye” in Greek. Now I could order my “pita”, my coffee, with a smattering of Greek.

I visited a few other places while I was there. Memories took me to the famous white stone beach of Lefkada, where the colour of the sea is different. Aegean beaches are beautiful, but this place was very different from what I saw. After swimming until the evening with the people I met there and became friends with in a short time, we sat at a pub nearby. In a photo taken at that time, I looked happier than I had felt in a long time, with my red-hot face. Meals had not yet begun. I tasted “buyurdi” there for the first time, which I tried to make a few times later and couldn’t find the same flavour, and I passed out. It was as if the warm spirits of the people here had influenced these flavours that I could not find where I lived.

Of course, we also had a lot in common. I used to order Turkish coffee, which I love to drink with a Turkish delight, like Greek coffee there. Even though there were minor conflicts about common tastes from time to time, we accepted that we were all from the same society, the same geography, and we loved it.

I had to stop thinking and plan. I was going to call an agency and get my ticket. But first I had to call Eleni, a dear friend of mine there, and let her know. The phone rang several times but I got no answer. Since I knew where she lived well, I thought I would find her when I went and hoped that she would still live in the same place. I didn’t think I could wait more than a day. I bought my ticket the next day.

When we landed at Athens airport, there was a great excitement inside me. It was as if I had returned to my home, where I had been away for years. Even though I knew few people here, I never felt a stranger. My feelings when I came for the first time were very different from now. It was now a familiar and even missed place.

I smiled involuntarily when the passport officer said “yia sou”. “Den milao Ellinika,” I replied, realising that I was continuing in Greek. He smiled and said in English “but now you speak it” and after quickly checking my passport and seeing that I am Turkish, this time he let me pass by saying “goodbye” in Turkish. I had already remembered why I loved these people so much and felt so close to them.

In contrast to the fact that I would be turning fifty-five in a few days, I felt like a child.
couldn’t help the urge to run around. I wanted to live here, not just to be here for another year.

Even after a long time, I was able to find my way easily. I reached Xylokastro before dark. Eleni’s house was in Sykia, but I preferred walking instead of getting off there. First of all, I wanted to enjoy this place, walk in the woods and breathe the salty air. While volunteering, we cleared the brushwood in all these forests and collected the garbage on the coastline. Judging by the cleanliness of the surroundings, there must still be volunteers. Once, when I tried to collect goat horns from the trees here and eat it, I was met with bewilderment. I woke up early in the mornings and took walks in the fresh air, as if it were yesterday.

After walking for a while, I arrived at Eleni’s house. I didn’t even know if she would recognise me, or if she would be surprised to see me. After knocking on the door, I waited for a while and heard someone calling from the window. A young girl was asking who I was. When I said I was looking for Eleni, I was afraid that she might have moved. This girl, who I later learned was Alkisti, invited me in. She told me that her mother had died last year but before that she had left a box and told her to give it to me if I came back one day. She was as surprised as I was by the fact that I had finally come. Eleni had told her daughter a lot about me, but I didn’t even know she had a daughter.

Alkisti brought me the box. When I opened it, I couldn’t stop the tears. The aged “Mavrodafni” that came out of it was from the wine cellar in Patras, where we went thirty years ago. Eleni knew how much I loved this very sweet wine. But what really made me cry was the one word note that came out of it: “Gracias friend”. It means that even when she said goodbye to this life, she did not forget me, and on top of that, she wanted to make fun of me once again with her quick wit.

“Oh sas!” Everyone learned this word, and they said goodbye to me in unison. Only one person, Alkisti, shouted “gracias”. But this time she did it not to make fun of me but because she wanted to thank me for coming. I repeated in my heart, for all the time I spent here and the people I knew: “Gracias, friends!”
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