

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Maribel López Martínez

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The light at the end of the Tunnel  
by  
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## INDEX

The beginning.....	
The madness.....	
The voices.....	
The unexpected.....	
The search.....	
The hunting.....	
The divorce.....	
The betrayal.....	
Everything remained inside.....	
Day to day.....	
The football game.....	
The light at the end of the tunnel.....	
My father.....	
The Power.....	
The return.....	
My process.....	
Orange.....	

To my great family,  
to each and every one,  
for being what they are,  
for having made me who I am.

## THE BEGINNING

It was already night for the phone to ring, so when my mother got up to answer, we all turned to see what it was about.

- Yes, it's me. Fine, thanks. And you? What? Why?

- Oh, mom! It must be José Ramón – Mariana said, squeezing my hand tightly.

- Yes, it's José Ramón – My cousin Nena said -. I told you that I dreamt about him horribly, surely something terrible happened to him, I told you, in the dream he was lying halfway down the street as if dead, I think he was hit, I told you – she repeated.

-But, have you seen him? What happened? Is he okay? Are you sure that he is okay? Didn't they hit him? What did he do?

- Calm down! Where do you get that it is José Ramón? Wait for my mom to hang up and we will know what happened, shut up – I responded.

- It's heavy, girls, it's really going to get ugly, be prepared. That dream is a sign. He was in the street all stiff and he was rising and he was getting lost, it was something really heavy, you know that I have a sixth sense, it's going to get very ugly, I sense that this time he is really going to leave us – Nena continued.

- Where is he? Give me the address, I'm going there right now.

- Stop it, that's enough, do not hallucinate, stop inventing and let's wait for my mom to tell us what's going on – I insisted.

- No, Mabel, it's Joserra, I am sure. Haven't you seen him lately? He's being weird, I am sure that something happened to him, he's involved in something, he's always as if he is gone, very rare. It's been a while since he's been talking alone and when there is someone, he acts as if there was no one, he's in his own world, like loony. Just ask for not to be something serious – said Mariana, my youngest sister.

- Mabel, take me to the delegation, they have your brother arrested –my mom told me as she hung up the phone.

- Why? - Mariana asked in a choked voice -. What did he do?

- I don't really know; I was just informed that he was walking naked in the middle of Insurgentes.

- What? Naked? But, How? Why? Was he mugged? Without any clothes? – We asked all together, my sister, my cousin and me.

- I know nothing; I only know what I just told you. Stop asking questions and let's go. See if he has any clean clothes and bring some blankets and some food while I call your uncle Octavio so he can meet us there – my mother ordered.

- Ma, just tell me, who phoned you? Who gave you notice? – Mariana asked.

- Your uncle Rodrigo.

- And why don't we tell my dad so he can help us?

- Daughter, it seems that Joserra phoned your dad from the delegation. He was the first one to know and he was the one who phoned your uncle Rodrigo to let me know. Your dad already went there, he left him cigarettes and then returned to his house. You

know how he is, so hurry up and let's go, because if he is naked he will die of cold – she concluded.

In the car, as I drove to the delegation, I thought about my brother.

The truth is that for a long time I hadn't noticed him. I would arrive exhausted at night, after college and work. I was too tired to worry about my brother. Joserra's life and mine had split radically.

He and I were very different; nevertheless, during childhood and adolescence we were inseparable. Joserra was born philosopher, intellectual, of an extraordinary sensibility. Since he was little he liked Quixote, the knights-errant books, Socrates, Plato and all Greek literature, while I was passionate about mathematics and physics. I remember the mess it was so he could understand the square roots; hours and hours crushing them in the evenings, explaining to him by all means so that, at the end, he would always fail the exams.

Our tastes did not have much in common either. While he enjoyed the loud music of Frank Zappa and stunned us every afternoon playing The Girl from Ipanema on his saxophone, I dreamed of finding a boyfriend like Susy's comic books, secrets of the heart, or a handsome man like those of Corin Tellado novels that I read in my granny's magazine, Vanidades. I was the teenager who would cry with Little Women and Love Story. I spent the afternoons knitting sweaters for my Juanita Pérez and playing kicked pot outside my house to hide with my neighbor and kiss. That's how we were opposites. He was kind of intellectual hippie and I was the poshest. However, we loved each other a lot. Joserra was the firstborn, he was a year older than me and, since I remember, he took care of me and defended me from everything and everyone.

It was always so much fun. He was very witty and made me laugh until I cried. He was very simple and innocent; with any nonsense he would laugh immediately. Up to date, every time we see each other we have our good laughs. We are both a little eschatological, so we enjoyed a lot telling jokes about farts, with which we laughed for hours and hours. We invented different definitions and types of farts: the silent, the whistler, the slippery, the one with the prize, the lover, the incognito, the dreamer, the sharing one, and many others that kept us wrapped in sonorous laughing.

My oldest brother not only made me laugh with his wits and his great creativity; he was also my bodyguard. I felt secured that he was going to the same school as I was, he protected me from everything, from anything, even from crazy Adolfo. I will never forget that heroic rescue.

We were in sixth grade and I had a schoolmate who was like a genius kid, one of those kind of crazy. His name was Adolfo. He was very intelligent, but very careless, very dirty and very weird, his snot always dripped and he never clean it up. In addition, suddenly he would transform, he would become angry if you contradicted him or mocked him, and in an instant he would attack you without control.

One afternoon we were in the loom workshop and Adolfo, as always, had the snot out. When I saw him I almost puked, so I told him: "Hey, pig, clean up, you're big enough to be such a pig", and happened what I never imagined: They disappeared from a slurp. "How disgusting! Adolfo just ate the snot!", I shouted out loud. I had not yet finished screaming, when I saw him take flight and turn over me. What a scare, I could barely lift

the feet off the ground to take off in a run-off race. After a lot of running, when I thought that I had already left him behind and I dared to turn, I saw him very close to me, walking straight, with decision and firm and broad steps, like a Frankenstein. He breathed deep and fast, he puffed like an angry bull.

Once again I sped, desperate I ran and ran. It looked like a nightmare. The more I tried to get away, the closer I saw him, he was walking fast at almost the same speed as I was, and as he approached me, I saw how he was growing and growing, as a giant. I felt that he could crush me at any moment, the legs began to fail me, they no longer answered me, they trembled, I knew about Adolfo's fury and I saw him reaching out to me, like hypnotized, as a Terminator whose sole purpose was to annihilate me right there, in that empty yard, with no one around who could save me.

With one last effort I turned and took the hallway that led to the library. There was no soul either, I felt like crying, I was desperate, I couldn't run anymore. I started to accept my end, when suddenly, there in the background, sitting on the library stairs, an angel appeared: sitting, reading. There was my salvation, my only salvation: my beloved brother.

-Joserra, Joserra, help! Adolfo the snot eater wants to kill me, save me, please!

Joserra was neither athletic nor a good runner. On the contrary, he preferred to read or to write before playing football. He had flat feet, so he spent all the breaks developing the intellect.

When he heard my screams, Joserra turned. He says that by seeing my face he understood that I was really in danger, and God knows how a gazelle's agility came out of him, but swift and fast he came into action. In the blink of an eye he jumped. He stood in front of the madman and placing his arm firmly on Adolfo's chest, he stopped him at once. You dare touch my sister and you will see it with me. – he told him.

Adolfo did not stop snorting. I watched how his chest was inflated and deflated, making my brother's hand go back to every breath.

Then tell her not to say again that I eat the snot, and much less to shout it in class in front of everyone. I never eat, nor have eaten, nor will eat the snot, never – he said while he sniffed those that hung from his nose and ran down to the mouth.

I will tell her, but you turn around at this precise moment and disappear from our sight, understand?

Brrr, brr, all right – he said, furious, turning around between snort and snort, obeying my savior.

When I saw that the brat was walking away, I threw myself into the arms of Joserra. As I hugged him and heard the unbridled heartbeat of my heart, I felt my brother's body tremble.

What's the matter? – I asked.

What do you think that I am of wood? I am terrified! I don't know how I dared. He was furious, totally out of his mind – he said, while he began to laugh more and more. - Did you see how the snot was dripping while he was telling me that he never ate snot? Did you see how he ate them all from a sip? He is a pig!

Forget about that, you should have seen the ones he ate when I screamed in the workshop, they were worse, green and thick – I replied almost without being able to talk because of laughing.

This way, hugging, we laughed and laughed as we commented about my face unhinged from the fear, the snorts of the snot boy, my brother's gazelle jump and all the details of our great adventure.

X

As a teenager, Joserra witnessed my first parties, my crazy emotion in my first concert of Juan Manuel Serrat. What a day. He not only accompanied me to be on line to buy tickets since six in the morning, but he also endured my screams of crazy fan from the third floor in Bellas Artes, to the rhythm of "That with whom dreams your daughter, that thief who robs you of her love is me, ma'am".

Sober, as it was then, he was my accomplice in my first drunkenness, in the love declaration of my first boyfriend – his best friend - and, of course, he was also aware of my first kiss.

It was on his shoulder where I cried and suffered the terrible and constant fights of my parents and their tragic divorce, and at the end of the painful episode I also shared with him our new life with dad and mom being single: their absences, their loneliness, their new partners and their frustrations.

When I left high school, my mother got me in the Lyceum Franco-Mexican to study French and electronics, under a traditional system, strict and demanding, while my brother went with his friends to Freire, the most rebellious active school of the moment. I studied and killed myself doing homework, while he devoted himself to enjoy life and fail exams, for he said he was a philosopher; he read and read, lectured all day and partied every night, until my mom could not take it anymore and decided to send him to a boarding school in Spain.

Apparently, Joserra had begun to go off the rails and was doing all bad things with his friends, he even started in the marijuana world and some other things.

X

The truth is that my mommy did not have time for us. She worked all day to support the five children, because, although my dad gave her some money after the divorce, when he remarried and his two daughters were born, it was not enough anymore: the allowances decreased. The situation got worse.

From time to time he gave us some cash, but it was not enough, so we lived surrounded by endless fights for the money. It was horrible. As Joserra and I were the oldest, my parents used us as messengers to send messages of all kind among them,



dreadful reproaches and complaints. My father would see us one week yes and one week no, and we almost didn't want to see him, we preferred our friends or to study, even, to not have to endure the big face of the wife and the difference that she made between us and their new daughters.

Our adolescence was difficult, and Joserra began to just party, until my mother lost control. She didn't know what to do with him, so she thought that it was best that in that so delicate stage, that he could have a strong masculine influence, so that's why she decided to send him to Spain with our uncle the priest, uncle Andrés, brother of my grandmother Maria, my paternal grandmother. A wonderful character, a warm, friendly and simple priest from Canales, a town of Leon, Castilla.

Joserra spent three years in boarding school with the Marists, the three years of high school, while I was in lyceum.

When my brother was in boarding school in that country, we found out that the Mexican government, by initiative of President Echeverría, would break relations with Spain, so Joserra returned. This break hurt us a lot, because we always felt a little from there; my grandparents were Spanish, and my father had grown in the pro-Franco youths of the Motherland, so we felt we were a little "gachupines". The sadness was bigger when we found out that the filthy Ministry of Education decided not to validate his Spanish high school studies and Joserra had to start here all over again in open school. Because everything happened in the middle of the school year, it was not easy to find school, so my uncle Rodrigo, the most conservative and the most influential of all my dad's brothers, got him into Cedros, an Opus Dei School, not more not less. Dreadful, as he was.

Not surprisingly, Joserra soon deserted the extreme right and decided to go to alphabetize indigenous to the Lacandon Jungle, in a government program of President Luis Echeverría.

We saw him little and I knew less and less of him.

Upon finishing the lyceum I went to college to study the career of Engineering in electronics and in the evenings I got a job to earn some cash and help my mom, so my world changed radically. I bought a Volkswagen and I spent the morning in the university, the afternoons in the office – where I worked as telephone operator, and at night as I was more independent, I would go out with my friends, I would go out with my boyfriend or with some guy or I would study.

Around the six months of working I became Fernando's girlfriend, one of the heads of the office, and I spent my free time with him.

When Joserra was in Chiapas, the Chichonal occurred to explode. Lucky him! Covered with ashes and frustrated, here he comes back to the city. It was then when he faced one of the most unstable times of his life. I saw him very little, since he started living for a while with his girlfriend, the best friend of Mariana, my sister. Then, when that relationship failed, he went with a friend, until they got tired of living together, and then he rented a room in a roof, dirty and dark, where he decided that he would write for a living. He lived like that for a while until he needed money. Confused, disoriented and depressed, he tried several work options that did not work for him, from selling ice cream in La Siberia in Coyoacan, to forming a group of music or editing texts for a comic book publisher. None worked. He tried, too, to return to school to finish high school, but it was

not time for enrollment and he could not. Anyway, nothing was resolved. It was a season of great uncertainty for him and a lot of work for me, so I lost track of his state and his activities until that night, when Mariana made me realize that I hardly knew anything about my brother.

On the contrary, my sister always stayed very close to him. It is funny, but now that I think about it, they are very similar. Mariana, the third of the five children and only one year younger than I, she studied a social sciences career and shared with Joserra their passion for the indigenous and the study of our roots. She had several study projects on the southern border, so she was constantly traveling to Chiapas, where they used to meet when Joserra lived there. They had friends in common, even Mariana's best friend had been Joserra's last girlfriend. So I understood that she had more information about our brother.

X

When we arrived at the San Angel delegation, my uncle Jorge, husband of my mother's sister, was already there, one of my most supportive uncles. He and my uncle Octavio, my mother's brothers-in-law, they were like our dads, they had always looked after us, and more after the divorce.

The delegation's building seemed horrible to me: cold, big, dirty and damp. At the entrance we came across with two drunks lying in a broken armchair. On the other side, behind the counter, were three policemen talking very entertained with two gentlemen. We came to see José Ramón Martínez – my uncle said -. He was arrested about two hours ago in Insurgentes, in front of the monument of the hand of Obregon, according to what has been informed to us.

Among mocking and fun laughter, the policemen told us that when they were on their round, they found him walking in the middle of the path between the streets, totally naked. When they saw him, they stopped the patrol and they asked him to get in, in order to take him to the delegation. "So calmed, as if nothing, he raised his little butt and put it on the seat, just as he came to the world, in the back seat of my unit, without resisting, we didn't even have to repeat it twice, on the contrary, upon hearing the command he said: 'Yes, my sergeant, as you indicate', and he got in."

Already inside the patrol they asked him why he did not bring clothes, and he replied that because his girlfriend had asked for it like that.

A little henpecked the lad – interrupted one of the policemen who was telling the event. What do you care? – the other argued -. Forgive him, miss, but the the thing is that people cannot be walking naked in the streets.

Nor that he was Jesus Christ – he joked again, the one that had just been silenced.

The first one continued with his story without flinching.

The lad replied that if the law was like that, he was willing to comply with it, since he had never intended to violate any regulation.

Of course, before such answers my uncle dared to ask if they had noticed if Joserra was drunk or under the effect of something strange.

No, sir, even the doctor has checked him. The kid arrived in his five senses without any influence of alcohol or drugs, but the results of the urine tests will be given to us in twenty-four hours.

They even told us that he answered all the questions logically and without any setback. That on his arrival he had been informed of his right to make a phone call and that Joserra spoke with my dad, and in a very normal tone he had explained him that the patrol had found him naked in Insurgentes and that he was arrested.

My father went to see him, they talked for five minutes, he left him some cigarettes and left.

My chief is very upset and he says that I should stay here to see if I learn, so leave me locked up or lend me money for the bus, because as you can see I do not even have a penny. I am not lying to you, moreover, I am not even wearing clothes to keep a nickel – he told them, laughing, after saying goodbye to my father.

My uncle asked for permission to go and see him and give him the clothes, the blankets and something to eat. While he did, the policemen explained to my mother, my sister and me that he has to stay for seventy-two hours, and that it was the best for him so that he would really stop doing those street stripteases.

Joserra is fine, do not worry, hungry and cold, but fine – my uncle said as he left.

Why did he do it? – my mom asked.

Oh, Macarena, you know how these young people are, surely it was a bet or something. As much as I wanted to get the truth out of him I couldn't. According to him, it was because a voice asked him to do it, that he was walking back home and suddenly he heard a voice, apparently his girlfriend's voice, who told him to take off his clothes and he had to do it, but I assure you that those are only excuses for not telling us the truth; I would bet to you that it was a game of young people – my uncle replied.

X

Joserra stayed the seventy-two hours in the delegation. Effectively, the results of the urine test came out negative, they didn't find any sign of drugs or anything unusual. We were all very intrigued by the event and we kept on looking for some logical reason, but as much as we asked his friends and even his girlfriend, nobody could tell us anything. That afternoon he had been acting normal with her and by the evening he had said goodbye as usual.

It was not until the day we went to pick him up, when we had the first hint of what would be the worst nightmare of my life.

When signing the exit sheet, the delegation's doctor at the shift called us to a private room and told my mom:

Ma'am, I think that your son suffers from auditory hallucinations. I recommend you to see a specialist immediately. While he was with us, on two occasions appeared the famous voice that made your son behave strangely. The first, when everybody was already asleep, he jumped out from bed to ask with great despair for bread with milk caramel, he said that his girlfriend commanded him to eat bread with milk caramel because he was very thin. The second, he took the comb off his cell-mate when he was combing. Upon hearing the other detainee's claims, that demanded the return of his comb, your son argued that he could not, because his little girlfriend said to him that in prison they shouldn't comb, that the prison was a punishment and they shouldn't be conceited... Your son does not talk alone, ma'am, he talks with someone who does not exist, and that, ma'am, it is called madness – he concluded.

## THE MADNESS

The next morning, first thing, my mom was stuck to the phone. She phoned all her acquaintances and relatives in search of a good psychoanalyst. She wanted the best. After much questioning, finally she decided for one in Colonia Guadalupe Inn. He was recognized by three to four persons as someone of a recognizable prestige.

When she called me to the office to tell me that at last she got an appointment with one of the best doctors from all over Mexico, I asked for permission to leave work two hours earlier. I went to the house to pick up my mother and my brother and took them to the famous doctor's office. We arrived at seven o'clock sharp; it was already dark. A man of good-natured aspect, with gray hair and mustache, came out to open the door and let us in.

There was no one else in the house. My mom and Joserra went in with him into a room, which was apparently his office, while I stayed in a waiting room that was slowly flooding with images flowing from my agitated head. "I wish it isn't madness – I told myself -. It cannot be. What is madness? What does it mean to be crazy? Why are we here? I wondered without stopping.

The scenes of Trapped without exit began coming to my memory: Jack Nicholson's operation in that mental clinic where he had his brain taken out and was left in vegetative state.

His unhinged face filled the room. I closed my eyes and saw the scalpel penetrating the forehead's skin to open the head in two, rummage for a while and carefully strip him of the gray matter. I took a deep breath trying to erase the operation of the spooky personage from my memory, but the scenes continued. The straitjacket appeared, the huge needle penetrating the vein of the strong arm that resisted, his deep eyes, cold, lost.

All the film's madmen at that moment came out from the wallpaper, from the carpet, from the lamps and from the pictures to keep me company in that icy waiting room. I stood up startled of the armchair.

"My brother's, is not madness. Crazy the doctors who drug the sick people to maintain them calmed and so they will not bother. My brother is sane. Surely the delegation's doctor is an ignorant, if not, he wouldn't be there, bureaucrat, mediocre. No madness, no nothing! Knowing Joserra, I am sure that about the bread with milk caramel and about the comb, he said it to have fun and to mock the cops and the other detainees. Ignore the diagnosis. Stop now! Don't you think about it, relax", I repeated to myself.

I took a magazine from the center table and started to browse through it.

Suddenly the radiant smile of the beautiful model from the cover began to fade away. Now I was in a deep depression. She too, after a while, ended up locked up in a clinic for the mentally ill.

"Ha, ha, you see how everyone can be crazy? Give them somniferous and drugs, many drugs, and alone they will go crazy. This one wants to die because she is not the most beautiful, the thinnest, because she cannot handle the cellulite, seeing herself grow old. Yes, even her, the most resplendent, the healthiest, the most desirable, can end up totally crazy. We are all crazy." I imagined that poor girl walking through the shoe stores and the neat and tidy stores announced by the magazine. She paced between the pages dragging the feet, her eyes fixed on the void, the head lifeless, fallen, defeated.

The room darkened more, and out of that lifeless space all the madmen came out.

"We are all crazy – I said to myself -. We are all the same, a little crazy."

"What is reason? Nobody knows. Not even those in the white gown, even though they try to feign coherence. Who told them that their behavior is normal? Who is the madman? The one in the white coat or the one in the white shirt? The one who evades the reality of a cold, material and insensitive world hiding in his warm and cozy world of dreams and fantasies? The one who hides and evades his reality at work without allowing himself to enjoy the wonders of life? The one who makes war and kills innocent children and people for power and ambition?

I wandered through the different hospitals that came to my mind and I witnessed the appalling practices that "the normal" perform in those places. Cruel experiments that provoke the highest degrees of pain that the human being is able to support. Physical and psychological torture through new medicines that provoke unexpected reactions and in some cases even death. Electro-shock without anesthesia. Experimental techniques, as if they were animals or insensitive beings. Bloody and frightening treatments.

With each image more the reason was lost.

Will they do that to my brother?

The center table began to take the form of a garden. I was sitting on a white iron bench in front of a tree behind of which my brother appeared. He was walking towards me in a white robe, his shaven head let me see a large scar along the forehead. With his lost gaze he laughed at nothing, without even laughing.

Everything came over me. The faces of the madmen mingled, the eyes fixed in the void, the heads without force, defeated, the languid arms, feet dragging those inert bodies that, once naked, vibrated on the stretchers with the wires in the brain. Scalpels, straitjackets, bed fasteners, sadism and suffering. No, no, no.

I reached the door almost without air and went out to the street. I needed oxygen.

X

When I saw my mommy and Jose Ramon come out I felt relieved, everything was product of my fantasy.

What did the doctor say? – I asked

That we have to come back tomorrow, he can not make a diagnosis with a simple interview.

During five consecutive afternoons we went to the doctor to take Joserra. All those days the ghosts accompanied me in the waiting room and some chased me to my dreams. The last day Joserra entered the consultation by himself. My mommy stayed with me outside, scaring away my hallucinations.

Mommy, when do you think we will know what's going on? Really, tell me, do you think Joserra is crazy? – I asked.

Oh, daughter, it is not what I believe, but what the doctor diagnoses. And, apparently, your brother has serious problems.

But he looks good; I see him normal.

This is how the disease is, at first it only manifests in some moments, but there it is and it can get worse.

What disease?

Schizophrenia – my mother said with a lump in her throat.

What exactly is it? Is it curable? – I insisted.

Apparently its like a set of mental illnesses which are characterized by a dissociation of the personality. That is to say, the personality disintegrates, separates, it does not function as a whole, do you understand?

No, I don't understand anything, is it dangerous?

Yes. In some cases, it becomes incurable. Your brother has auditory and olfactory hallucinations, he hears voices and smells things that aren't real. Every effort is being made to cure him, but it is difficult...It is most likely that he will need a long treatment and perhaps even spend time in a clinic.

In what clinic? In a mental hospital, where they are going to drive him crazy for real?

Mommy, please don't be ridiculous, my brother isn't crazy. I have seen him everyday since

he left the delegation and he's perfectly, as crazy as you or me. What do you pretend? Do you want to get rid of him again as when you sent him to Spain? Are you going to invent something every time that you don't know what to do with him? – I shouted in despair. Shut up, shut up immediately! – my mother shouted -. How you dare? I will not let you say that again. Never, do you hear me? Never. I have never pretended to get rid of you all, of none, I adore you all, you are the only thing that I have in life and I just want the best thing for each of you – she said, hugging me while I wept without stopping.

Sorry, sorry, mommy, but my brother is not crazy, really, believe me, he isn't crazy. Let's not lock him up. Let's look for another opinion. In those clinics they operate them, they take their brains out, they experiment with them, they will really drive him crazy. I know it, I have seen it in the movies.

Don't say nonsense, not everything that happens in the movies is true, sometimes it is pure fiction. Let's see what the doctor says. Of course, I will do everything before interning him, but understand that if he is ill we have to cure him – and taking my head in her hands she stroked my hair and continued talking -. Daughter, your brother is in the hands of a real specialist, one of the best, do you understand? Apparently, the voices he hears are terrible, they say horrible things to him, very painful, they hurt him; we can not allow it either, he is suffering, he suffers a lot, understand it – she concluded in that firm voice that did not give room for more discussion.

## THE VOICES

That night the three of us returned to the house, almost without speaking.

When we arrived we sat down to dinner all together. Joserra, Mariana, José Felipe, Lola, my mommy and me. Already at the table, something horrible happened.

Unexpectedly, Joserra began to choke on every bread in the breadbasket. He grabbed them, he bit them desperately and threw them out.

I can't faster, I can't – he said in a loud voice with his mouth full of crumbs, while spitting half and grabbing another bread to put it in his mouth.

What's up? Joserra, what are you doing? Lola asked, my youngest sister, who saw him with that little face so full of surprise.

Mariana removed the breadbasket and put it on her knees.

Are you crazy or what? – she asked.

My mom got up to hug Joserra, but Joserra threw himself over Mariana to take breadbasket. At one stroke he snatched it away and sat down on the floor to eat.

Suddenly he began to shout:

Mom, save me, tell her to leave me alone, that I can not eat more, I'm going to burst! She wants me to fatten up, she wants to see me like a pig, that's what she wants, she doesn't realize that I'm drowning. Mom, she wants to kill me! Hear her!, Hear her! She wants me to eat more bread, I can't anymore, I'm going to turn into a barrel, why do you want me to be a pig? Why do you want to see me eat like this? – he shouted to the air.

We were all petrified. Only my mother reacted and sitting beside him on the ground, said to him:

Joserra, what you hear isn't real, don't listen to it, son, don't listen.

Suddenly, José Felipe, my youngest brother, got up. Also sitting on the floor, hugged him.

Joserra, we are all here and we love you. Calm down, brother, don't listen to the voices, please listen to me.

My mommy also hugged him and we all approached to give him love. Joserra calmed down and let himself be hugged, he breathed deeply looking at the ground. Mariana, Lola and I were crying without stopping, we were very impressed. Suddenly, Joserra protested.

-Let me go, I have to throw all the bread that I ate, otherwise, I'll get fat.

Rising up at once, he unzipped his pants, he pulled them down and began to defecate on the dinner plate which was on the table.

We were immobilized, sitting on the ground, without understanding what was happening. I knew it was the voices, my mother has just explained to me, but my little brothers knew nothing. They must had thought that it was a game.

What are you doing? – José Felipe screamed -. Are you crazy?

Yes, I am crazy, Don't you see that my mom wants to lock me up? She wants to take me to a mental hospital because I'm crazy, I'm crazy and I can hurt you all. I'm a caveman monster who does not know how to use the bathroom, see this – he said while defecating on the food plate.

José Felipe jumped on him to stop him, but Joserra ran to the balcony and pulled one leg down the railing to throw himself in the void.

We lived on a third floor and the height was considerable, so José Felipe stopped completely at the balcony door.

Half naked as he was, with one leg off, Joserra started to scream:

I'm going to kill myself, I'm going to flee and I'll set you free so that you don't have to be ashamed of me, of your brother the insane, the useless!

Easy – my mother shouted -. Stay away from the balcony and get in immediately.

Who do I listen to? Don't yell both at the same time! – he said as he covered his ears.

I'm the only one talking, there's no one else. The other voice is your imagination, see me, son, turn around, I'm the one who's talking to you – my mother repeated to him.



No, mom, she is here again, the voice. Do you hear the voice? She tells me to throw myself, to kill me, that I am worthless, that I am useless, that I couldn't even finish high school. She's right, what am I for, if my life is a nuisance for everybody?

Then Joserra darted toward the railing ready to jump into the void. He is going to kill himself! Mariana cried.

At the same moment that Joserra pushed forward to throw himself, without realizing how, my mother took a step toward him and pulled him inward. They both fell to the floor. My mommy stood up in an instant and slapped him strongly which paralyzed him.

Nailing his eyes to those of my brother, with that voice and that look that only she has that drills you to the bottom, my mother said to him very slowly, with her teeth clenched and spelling each syllable in a firm and dry voice. Nailing to the depths of his being each word:

Take it easy. You calm down right now. You are not crazy. You are very upset, I'm going to give you a pill so you can calm down and you are going to take it, did you understand me?

Joserra burst into tears.

Mom. What am I going to do? My life has been only a chain of small failures. Look at me how I am. What is the point of continue living?

My mom took him in her arms and like a little boy she took him to the living room and sat him down in the armchair, while repeating:

Easy, breathe, calm, everything's over, everything's fine.

We sat around Joserra in dense silence, while my mom went to get the medication.

"Oh, nanita, hope she isn't late, hope he won't get up again", I told myself. I was terrified that Joserra would start again, and we would lose control. "I hope my mom hurries, I don't know how she goes away like that and leaves us alone here with him. Why didn't she ask me to go for the shitty pills? Only she can think of leaving us here in this moment."

Please, help me, take this voices out of me, I can not handle it anymore, I can not stand it, I'm really going crazy, please do something – my brother said, putting his head between his hands. He looked so helpless that I approached him to embrace him.

Mabel, do not let them to take me to the mental hospital, they want to put a straitjacket on me, the doctor told me, that if I don't cooperate I'm going to be tied, so I'd rather die. Mariana, you know me better than anyone. I'm going to go crazy if they lock me up, for sure they will give me shocks in the head, I will not be able to take it, help me, take away these voices, please, please – he said while he covered his ears. Then he was looking for José Felipe to embrace him and ask him the same.

"Shut him up, I can not stand him anymore, he keeps on saying the same thing, he's like a scratched disc, he's driving me crazy, make him stop, stop already. Mom, what are you doing? Please, come back, hurry up, before he gets up", I pleaded in my heart.

That must have lasted a few seconds, but to me, up to date, it still seems centuries.

Finally, my mother returned with the blissful pill.

Joserra swallowed it and after a while everything returned to calm.

That night my mom spoke to the doctor to tell him what had just happened and when she hung up she said to me:

You are not going to college tomorrow. We have to take Joserra to the doctor first thing in the morning.

X

We lived in a three-bedroom apartment. One of the rooms was shared by Mariana, Lolis and I with an arrangement of wooden bunk beds for them and a single bed for me. The other bedroom was of my two brothers and the third one of my mother.

They are going to lock him up, I know it, I know it – Mariana told me, already alone in our room -. Mabel, we must not allow it, don't take him, they will give him electric shocks and those things, they are going to kill him. Think on what you are going to do, don't be an accomplice, don't do it.

What's going on? Explain to me please, I am scared – said Lolis weeping as she embraced Nefasto, our cocker dog, who was very nervous.

Lola was the smallest, she was barely twelve-years-old, and since my parents' divorce, at age eight, Lola had been my responsibility. As my mother worked all day, and sometimes all night, I had to take Lola to school until she learned to go by bus with José Felipe. In the afternoon I would see that they eat and do the homework, and twice a week I had to take her to her therapy, since she had dyslexia and she had difficulty learning to read and write.

At just the age of twenty-one, I was a family boss for a long time, a good big sister. Part of my childhood and adolescence were spent in the care of my brothers, above all, of the youngest ones, so I had earned their trust, their respect and their affection, so it wasn't difficult to reassure them.

It's all right, both of you go to sleep, let's not make it any harder. Tomorrow the doctor will tell us what is best for us. Remember that we are in the hands of one of the best of his gender. Only he will know what to do. I will not let them hurt Joserra, trust me – I told them as I turned off the light.

It took me a long time to fall asleep and it was the worst thing I could have done. The night was a permanent nightmare. I could see myself among crazy people who chased me with a scalpel and that wanted to operate me, I saw my brother as in the images of the doctor's waiting room, wandering in the garden, shaved and with the lost look.

In one of the dreams I was walking down the university hallway, when Joserra suddenly jumped to my legs from a sewer and, watching at me from the ground with that face of craziness, squeezing me strongly, he was yelling at me: "I'm not crazy, don't leave me here, take me with you".

I woke up soaked and very jumpy. To see that it was only a dream, I tried to calm myself. That is when I realized that I had peed on the bed. It was all wet. When I turned on the light to change the sheets, I heard sobs of Lolis. With her face on the pillow, my little girl cried without stopping. I got into her bed, we hugged, and like that, crying without consolation, we were surprised by the sunrise.

## THE UNEXPECTED

Early in the morning we woke up like any normal day. I had hardly slept, so the world seemed bleak and gray to me, but as if nothing had happened the night before, we bathed, we had breakfast and we headed to the clinic. When we arrived, at about ten in the morning, the doctor called my mom alone to his office. That had never happened before, she always entered with Joserra and lately he was entering alone.

“I’m sure that he’ll want to talk to her about last night or tell her something about Joserra’s illness that we must not know”, I thought.

José Ramón stayed with me in the waiting room. It was the first time that we shared the cave of the ghosts and I started to be terrified that they would dare to visit us. “If the insane of this room appear, Joserra can go mad again on having seen them, he will think that they are the hallucinations or the voices”, I said to myself.

For quite a while neither of us uttered a word. As hypnotized, Joserra stared at a picture on the wall. I began to doubt if he would not be already sharing the space with my friends the looneys of the waiting room. I had not seen them come out of their corners, so I kept on begging for them not to appear.

Do you have cigarettes? – he suddenly asked me.

Remember that I don’t smoke anymore – I replied.

But you could have, couldn’t you?

I don’t see why, if I quit smoking it would be ridiculous to carry them to see who wants one, right? If someone wants one, they should pay for their vice.

I was getting there, you are very “smart”, sis. Can you lend me to buy some? I need a cigarette and for a change I have no cash.

Yes, of course I lend you – I said, taking out a hundred pesos’ bill from my purse.

I’m going to the corner to buy them. Do you want something?

No, nothing, thanks.

I saw him leave with that walk so like him, his body leaning forward, half bent over, big steps like those of my father’s, his hands in the pants’ pockets and the head looking at the floor. He looked sad. He certainly felt very depressed.

I searched for a magazine, but they were the same ones that I had seen again and again, nothing new, so I went to the Volkswagen for my book. When I went out I saw Joserra smoking in the corner. Tall, sturdy, attractive as he was, he was leaning against a car. Thoughtful, he inhaled the cigarette vigorously and exhaled large puffs of smoke, always staring at his shoes. I managed to see his wide mouth, fleshy lips. I guessed his deep eyes and full of passion. He wasn’t a pretty boy. On the contrary, he was a strong man, with personality, very manly, very interesting.

“Poor Joserra, now that he is so lucid he must be thinking in everything that is being deliberated in there between my mother and the doctor. He knows perfectly well that the big decision about his future is being made. What an horror, there is nothing worse than uncertainty, I don’t want him to be locked up, but I don’t want to live any more scenes like last night. What will be the best? What will be the solution? Ah, I don’t know, now I can not even think, I’m too sleepless and without encouragement, it was a dreadful night and a worse day awaits us. Let it be what it has to be and period.”

I went back to the sitting room and got stuck in my book. Although reading has always been one of my passions and the book was great, around the second page I was completely asleep leaning on the wall. I woke up to the sound of my mother’s steps on her way out from the doctor’s office, about an hour later. When she asked for Joserra I realized that he had not returned.

He’s smoking out there, I’ll get him – I said.

I went out looking for him, but I didn’t find him.

I asked at the newsstand that was in front of the place where I had seen him the last time.

Yes, ma’am, he just sat there smoking for a while, but it’s been like half an hour since he headed to Insurgentes – the seller told me.

When I returned to the doctor’s office I saw my mom and the doctor in the street.

With their simple expression I understood that something serious had happened. He left? – the doctor asked.

Yes, it seems that he headed to Insurgentes.

It could be terrible as it stands. Ma’am, we must find him. I will stay here in case he returns, you should go walking to look for him and your daughter should go by car to check all the area. It is very important that you find him and bring him, it is dangerous for him to be alone, something irreparable can happen.

Before he finished talking, my mom had already started a race towards the corner. I got in the car and started in the opposite direction to look for him in the surroundings. He knew the colony well. There we had lived a long period of our youth, so I thought that maybe he had gone to our old house. I drove there. When I arrived, I got off the car and I watched every corner of the block, but nothing, I didn’t see him anywhere.

“Surely he went to the Juggler,”- I told myself -, as he likes to read, he must be there snooping among the books.”

After checking the entire bookstore and the cafeteria, I crossed the street and went to church. Neither of us were catholic, we were rather atheists, but maybe in the confusion or despair he had gone to commit to God. Nothing, no trace. I took the car again and slowly started to go through each of the streets nearby.

Then, bored of so many laps, I crossed Insurgentes towards la Florida and drove to Freire, the school where Joserra had studied High School.

Oh yes, the Toad, of course – the doorman remembered when I asked him about José Ramón Ramirez. That’s how they called him at school, because he walked zambo, like a toad, in addition, when he rode on the bike and pedaled, he did it with totally curved legs, they really looked like a tadpole’s legs.

No, ma'am, I think he's in Spain, it's been long since I don't know much of him, he hasn't come here, but if you see him tell him that we miss him, to remember us, that we will wait for him even if it is just for the parties of alumni, not to forget us.

I got back to the car and arrive to Sanborns San Angel, I thought that maybe with the cigarette he had craved a coffee, but not even his footprint was there.

I crossed to the monument of de Hand of Obregon, where so many times we had played when we were young. I got off and I walked through the park. He wasn't there either.

I went through Miguel Angel de Quevedo and went to Gandhi, his favorite library. I checked every corner, without success. I went out and looked in every bench of the park in the corner, where sometimes he sat down to read, but I was unlucky. For more than four hours I covered the whole area, the Guadalupe Inn, the Florida, San Angel and its surroundings.

During the search several times I crossed with my mother and with the doctor. When we met, we asked each other if there were news.

Nothing? – was the question.

Nothing – was the poor answer.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, tired and defeated, the three of us met again back in the doctor's office.

Anxiety and worry had taken over my mother. Frowning, with clenched teeth and serious eyes she didn't stop rubbing her hands or biting her nails.

What do we do, doctor, what do we do, what can we do, what do you suggest? – she asked without giving time to an answer.

We have to find him as soon as possible, ma'am – said the doctor -. Call friends, family, go to the places that he usually goes, contact Locatel, I mean, do what you have to do in order for him to show up. Your son is not well and I'm not sure how can he react in the state in which he is – he repeated -. As soon as you know something, call me immediately. I'll be waiting.

From that moment and during the next two weeks our lives had only one goal: to find my brother.

## THE SEARCH

As soon as we got to the house my mom started to call all the friends, relatives, neighbors and acquaintances to ask about him. But we didn't get a word about his whereabouts. No one had seen or talked to him.

With each negative answer, my mother's nerves tightened more and more and apparently she only reassured by the mobilization of her army, so she didn't stop giving orders.

Mariana, go to Cuco's house to see if he's there or if they know something. Mabel, you go and see his girlfriend and go around the center of Coyoacán to see if he is out there. José Felipe, you and Lola go to all the streets nearby to see if you run into him. Open your eyes wide, because he could be sitting down in a corner, in a park, on the sidewalk or wandering around. Mariana, on your way back, go to Don Arturo's store and ask him if he saw him. Mabel, get the phone numbers of his school mates from Cedros. José Felipe, before you go, check the room out very well, search his clothes and drawers to see if you can find something that gives us a clue where he may be. Lola, tell the vigilant in the entrance that if he sees him to tell us.

At about seven o'clock at night she came up with a new idea.

Mabel, get a picture of your brother, paste it on a sheet of paper and write down: "Wanted, sick young man, dressed in blue jeans and blue and white plaid shirt, twenty-two years old. Answers to the name of José Ramón Ramirez. High and robust, one meter seventy-five centimeters and eighty kilos". Write our phone number and get several copies. Stick them on the posts of Coyoacán, give them out in the delegation and around his girlfriend's house and friends, near the school and where you think he could be walking – she ordered me.

Now, mom? It's too late, I didn't sleep at all and I'm very tired, all day you have brought me up and down, better tomorrow in the morning, no?

It really seemed an excess to me, although I was not surprised, because my mother was always so apprehensive and exaggerated, and even more when it was about her children, her chicks. I knew it. Mommy hen was not going to let us sleep if we were not all in the corral under her wings and her protection.

I said right now! At this precise moment – she repeated banging on the table -. Hurry up and don't delay, if when you come back there is no news, then we are going to have to go

to the delegations, to Xoco, to the Red Cross and to all the hospitals to look for him, so you better start right away. I'm going to call back to Locatel, and keep insisting with friends. Call me every half an hour to know you are okay and in case there is news.

I asked Mariana to accompany me, and until eleven o'clock at night we kept on pasting and distributing signs in all places where it occurred to us.

When we returned, my mother was waiting for me to start the tour of all nearby delegations and hospitals, asking for my brother. Without any news, we returned when the sun rose.

The following days were no better. The scenes from the search were repeated and repeated, with greater insistence and despair.

Three days after the disappearance of my brother, my mother decided to change doctors. Apparently, someone had convinced her that the doctor with whom we were wasn't so good, because he had not noticed the condition of my brother. He had let him escape. The logical thing would have been to medicate him from the beginning, to avoid that in his moments of good judgement he reacted like this. That had been a big mistake. So my mom looked for another one.

When speaking to the doctor of the Guadalupe Inn to request him the file and explain him that we would change doctors, he accepted and acknowledged that the new doctor was an eminence. He even offered to talk to him to give him his diagnosis. My mother thanked him and accepted.

Doctor Vargas Elías is a real schizophrenic specialist, ma'am. He has helped several patients go through it and I am sure that if José Ramón appears, he will help him a lot. What you really require is a psychiatrist, not a psychologist like me – he said as he handed us the yellow envelope with my brother's file -. As I mentioned the last time that we met, right now your son requires medication, not just therapy, and I am not the right one to prescribe it, so it is very convenient for you to change doctors. And Vargas Elías is one of the best.

With the envelope in hand we went to see the new doctor. Just by seeing his office I felt so much better. His office was wonderful, it was on the seventh floor of a building in Insurgentes, near Barranca del Muerto, and it was a true elegance. When the elevator opened, I was surprised by the view, the light and the cleanliness. Arranged with the cozy carpet and surrounded by windows, down the hall we entered a room covered with fine wood very well varnished. When we reached the waiting room, I realized that there were no ghosts. In its place I found a divine fish bowl full of happy little fishes that swam between rocks, shells and a stranded boat. On the corner table there was a lamp that simulated a fountain that let out the beautiful reassuring sound of water as it fell. A smiling and friendly secretary greeted us and offered us something to drink. While I waited for my mother with a soda in my hand, I noticed the comfort of the armchairs and especially the variety of magazines on the center table, very well set up around a sweets platter full of chocolates, chewing gum, chamois, lolly pops and taffy. After an hour of browsing some magazines and savoring some sweets, finally my mommy came out with the doctor.

Tall, slim and elegant, he walked and was dressed like an English Lord, with soft steps that let his cashmere vest under his mottled sack. A mature man and with a lot of personality.

Until then, ma'am, keep me informed of anything, I will be waiting for your news – he said in a calm, steady voice that made me feel very tranquil.

See you, Mabel, please help your mom and don't let her despair, we are going to find your brother and we are going to cure him – he said softly to me as he held my hand and caressed my head.

“Wow, he even knows my name, this one is a real doctor, he looks confident and knowledgeable. This man is going to cure Joserra, now he only needs to appear”, I thought.

X

By the eighth day we finally had news. We found out that Joserra was or had been at Cuco's house, his soul bro, his childhood friend.

The man of the chocolate factory in front of Cuco's house informed us. He heard thanks to the ads that Mariana and I gave away that night, and because we had been good customers while we lived in Coyoacán, he was encouraged to call us and tell us that his daughter had seen him enter Cuco's house that morning.

For more than five years we lived in front of the chocolate factory. Each time that my mommy had nerves or depression, she would send us to buy chocolates and marzipan, so the man knew us very well and he liked us very much. Even on some vacations he let us help him at the factory. At that time my mom was a television host and was always living on a diet, being careful not to put on weight.

Do not bring me chocolates for any reason, not even if I beg you. I just started a diet of only juices, so I'll give you five pesos if you don't buy me a single candy in the whole week – she would tell us on Sunday.

Her willpower was great – not like mine, nonexistent -, but arriving Friday or Saturday she would start being hungry, so then the offer would rise to ten or fifteen pesos if we brought her at least a hundred grams of chocolate and one or two marzipan.

We learned to resist her blackmail until we could get out twenty or twenty-five pesos, and as soon as she gave us the money, we would run without any remorse to buy her chocolates to satisfy her the anxiety.

When the man from the chocolate factory called us, we immediately left towards Cuco's house to look for José Ramón. Cuco half-opened the door and stuck his nose out, but he didn't let us in. From that little hole he told us that Joserra had told him that we wanted to lock him up and that he would not allow it, that he was very resentful of us and he wasn't going to go back home. Cuco was outraged too. After insisting a lot to let us see my brother, he demanded us the treatment we were giving him to believe him crazy. He reminded my mother that Joserra was a misfit because she didn't know what to do with



him and she had sent him as a prisoner to the priests to Spain and she had separated him from his friends, that he wasn't going to betray him like his family, that he was his bro. He was very hard on us, but my mother didn't lose her temper. She tried to persuade him to let us in and see him, but she didn't accomplish anything. She explained him that we were not going to lock him up, that no decision had been made, that all she wanted was for the doctor to check him, that we needed to evaluate the options according to the diagnosis. That my brother was sick and had to be attended.

The Cuco didn't hear any explanation, he told us that my brother was fine and that he would not give him up for any reason. That he was in good hands, not like ours.

When my mother lost her patience, she began to shout that he was a marijuana junkie, irresponsible and other horrible things, until the Cuco ended up closing the door on our faces.

We have to get your brother out of here and convince him to go to the doctor – my mother said as she got into the car -. We can not leave him with that hippie junkie. It is not a game. Your brother is sick and he needs medical care, who knows in what condition he is.

Ma, if Joserra is there or if Cuco knows something about Joserra, surely it's because he is okay, if not, he would have already told us. He may have a few drags from time to time, but he is not a jerk, he understands the situation well and he loves Joserra very much. Calm down – I said to her -. We should ask Mariana to talk to him, he knows her well and he trusts her much more than you or me, maybe she can convince him.

When we arrived home we explained Mariana what had happened and she agreed to talk to Cuco to explain him, so she called him and agreed to meet him in El Parnaso in the morning for coffee.

The next day, Mariana came back home with her eyes totally red and swollen, you could see that she had cried a lot.

As she told us, Joserra had slept with Cuco the last nights, but this one warned him advising him to leave. He told him that we were looking for him and that we were already lurking nearby, so surely we would find him and we wanted to lock him up. He had apparently advised him to go to Valle de Bravo to look for Botingo to hide there. What else did he tell you? How is he? Did he tell you anything about his condition? How is your brother? Did he tell you about something strange in his behavior? Tell me everything that he has told you without omitting detail, although it is very hard, please, daughter, it is very important for me – my mother asked.

Oh, ma, it's horrible – said my sister as she burst into tears and hugged her neck -. Joserra is bad, very bad, ma. What are we going to do?

Between sobbing and sobbing, she finally told us what she had heard that morning.

As Cuco told her, Joserra was a nutcase. The days he was with him, he saw him talking to himself, shouting and complaining about the voices, Cuco had reassured him, and sometimes he even managed to make him come into reason, but as time passed, the things got worse. In recent days, apparently, Cuco had to slap him and tie him so he would not be lashed against the doors, walls and windows. One night, he even locked him in the room and let him hallucinate alone. My brother spent all night screaming and whipping against everything, but Cuco ignored him and left him there until he fell asleep.

Until then, Cuco believed that it was a passion or a crusade of something, and that if he stayed clean, without consuming any drugs a long time, it would pass. But the last night Joserra had frightened him a lot, since he had had a very strong start of madness. Not only did he start talking and shouting at someone who didn't exist, but he became very aggressive with himself, he pulled his own hair and hit his face and head. Violence was growing more and more, unable to stop it, until in one of those attacks, Cuco himself had to knock him out.

As he told Mariana, it all started when José Ramón, obeying the voices, began to desperately eat all the food on the table.

Cuco tried to calm him, when suddenly a fight broke out between my brother and his own hand.

Stop bringing the food to my mouth, I do not want to eat anymore. Don't hit me, don't pull my hair, loser. That's enough. Stop it, don't listen to the voices, don't obey them, in here the boss is me – he shouted at his right hand while he stopped it, he slapped it with the other and he lashed it on the table and Cuco didn't know what to do. In despair, Joserra took his right hand with his left hand, placed it firmly on the table, and shouted: "Quiet, bitch" and he stabbed the fork with all his strength.

There was silence. Joserra was hypnotized watching the blood that began to squirt. It was then that Cuco reacted and knocked him out.

## THE HUNTING

The next morning, after finding out Luis Botingo's address in Valle de Bravo, my mommy and I went there. Luis was another friend from childhood and long ago he had gone to live to Valle de Bravo with his girlfriend. My brother always called his friends by his nicknames. I have never known why Luis is called el Botingo or Javier el Cuco, or Gerardo el Puche, or my ex-boyfriend, Julián, el Gordo, I guess because he was skinny. What I sure know is that between them there was always a great friendship and complicity which kept them together at all times.

I drove my Volkswagen while my mother slept; it had been days in which she hadn't closed her eyes. I wasn't a good driver on highway, I had barely gone out once or twice, so I was very attentive. Suddenly the landscape began to caress me with thousand memories of my childhood appearing at every turn or behind every tree. Going and returning to Toluca with my daddy, to Ixtapan de la Sal, to the Caves of Cacahuamilpa and to Valle de Bravo.

The relationship we established with my father after the divorce was very intense, much more than when we lived together, because in that time he was almost never at home and we didn't see him. But after the divorce, and before marrying again, he picked us up almost every weekend to take us hunting. Joserra and I were always going. Sometimes Mariana and José Felipe accompanied us, but not very often. It depended on the route, because they were younger and couldn't put up waking up so early in the morning and the long walks. My dad always liked to hunt. We only accompanied him when it was with hares and quails, but he repeatedly went into the jungle in the south of the country in search of larger animals. I guess that as a sport and as show off of his manhood and bravery. To date, he has dissected heads of wild boars, pumas, lynxes and tigers hanging on the wall of his living room.

On Friday afternoons he would pick us up in his van, to which he had adapted a trailer for the dogs, and would take us to live great adventures. After going to the supermarket to buy "provisions", as I called the food, we used to take that same road in which I was driving now desolated and full of uncertainty, to get to a hotel to sleep near Ixtapan de la Sal.

Early in the morning, he woke us up to go after the quails. There were never missing his friends, dukes, counts or archdukes or some important personage of very high lineage of the Hunters' Club. The princes of Ehrenberg of Habsburg, the Archdukes of Austria, or the brother of the Austrian emperor. That was the funniest. I loved his wonderful stories, which he repeated to me every time he saw me, about when Hitler had invaded Austria and how he had to go to England and then to Mexico.

I also liked going out with the Duchess Ana Eugenia de Bar. Wow, what a name! I wanted to call myself like her. Sometimes we would go to pick her up to her house in Reina street, in San Angel, and I thought that the street was named like that because she lived there. My dad was good friends with them, they had made the Vizla Club together. According to what was told, he had come very proud to the Mexican Dog's Association to register the first dog of vizier breed that arrived to Mexico, and he found out that the Duchess' Vizla had arrived two days before. So he ran to meet him and that's how the friendship came about, based on dogs and hunting.

Who had the best dog? What dog was the champion's son? Who was going to breed their dog with the other champion? That was the real competition. Which dog had better pedigree, more diplomas, better pose, more medals.

I was fascinated by all the status around the hunting. I was around ten years old and wanted to be a princess. I loved the dog contests, the training, the dukes, the stories of princes and emperors, the hunting, the rifles, and above all, my father.

In the hunts he was the best. Super Ramirez, my idol. I wanted to be just his and wanted him just for me. Like every princess, I had my vizla dog. My father, the king, had given it to me. It was Lucila, a champion, a beauty daughter of the best. She made me win all the competitions. Of course, I had my skills too. I was very good at target shooting, I knew the whole theory and tried to practice at every fair and every hunt. I was always a very strong, disciplined and energetic girl, I always stood by the hunters without tiring and without protest, and whenever I could I would go with them, so I was also my dad's pride.

Joserra came with us, but he didn't love the hunting like me. He had flat feet and at that time he wore very thick lenses, because he didn't see well, so he didn't like long walks and he wasn't so good at target shooting. He preferred to go out trout fishing with Roitter, the vet. He was fun, but different. Just blah, blah, blah, and less action. Maybe that's why Joserra preferred that. They talked a lot. Roitter, Joserra, and my dad discussed deep-seated topics, adult themes, while we waited for the fish to bite. We didn't walk so much, but we did eat delicious. We prepared trout to the embers in a cheerful fire that we revived between joke and joke and histories of hunting, dogs and adventures. For me that was the best time of fishing.

But the outings to the trout were few, because my father's true passion were the dogs and the shotguns, it was manly and it was status, worthy of his youth in the Falange, so Joserra endured and accompanied us after the quails, as a male, as my father used to say. Besides, it wasn't so bad, since we usually spent the weekend with him. After the hunting, my father would take us horseback riding to Ixtapan and on Sunday we would swim and we would cover with mud in the spas.

We always lived between dogs and shotguns. The hunting season was from February to September, and the months when there was no hunting, the dogs had to be trained. We had a big house with a large patio, and on the training weekends my dad let us participate. We would tie a dead quail to a stick with a bow and we would turn it around so that the dog could smell it and chase it until it learned to identify the smell and managed to show itself when recognizing it. We always knew how to shoot with shotguns. On field days or at my uncle German's ranch, they would put us beer cans on a fence and we had to pierce them to shots. Joserra was not the best, and then with his blindness he could not even see the height of his nose, much less the beer can in the distance that had to be brought down. I, on the contrary, at the first shot would make it fly.

When the hunting was finished I always started the competition to see who threw or at least who could pierce more cans. Of course, I always won, and my father made fun of my brother. "How is it possible for your sister to win you, if she is just a woman", he said to him. How he bothered him!

The only bad thing was the blow of the shotgun when firing. Oh, how we suffered the pain and bruises on the shoulder by the strokes of the filthy guns with every shot. And how bad my brother felt with my father's scolding when he complained. "Don't be a sissy, it's not such a big deal, learn from your sister that she holds up like a male." I have always had the threshold of pain very high, and when it hurt, I bit my lip to not complain, because I knew that was the way to be accepted by my dad.

X

That way, dreaming with dogs and shotguns, we arrived to Valle. Finally, I parked the car in front of Luis Botingo's house, where my mother and I knocked for over half an hour without any response.

After waiting until lunchtime, we decided to go look for Joserra in Valle de Bravo and its surroundings, but there was no sign of him walking around. Fortunately, it was

Sunday and Valle was very animated, so it was entertaining to visit the market, where we ate some snacks, and later we strolled among the craft shops. Already in the afternoon, after trying again without success in Luis's house, we decided to call Mexico to see if there was any news. It was Mariana who answered and told us that my dad had called in the mid-morning to inform us that Joserra was with him and that it was urgent that we communicate.

My mom and dad had not spoken for long. I was always the intermediary, so I prepared to once again serve as messenger between them and endure the bickering pretending that it didn't hurt me or that I didn't understand. But to my surprise, and surely because it was about Jose Ramon, it didn't bother my mom to speak directly to my dad. So, when hanging up with Mariana, very determined she left the cabin, and without hesitation not even for a second, she gave the operator a new number and asked her to communicate her with Mr. Jose Antonio Ramirez.

Hello – I heard her say. Jose Antonio? It's Macarena, Mariana tells me that Jose Ramon is with you, is it true?

I just got there. I could not take it any more and I ran to the street. It made me very nervous that they were talking to each other. They always ended up insulting and hurting themselves, which caused me a deep damage that until now I can not repair.

That feeling that the two beings I most loved in this world would destroy each other once more, took me to the little bench in the park, where I waited until minutes later I saw my mom coming in a hurry, announcing with that unmistakable gesture of anguish and worry that in the last days had been tattooed in her face, that something bad had happened.

Where were you? Why do you disappear? Don't you realize how the situation is? Come on, move it. Let's go to Mexico at this moment. Your brother is still bad, very bad. As your father told me, your brother was here, and in a terrible crisis that he had, he tried to cut his veins with a razor blade in the bathroom in Luis's house. Fortunately, Botingo stopped him on time and didn't get worse. This morning your father found him at the door of his apartment and now he is with him.

Cut the veins? Tried to kill himself? My brother? Why?

I could no longer hear what my mother kept saying, she spoke without stopping while we got into the car. I started the car and took the road. I no longer listened to anything, I went back into that world of memories of my childhood that the road had given me. Among the headlights of the cars that were coming in the opposite direction I found the escape, in the memory of when I was a princess and around me there was only love.

X

That big day, dressed as we had slept, my dad woke us up at four in the morning. As I got up I remembered my new clothes and I got very excited. I saw myself in the mirror before I left and I confirmed that I looked super cute, like a real fashion girl. While Joserra dragged his feet and held to the rail to get down the stairs still half asleep, I walked with

charm admiring how the bell from my flared pants was moving at every step. Before leaving I put on my denim jacket and ran to the bathroom again to see myself one more time. "No, with the jacket closed neither my blouse nor my belt can show off, and the worst of all, you can not tell that my ago-go pants are to the hip, so I better unbutton it", I said to myself as I opened the buttons.

Close your jacket, you are going to get sick – my dad said when he saw me at the door. I'm not cold, dad.

Don't be conceited and close the jacket immediately – he insisted.

"Fuck, I always have to do what he says", I thought while I closed my filthy jacket.

When I got in the van, Joserra had already made himself comfortable in the armchair and he was totally asleep. I accommodated next to him and tried to sleep again.

Accompanied by the music of The sounds of silence, by Simon and Garfunkel, which my father had put in the cassette player, I wondered: "What are they going to say when they see me so beautiful? What is Miguel going to say about my new look? I am sure that now he is going to fall in love with me, I look like a real duchess".

Miguel, the friend of my uncle Joaquin, my dad's youngest brother, had started to go out with us for hunting and since the first moment he had conquered me. My dad said that it was an impossible love, for he was twenty-five years old and I was twelve. But I already knew that, in love, age doesn't matter. Angelina, my mom's helper, had told me. In addition, I had read it in Susy, secrets of the heart, so I was sure that I was going to marry him, that's why I had fought with my dad to buy me fashionable clothes.

The clothing was a real fight during the divorce. Well, everything about money was horrible. My dad did have money, so he always bought us new clothes, but he didn't let us take it to my mom's house, and we could only wear it when we were with him. My mom would get very angry, because she had no money to buy us almost anything, so she would send us as beggars, with the worst clothes that we had, so that my dad would be embarrassed and had to buy us new. I suffered a lot, because my dad would get very upset and would speak very bad about my mom. I felt very used and very ugly.

The day before the big hunting my dad picked us up with our worst clothes, so we had to go to Suburbia to buy clothes. He was in a bad mood since he saw us coming out so badly dressed, but I was happy; I had long wanted flared denim pants and a transparent blouse full of flowers of many colors, green, pink, yellow, blue and red, like the one of Motorized Cupid, and when we got to the girls' department I found one just as I had dreamed it. Fully flared hip pants with a green embroidered stripe on the hem and with the belt of the same embroidery. A real ago-go model.

Of course the shopping was not easy, it was a real battle with my dad. It doesn't match, at all. It's not for hunting, you're going to get stuck in the woods with those bells. Besides, you look as a maraca player with those sleeves full of ruffles – he told me when he saw me coming out of the dressing room.

Dad, you know that I like the phosphorescent and bright colors, that's why you call me Tlacuila...Besides, it's fashion, that's how the the one from The Partridge Family dresses and the one from Motorized Cupid too, really, just turn on the TV and you will see.

Since very young my father called me Tlacuila, he said that I was like those young Nahuas who were responsible for painting the codices, with the messages their leaders

gave them, because I used as much color in my clothes as the one they stole from the flowers for their paintings.

After a while complaining about our poor dressing in which my mom had sent us and criticizing my bad taste, he finally accepted.

Oh, my Tlacuila, at the end, who's going to wear it is you – he told me.

Thinking about all this I fell asleep next to Joserra until the leaps of the van on the dirt road, woke us up.

Children, get up, everyone's here – my father said.

“Oh my, and I haven't combed my hair”, I thought. Quickly I looked for my little bag, took out my brush, I combed and put on my hat.

But look at this beauty, how beautiful she is today – said my uncle Joaquin while he lifted me up in his arms and pulled me out of the Van -. But it seems that you are going to a fashion show, come on, give me a kiss.

In that I was, when I saw Miguel coming, he had left the moustache grow and he looked super handsome.

Wow! Very nice pants! – he said to me -. Let's see, turn around, you are spectacular.

“Now I have conquered him”, I thought, as I watched them releasing the dogs that ran out to pee. That's how the hustle started, distribution of belts, cartridge belts, whistles, medicine kit, canteens, backpacks, shotguns and everything else.

I accepted everything and hung on myself what I could until Inocencio, my dad's assistant, passed me the hook to hang the dead quails. I took it with a quick motion and then passed it to Joserra, who rejected it.

Don't be like that Mabel, you know that I do not like to carry corpses – he told me.

Just for today, Joserra, don't be mean, or I'll get my new clothes dirty, please; yes, yes, yes?

Finally, he put it on his belt. I always carried the dead quail, it was my trophy, but that day I wasn't going to do it, I didn't want its blood to get dirty my pants.

The walk began. I was looking for the sun in order to take off my jacket, but it was very cold and it was about an hour before sunrise, as it was only six in the morning.

We were already going cross-country. We had to walk behind the adults, along with Inocencio, who carried the rifles and ammunition, and we couldn't make noise, for we scared the quails.

At a stop, Miguel came to where we were and told us:

Just look how modern the princess is with her hat and her flared pants.

Don't even tell her, because now she's very conceited, since yesterday she's unbearable, she feels the very best – my brother replied.

I knew I was a princess like the ones in Vizla Club or like Betty and Veronica, those of Archie's comic books, and I walked like such, taking care not to fall, with little but quick steps, as I had seen it on TV.

We had been already for a long time going through land and crops without finding places for hunting. Not a sample, not a shot. My father was furious, he could not stand the arid, difficult days, without hunting, without pleasure. Once the massacre began, he would surely be appeased, since only the sure shot satisfied his thirst for death and his fury as a mastiff.

Suddenly, the Lucila, my dog, stuck like a dart in the middle of the race. She had detected the first flock. She was on sample position. The front right leg raised, the tail well raised and the neck and head crouched, at an exact angle of forty-five degrees, as my father said. Inocencio beckoned to us to stop and shut up. Joserra covered his ears and closed his eyes. I stood very still watching attentively how the dogs walked from one side of the scrub to the other, sniffing the floor, where the Lucila remained motionless. Therein, the Max, my dad's pointer dog, also went on sample position next to my dog. Sure it was a big flock.

There they are –my father whispered.

All the hunters put the shotgun to the shoulder and a great silence was made. I saw Joserra sideways, how he frowned behind the glasses and squeezed his eyes harder. He didn't like the noise from shotguns. I also turned to see Miguel, my dream prince. I saw him with the rifle well placed, pointing to the front where the dogs were. "He is like Lancelot, The Knight of the Round Table", I said to myself, when all of a sudden, brrrr, the great noise of the birds was made as they flew all together towards the sky. Bang, bang, bang. The shooting began and the poor birds started to rain.

The screams were heard.

"It's mine, another one, good shot, excellent, well done."

The dogs remained still.

Azzo! – my father screamed. The signal for Lucila and Max to go pick up the dead quails. In spite of the shots and the screaming, the dogs shouldn't move until they are indicated to do so. When they heard the signal, they began to run.

Joserra, open your eyes, that if your father sees you, he's going to be angry – Inocencio told my brother, while taking his hands off his ears.

Now I'm going to have to carry the bloody little birds, I hope that my dad doesn't give me any – Joserra told me.

You better shut up, if he hears us, we're going to be in trouble – I responded.

The dogs began to return each with their prey still hot on the snout. The hunters called them and then caressed their heads while they took the dead bird from the jaws, they checked it and then hung it from the paw on the hook that they had put on the belt. The poor quail, lifeless, headlong and with its beak open and dripping blood, accompanied us in search of other victims.

When we saw that the adults hung all the birds and didn't give any to my brother, Inocencio and I exchanged a smile of complicity. Fiuuu, my brother wouldn't have to carry corpses.

It had been around two hours and I hadn't been able to show off my attire. I was impatient for the sunrise that way Miguel would be with his mouth open, but it was colder and my dad would get angry. The hunting was going very well, we had found many quails and they were all very happy, so I didn't want to ruin the morning.

We went on for a little while, until finally I saw that the sun started to appear.

On the horizon where the sun rose, I saw my dad walk with his giant steps and his "you will see" leg. His shotgun on his arm, the ammunition at his waist, the hook hanging from the full belt, better said, replete of the quail he had hunted. He carried about ten



birds piled up, hanging from his belt, shaking blood with each movement, staining his olive green pants with every step he took.

I felt a little warm, so I looked where to stop to take off my jacket. Just there I saw a bush.

Wait a minute, I'm so hot.

I bent down to leave the canteen and the backpack that I had on my back. My dad was coming towards us.

I got up, took off my jacket, folded it carefully and put it in the backpack, I didn't want to tie it to the waist, because the princesses don't do that.

When I got up, I heard the strong and serious voice of my father:  
Who has the other ring to hang the quails?

I – Joserra replied.

Pass it to me, this one is already full.

Joserra began to take off the belt to remove the ring with the rings where the future prey would hang, when what I feared so much happened. My dad took out the pile of hanging birds and, without giving me time to do anything, he shouted:  
Tlacuila, catch them, they are yours, champion!

Oh, no! How awful!, it can't be! When I turned around I could only see that bundle of bloody feathers flying straight to my blouse, crashing on my pretty flowers, ripping the delicate cloth with the beaks and the nails of the animals and bouncing on my ago-go pants, staining with blood the dreams and fantasies of the poor little princess.

I ended up very filthy, like a real beggar, surely that's why Miguel never asked for my hand.

THE DIVORCE

My parents' divorce was very difficult for everyone. For them, for our grandparents and our aunts and uncles, for me and for my brothers and sisters. It was a very filthy divorce, that did a lot of damage.

The day that my mother decided to separate, there was no human power that could make her come to reason. She packed our clothes and we went to live to a hotel. My mother had decided it after eight years of enduring my father's infidelities, his absences and their lack of love. With a rude attitude as a rich junior, my father didn't get tired of wasting grandpa's money outside the house in demonstrations of manhood, partying and revelries.

When we finally left, my father could not bear it. I believe he loved my mother, but above all, he couldn't handle to see his self-love hurt, so he used all sort of tricks to make her return. From crying and pitiful pleas, to mean accusations about the influence of friends, invented lover's stories and accusations of an immoral life.

Lola was just born and I was only eight-years-old, I was very young to survive the violent scenes that were unleashed following the separation. They caused me immense pain and monstrous nightmares that made me pee in bed from the age of eight until a little after I entered adolescence.

But it was not worth throwing warning signs. Neither the urine in bed, nor the failing of my brothers at school or the low grades, none of them were attended, since any act to call the attention of my parents and telling them that they hurt us, was useless. They had no head except to see how they could attack each other, even through us.

One afternoon, my mom was bathing Lola in her little tub at my grandma Paz, the only backwater of calm that we had in that so turbulent times. Suddenly my father came in, shotgun in hand. We all saw him with surprise faces, but he didn't even greet us. He entered directly to the bathroom and pointed to my mother ordering her to return to the house. My heart was paralyzed, I took my brothers and I ran with them to embrace myself in my grandma's skirt. My grand-mommy took us by the head and made us kneel beside her in front of a crucifix in her bedroom and began to pray, asking us to do the same. I couldn't take my eyes off the bathroom door where my parents were. I couldn't believe it.

My mother hugged my little sister Lola, who was just a baby, she stood up two inches from my father in front of the gun, without a single blink. Come on, Jose Antonio, shoot. I'm not afraid of you. Kill us and you'll go to jail for the rest of your life, with a guilt that will not let you breathe. Come on, if you're going to shoot, shoot, and if not, keep the gun and get out of here right now.

My mother's words crushed my brain, my chest was torn, I heard myself whining, those whines of little girl that I emitted at that time when, I couldn't bear the suffering anymore. I knew that my father had killed Max, his champion, his beloved dog. The secretary had talked about it without realizing that I was listening. One night, with the bitterness of my mother's rejection, and after an afternoon of unsuccessful hunting, he arrived at his factory, grabbed the shotgun, went to the kennels where the dogs didn't stop barking, opened the door of Max's cage, and without giving the dog time to go out, he pointed on his head and let out two cartridges, ending the life of Max von Schnellberg and all his pedigree. I guessed that he was going to kill us all, I knew it, and I thought that

it was the best thing that could happen to me. I would rather die than to see my father killing my mother.

My father kept standing with the shotgun in his hands, that started to tremble, while my mother was despoiling him of that false bravery with her gaze. His fingers clung to the metal of the weapon. He was tense, not moving. That way I saw him and I understood that the will began to turn into panic.

Shoot, I tell you, or turn around and get out – my mother repeated more forcefully.

Impotent and unable to fulfill his purpose, he lowered the weapon, turned on his feet and left the apartment.

This way was for months and months. The time that lasted the divorce lawsuit and the parental authority mess. While the judge didn't decide who we would be with, the lawsuit between my parents for our care and protection was constant, so one day we would wake up at one's house, and the next day, after a quarrel or big discussions, in the other's house.

My father knew that my mother could not live without us, so he blackmailed her by threatening that she would never see us again if she didn't return. He fought for our custody as if it was the last thing in his life. There were calmer days than others, but overall it was a stage of uncertainty and instability. To me, when I was scared the most, was when it started to get dark, because it was when horrible things happened.

One night, when I was in my paternal grandparents' house, my mother came among patrols, police and journalists to get us out of there screaming that the great Don Jose Antonio Ramirez and his mother Doña Maria, who in that time enjoyed of great popularity among the Spanish Colony in Lindavista, had stolen her children. She entered like crazy in my uncle's room, where we slept, ordering us to get up immediately because we were going back with her. Half asleep, we got up among screams and discussions that we didn't understand. My mother carried Jose Felipe in her arms, while Jose Ramon, Mariana and I were walking sleepy after her, trying not to fall down while going down the great spiral staircase of the grandparents' immense house. Suddenly, I collided with my mother's body which stopped all at once. I saw my grandfather Joselo standing in front of my mother in the middle of the stairs, stopping her with his arm.

Macarena, please, reconsider, it's almost midnight, the children are asleep and it is raining outside. Leave them here and tomorrow you pick them up. Understand that I can not let them out under these conditions, they are going to get sick.

My mother straightened like a cat, she stared at my grandfather's pleading gaze, took a breath and responded to him:

Don Jose Luis, you know that I respect you a lot and that in other circumstances I would not dare to touch you, but if you don't take your arm off and open the way for me at this very moment, I don't know what might happen. Stand aside and don't get involved – she said firmly while she pulled away his arm with which grandfather held her.

Mommy, it is my grandfather – I told her -. Do not push him.

My grand-daddy Joselo was a delight, I adored him. At night, when we slept over at his house, he would take us out into the garden and sit us on his legs, above the fountain, to tell us how on a full moon night a witch had come down on her broom and pinched his face, leaving him with that wart he had next to his nose and that made us so curious.

Seeing my mother so determined, grandpa got out of the way and sticking his back to the wall, he left the road clear. As I passed besides him, I felt his loving hand on my head, I confirmed that he loved me as much as I loved him.

After being wrapped in blankets by the men who accompanied my mother, we left in her arms out of the house, among the flashes from the reporters and the patrols' three-colored lights. By the car's window, through the raindrops that fell intensely, I saw how my grandpa made the sign of the cross to bless me and threw me kisses with his trembling hand. I tried to pull out my little hand to send him a kiss too, but when I was able to do it, the car had already left him behind. I cried and cried on my way to the hotel where we lived since my parents' separation and where we spent the day locked up while my mother worked.

Two months later, when we were already living in an apartment that my father had rented for us, another awful episode happened. In the middle of the night, Inocencio, my father's assistant, who had agreed with Angelina, the lady that helped us with the cleaning and took care of us, tried to kidnap us to take us to my father's house. It was around two o'clock in the morning, we were all deeply asleep, when Inocencio made a sign and Angelina opened the apartment's door. Then, stealthily, my father and Inocencio came in and extracted us from the bed, while we were still sleeping, to get us into the my father's car and take us to his house. Joserra and I were carried by my father; Mariana and Jose Felipe by Inocencio, and Angelina carried Lola who was a baby of months. Suddenly, almost reaching the car, appeared my mother in nightgown chasing us. Jose Antonio, give me back the children immediately! – she cried as a wounded beast. Inocencio, Angelina, don't listen and finish up getting the children in the car! – my father ordered.

I woke up completely with the screams already inside the car. I raised my little face to see what was happening and I saw how my mother grabbed Angelina's long black hair and pulled her towards her to snatch Lola, whom she held strongly with an arm, while with the other she took the girl again strongly by the ponytail, she stuck the leg between the knees, making her fall, and then whipped her face against the sidewalk. Either you give me back the children or I will kill her! –my mother screamed as she beat Angelina's head against the floor again and again, among our shouts and cries.

Angelina was bled from the mouth and asked for help.  
Stop her, Sir, she is going to kill me!

My father came out of the car as a rocket and shouted.  
Macarena, leave her alone, calm down, release her in this moment and take the children!

My mother released Angelina's hair, she joined, she took Jose Felipe by the hand and ordered us to get into the apartment and to go back to sleep. The next weekend it was my dad's turn to go out with him, but my mom was so upset that she decided that we were going to the house of my uncle Octavio and my aunt Lourdes, so when my father went to pick us up he didn't find us. The fury of being mocked and deceived, blinded him even more than the fact of not seeing us. Humiliated, crazed and with the reason lost, he threw himself over my mother's room and destroyed everything. Furniture, books, lamps, clothes, windows, photos, everything. When we got back, the cleaning lady was still crying and terrified.

Although always after a quarrel my mother snuggled us, consoled us and explained us that if she fought with my father was because she loved us and didn't want to lose us, I could not take the anguish off me and, for days and days, I kept on hearing the cries and insults. I slept in fear of what could happen at night. I was afraid of my father's fury and his outbursts of madness. In addition, my mother scared me. Until then I knew a sweet and affectionate mommy who sang to us children songs, told us stories and made us swing on her legs, singing "los maderos de San Juan, piden pan, no les dan, piden queso y les dan cosquillas en el pescuezo, eso, eso". I didn't know that woman who faced a shotgun without any fear, who was capable to challenge grandpa and threaten to throw him down the stairs, and to hit without any mercy a cleaning lady so she would not lose us. I was frightened by her aggressiveness. I used to dream that to rescue us she killed my dad and my grand-daddy; I woke up crying and all peed.

The fights lasted almost a year. Sometimes, for long periods we lived at my father's house and we could only see my mother through the window, when the cleaning lady pitied us and hidden from my father she would let us look when we heard the car's horn in front of the window. Another season I remembered that we could only see her during recess at school, under the supervision of a nun in Guadalupe School. In that time, I didn't love my mother and I almost didn't even greet her nor speak to her, because the nuns had told me that she was not good, that she was with many men and that was why she had left us. Other seasons we would go back with my mom and I would get more confused, because when I claimed to my mother the abandonment, she would tell me that nothing of what I had been told was true. That my father was behaving very badly and very cheater, and that he had even edited photos where she was seen going out from hotels with men, to present them at trial against her. Then it made me very upset to have doubted my mommy and I got angry with my dad, but I couldn't claim him because we were forbidden to see him.

One and the other wanted to have the parental authority by using all the possible tricks. Both were from wealthy families of the Spanish Colony in Mexico, so they had the best law firms inventing and making up evidence against each other. The dissipated life of each was claimed. The only thing they managed to do was to destroy each other as revenge of so much resentment kept. It was learned of insults and terrible arguments forged by those who know how to use the law as an advantage.

There were constantly prostitutes who declared against my father, and from his part, he couldn't prove the adulteries of which he was accusing my mother, cheating with all kinds of lovers, from her teacher of Russian to a book seller.

Finally, one day the divorce was completed and the rules of alimony were established. It was decreed that we would remain under my mother's custody, but that she should lead an honorable life and that we would go out with my father one weekend yes and another not. It was then that the fighting decreased a little and we went back to enjoy my mother and my father. Unfortunately, the pact lasted only three years, the time that my father remained single, because the day he remarried, everything recommenced. Apparently, the money was no longer enough to support the two families and he didn't give us the agreed, so the gray days returned, the claims and the offenses.

For my mommy it wasn't easy, and although she worked hard, there were times that it just wasn't enough. Some months were harder than others, and then there was a lot of tension at home: we owed rent, electricity, telephone, and school fees, and there was neither for school supplies, nor amusements. Well, sometimes there wasn't even for food. At that time, we would take refuge at my Granma Paz's house, where there was always, at least rice with banana and eggs with sausage for us.

We were in one of those bad seasons, when one morning when we woke up and reminded my mother that they wouldn't let us in school if we didn't hand in the tuition check, she ordered me to call my dad to ask him for money. My father replied to me that he didn't have and, when I told my mother, she took the phone and told him to take care of us then, that, in that instant, we were going there to stay with him, because she couldn't handle it anymore.

We got in my mother's old Rambler, scared, and headed to the north of the city, where my father lived in a nice little house, with Esther, his wife, and Maria Esther, their first daughter, who at that time was only a few months old.

When we arrived we saw my dad's car at the door. However, when ringing the doorbell no one opened us, so my mother ordered Jose Ramon to jump the gate, enter and open us from the inside. Joserra tried to climb but it was difficult and he couldn't. Then, my mother asked me to do it, but I refused, I thought it was a bad thing.

It's my dad's house, mom, we can not do this. We are not thieves – I told her.

It's your house too, daughter, understand that what is your father's, is yours, of all of you. That is why we are here, because he has enough and he has to give you. So we are just going to take what corresponds to us. Come on, Mabel, go in and open the door, we are going in and we will wait for your father to come back, since you're going to stay here with him some time while my situation improves.

I started to climb the gate when suddenly the door inside opened and my father came out.

Come in – he said – I don't want scandals with the neighbors.

We all went in and one more fight began.

My mother had never been to his house, and as she entered and saw the luxury and comfort with which he lived she enraged.

So you have no money for your children, hey? And what is this? And this? And this one? – she said as she grabbed the ornaments that she found on her way and threw them to the ground.

And so she came up to the kitchen, where she opened the big refrigerator and seeing it full of all kinds of things, she started pulling them out and throwing them to the floor. Then she continued with the pantry and the bar.

Imported cigarettes, all kinds of meat packages, beef fillets, fish, fruit, eggs, cans of caviar, serrano ham, great variety of fine cheeses, everything went flying as my mother passed.

When she got to where the bottles were, she stopped abruptly.

I can not believe it Jose Antonio, it cannot be true what I'm seeing. So while your children only have rice with egg and sausage, you smoke imported and eat caviar and serrano ham and you drink all the most expensive wines and liquors. And you say that you don't have

the money to give us more? Well, now you're going to have to stretch your few cents because the children stay with you.

Perfect, leave them with me, but you will never see them again – my father replied. I'll put them in a full-time boarding school.

Many years I fought for them and I offered to take care of everything, but you didn't allow it, Macarena. Now I have already remade my life and it is not fair for Esther to make her responsible for five more children. The one who decided to divorce and take the children away from me, it was you. You should have thought of this before.

Look at the good father you have, children! Now it turns out that you're a nuisance to his new young woman! Of course, as he only has eyes for his new little daughter, you don't matter to him anymore – my mother aimed him with that poison that came out when she was talking to my father.

That is not true – my father replied, as he approached where I was to hug me -. Do not listen to her – he said at the time that he was raising me into his arms -. I adore you, you know it, Tlacuila, it's a lie what she says. You stay with me and we'll see how we do this. Release her! – my mother shouted at the time that she pulled me from an arm to separate me from him -. You have no right to her if you don't even give me for her food. I'll take them all, I'll see how I'll do it and if we die of hunger that in your conscience stay – she said while she pulled me.

Leave them to me, I'll take care of them! – my father fought while he pulled me from the other arm.

Not! I'm telling you to release her! – my mother shouted, as she pulled me towards her.

Trapped between the two of them, feeling my arms drop with each pull, I only thought of the boarding school. No, please, do not lock us up in a boarding school. I don't want another school of nuns, please, please. I didn't dare to speak, I didn't want to make them angry anymore, I was afraid of the decision they could take about our future. I wanted to disappear. Suddenly, the pain became more intense and I could not take it anymore, my muscles were tearing apart.

Let me go, let me go, please, it hurts, it hurts a lot, my arms will be ripped off! – I could finally scream.

Let her go, Jose Antonio, you're hurting her –my mother finally said at the sound of my voice -. Let them decide – my mother launched, like an ax on my forehead -. What do you prefer: go to a boarding school for life or to come with me to the house? – she asked.

I want to leave, I want to leave, please, do not fight anymore, let's go already – I said weeping as I ran to hug my mom's legs -. It doesn't matter that we have no money, let's go, ma, please, I don't want to stay here, we can all work and help you, we can sell ices, wash cars, or work with the lady from the street in the factory of bird cages, we will not starve, I promise you, we are going to eat a little so you can afford it, let's go, I don't want to go to a boarding school, please, ma, let's go – I begged her.

Upon hearing my plea, my mother took pity and let out the magic words. Everyone in the car – she ordered.

We went up to our ramshackled Rambler, while I sighed and rubbed my arms. For a moment I thought that it was over, that we were going home, but I was wrong. It was there that I realized that I didn't know my mother at all.

Is that your father's car? – she asked us from the steering wheel, pointing to the latest model car parked in front of the house.

Yes – we responded.

Then, without knowing how, she drove backwards and let our car go over his car again and again until it was completely dented on all sides. We all screamed and cried as we felt the bangs and to see my father standing by the gate, watching us in silence.

## THE BETRAYAL

That Sunday, upon returning from Valle, we agreed that the next day, after college, I would go to my father's house to see Joserra. So on Monday afternoon, anguished and afraid, I arrived to Tlatelolco. I parked my vocho on Insurgentes and got down shaking. I walked very slowly, without wanting to arrive. I was distracted, I wasn't paying attention to the road, the words were bouncing in my brain. "You have to come and help me, apparently we're going to have to hospitalize him, there's no other alternative. There's no other alternative. There's no other alternative."

Seeing the building Guerrero, where my father lived, my heart accelerated, I wanted to turn around and run, run until disappearing, so I pushed myself and accelerated the pace, I climbed the stairs in a second and knocked the door before repenting. I saw myself standing there with my white-stripes and pink dress. "From now on you are just a rock, convince yourself, you have no heart, you're solid and hard", I said. I breathed deeply.

My father opened the door.

Good thing that you came, I'm going to need you. This is going to get ugly – he told me.

Why is he always so catastrophic? He didn't realize that he made the situation worse, he always made it more terrible, more difficult. He had the facility to take my peace away, to make me feel bad, to make me believe that I was facing the worst, the most negative. It was impressive how he managed to fill my chest and invade the atmosphere with anguish. I felt that I couldn't swallow saliva, my throat closed.



Where is he? – I asked.

In the bathroom. I'm just waiting for the doctor's call to know at what time he will receive us – the table was set. My dad was crushing something in a napkin -. I am going to put two valiums on his plate, we need him to be stunned to control him.

Two valiums? It's a lot. Why do you always have to be so savage? With half is enough, pa. No, daughter, look at his size. Hardly this way we are going to be able with him between the two of us, trust me.

I sat down at the table and saw the white powder fall on a large plate of spaghetti with ground meat in tomato sauce. My dad stirred it up with the fork until there was nothing left. My throat was knotted. My sight clouded, it seemed unfair to me. Why? Why?

I felt guilty, an accomplice, a traitor.

"Mabel, please, don't lock me up, I know that they want to take me to the madhouse, don't let them."

The spaghetti dish was immense, as usual; in that house the food was served in an exaggerated way. Everything was in excess. Like that, just as full, came mine. Grotesque, inopportune; it made me nauseous.

A door was heard and I saw him appear at the end of the hallway. That wasn't my brother. Had turned gray terribly, he had almost all white hair. How could that be? Only a few days ago, when he had disappeared, his hair was totally brown.

He was twenty-two years old and he looked like an old man. He was only a year older than me, and I felt as a fragile and vulnerable girl, and more in that moment. Hello, Mabel – he greeted me with a kiss -. How good that you already came, I'm starving – he told me as if nothing had happened, as if he hadn't escaped, as if we had not spent more than ten days of uncertainty looking for him in every possible corner, as if nothing, just like that.

We sat all three at the table. I saw him take the first bite and I felt like screaming. "Don't eat it Joserra, it has Valium, we're going to sleep you to take you to the doctor. Forgive me, forgive me, it is for your own good." Not a syllable came out of my mouth.

I felt like running away again. I wanted to get out of there, I was lying to my brother, to my soul bro.

My father would say some stupid thing about his youth in Spain and my brother would laugh out loud, with that honest laugh, with the innocence that characterized him. I saw him laughing and I wanted to snuggle.

I started to eat, I wanted to forget and to laugh too.

Joserra, my little brother, my little friend, the accomplice of my childhood. Why did this happen to you? Who did it to you? I felt the vomit in my throat. I ran to the bathroom and expelled what little I had eaten. I hugged the toilet and I cried and cried. I kept on vomiting bile for a long time until I heard the phone. When I left the bathroom, I listened to my father.

Perfect, doctor, then at five o'clock sharp we will be there.

I gathered up my strength and sat down again at the table.

Jose Ramon was petrified. He no longer spoke, his eyes had lost their light, there was only fire and rage in his eyes. He stared at my father with eyes of fury, with those

eyes of another who had been inside him for days. He snorted by the nose like a bull, completely out of his mind.

I'm not going to the doctor and you know it, dad – he shouted while approaching in an insulting way to my father's face. His breath hit him. Challenged him. – Don't betray me, you are not like my mother, that's why I came to you – he said, shaking his shoulders -. I trusted you. You promised me, don't even try it, don't you dare. Don't you see that I'm not crazy? Don't you realize? I'm not crazy.

He let go my father and took refuge behind my back. He took me with force. Don't let him, help me, please, he wants to lock me up in the madhouse, I told you, stand up for me.

Calm down! – my father shouted -. No one is talking about you, the appointment is for Mabel who isn't feeling well. Can't you see that she's vomiting?

Joserra took me by the face forcefully and forced me to see him in the eyes, those unrecognizable eyes, irritated and full of fury.

Tell me the truth, Mabel, I only trust you.

Dad, don't do this to me – I pleaded. There was a great silence. I burst into tears.

Joserra loosened his arms and hugged me with love.

Don't cry, sister, it's for your own good, if you're sick, the doctor will cure you – he said to me -. Do you feel bad?

Yes, yes, very bad, very bad – I replied, as I hugged him and received his caresses over my head.

Well, well, that's enough, stop the melodrama, don't be exaggerated – said my dad -, finish eating because we have to leave, come on.

I've finished – I said.

Not me, I'm going to finish my spaghetti, I'm still hungry – said Joserra, more calmly.

I returned to the table and began to sigh deeply, with a feeling that ripped me all inside. I wanted to hug my dad and to lull me like when I was a child, but my dad was very angry, he saw me with a complaint in the eyes. It was logical, I could imagine what he was thinking, I had almost spoiled everything with my cowardice.

I felt alone. I had no capacity to withstand what was going on, my heart was not so strong.

“Why don't they let me keep on being a girl? Why do I have to assume the role of my mom? Ma, why aren't you here to solve your son's problems and to control your ex-husband?”

Mabel, daughter, it's a fact that your brother goes to the hospital today – my mom had told me when I woke up in the morning -. Be strong and don't get separated until the worst happens. Love him very much.

My mother had delegated this decision to my dad. I'm sure she would never had taken it. Even though she was a superwoman, with her children she was weak. In order to defend us and protect us, she would take the power from beyond, she never allowed anyone to touch us nor harm us. The lioness that took care of her puppies, for this dreadful decision, found no strength.

Is there any dessert? – my brother asked in front of the empty plate. My father brought a piece of cake -. Umm! Delicious, I want, I crave that little cake with coffee and a cigarette.

I saw him light his cigarette with that taste he always did. The coffee steaming and the cake looked like an advertisement, spongy and juicy. I closed my eyes and kept the image. It was a perfect picture of the happy family. Everyone around the table, drinking coffee and enjoying a nice chat.

I logged out.

I was left with the image of the happy family.

I'm going to get my coat. Joserra, grab your jacket, it's about time. Come on, Tlacuila, we're running late.

Already in the car everything was silence, it looked like a graveyard, during the whole journey no one said a word. The silence hurt and so, full of pain, we arrived.

I think Joserra was already half asleep, because when the doctor appeared and indicated that the first one that he would receive would be my brother, he entered without any reproach.

While we waited, Fernando, my boyfriend, arrived. I felt great relief. Now I had my bodyguard. I wanted to feel his body covering me all, his warmth, his affection, I wanted to hug him tight and tell him everything, but when I tried to speak, my eyes fogged. If I came so that you cry, I'd better go. Enough of so many tears. I've already told you that it drives me to despair that you cry – he said to me with his northerner's brusqueness -. You women think that with crying everything is arranged. Well, no, you only make it worse, so sit down and calm down. Where is your brother? – he asked. Inside – my father commented.

Once more I swallowed all that salt, all the bitterness.

How's everything going?

Bad, very bad... Jose Ramon has been out of his mind, he says nonsense things, he comes out of control easily. In the morning we had a very serious confrontation...

My father told Fernando a series of incredible episodes about what had happened that morning in the meeting with my brother. Scenes of too much aggression, confrontation and destruction. I listened in panic.

We waited over an hour, or so it seemed to me.

When Joserra left, the doctor called my father and me.

I have to talk to your dad, please stay with your brother in the waiting room and don't let him go out for any reason – he said to me.

Fer, help me – I said to him in secret -, we have to entertain him.

For that, Fernando knew how to do it. He was a good conversationalist, entertaining, with a lot sense of humor, so with the sympathy and naturalness that characterized him, began to tell wonderful stories of his new ranch, as only he knew how to do it. We both listened attentively, although the tension did not go away. Every time that Joserra was making a move, I would pounce and hug him to stop him, thinking that he was going to run like the last time, but Fernando stopped me and kept talking like nothing was happening.

No one knows all the jolts that my heart gave me while we were there. After almost a century my father came out.

Let's go – he said to me while he pulled my arm. We advanced a few steps -. I want you and Fernando to sit in the back of the car with Joserra in the middle, I don't want him to escape from us.

Fernando continued talking about his thousand adventures, until we stopped in front of a pharmacy.

I'm going for some cigarettes; do you want some soda? – my father asked.

We all accepted.

Tlacuila, come with me – he said. His voice sounded like a thud as we crossed the street. We have to give him some medicine to finish making him sleep. We are going to take him to the San Rafael Clinic, we have to intern him today. I'm going to put the medicine in his soda, it's very strong, so it probably will cause him convulsions, please don't be scared and hug him tight, don't give in to anything that he tells you, it's for his own good, do you understand? When we return, we are going to ride in the car until he is completely asleep, he is almost lost but if he asks where we are going, we tell him to the house, he is already half doped, so he won't even notice. I am supposed to see the doctor in one hour in the hospital, to intern your brother. The male nurses will be waiting for us to receive him. Daddy, Isn't there another way out? – I asked in a faint and skinny voice -. Please, I promised him that I wouldn't let him be locked up. I can not betray him. Don't start weeping, this isn't easy for anyone – he said harshly, without feelings -. Would you rather he committed suicide? With an attempt wasn't enough? – His words pierced my brain -. Your brother is schizophrenic, daughter, understand it once and for all. It's not a game. He has to be cured and at this point there is no alternative – he concluded dryly.

I'm sure that Joserra realized my betrayal, because when he got into the car, he kissed me on the cheek and said to my ear:

Thank you for everything, Mabel. I love you.

I saw him give the first drink to the soda and I could not take it anymore, I felt how my body collapsed. As much as everyone thought that I was strong, I was just a little rat terrified, so I disappeared. I leaned my head on the window and fled among the lights of Insurgentes. I took refuge in every light. I could hear the voices of Fernando and my father as distant murmurs. I just wanted to count the lights that passed us nearby, just that, nothing more. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine...

EVERYTHING REMAINED INSIDE

The pain I felt when I saw the bars of the San Rafael Clinic closing behind us, with my brother in there, tied up in that straitjacket and guarded by all those male nurses, didn't

heal in a long time, didn't even diminish a little. On the contrary, it was growing day by day.

The hospital took away from me so many things that, for long months, it was almost impossible for me to survive. It kept my sick little brother, whom I missed every day, whom I dreamed healthy in some happy adventures and sick in horrendous nightmares. The hospital stole the joy of my family, the stability of my home and, the worst of all, the energy and the strength of my mother.

The house collapsed little by little. The only rock that had sustained our home after my parents' divorce had been my mother, and that day she became dust. She turned into weakness and depression.

The hospital took everything, it even sucked the light and life of my mommy's room. For months, in the dark she transformed into a boneless body, in a lump in fetal position that didn't want to live. A weak body and full of guilt that would only go out twice a day. In the mornings to run to the horrendous clinic where she would leave her hope, and in the evenings to consult the doctor in search of some word of encouragement or at least a small explanation to try to understand what had happened.

Every day my mommy went to the clinic to leave a gift for my brother, whom we were forbidden to see, hoping to find some news of his recovery. When she didn't receive sign of his improvement, she returned to her confinement.

I remember the day when I finally dared to enter her room.

It had been more than a month since we had locked up Joserra. I arrived from college and I found once again with my mother's plate full on the dining table. I decided to look for her and to insist her to eat.

It had been more than twenty days since I had seen her, since she had locked herself up in her room I didn't dare to enter.

When opening the door of the room, the darkness blinded me. I took another step and waited until my eyes became accustomed to that deep black. I was afraid of what I could find. It wasn't the room where I used to talk, laugh and argue with my mother. It was not the room that provided me with dresses, make-up or jewelry on my party days. It wasn't that space where we shared the good films of Voluntary Permanence on Sundays, lying in bed surrounding my mom among chocolates and marzipan.

No, now it was a horrible pit, a cold cave, a cemetery, something had died. It was dirty and forgotten. It had not been cleaned in all those days. The floor was filled with objects, clothes, plates, books, papers.

Trembling, I advanced to the bed. Almost on arrival I saw a bundle. It was my mommy. She was in a posture of ball between the bed sheets, like a puppy.

I approached and I heard her cry among long and choked sighs that didn't allow him to breathe, she pulled air so deep that I understood that something was dying inside her.

Where was the great lady, the invincible, the almighty?

Before my eyes I only had a rag that vanished with each breath. I sat on the edge of the bed and hugged her.

With all my hopes I wanted to feel her hard, solid, I wanted to see the pillar that had sustained me during my childhood, in my adolescence and in the divorce, the column

that supported the house and my family. I wished to see my protector warrior appear, my mommy tiger who would take out her sharp claws to defend us and protect us when she perceived some danger.

I begged to listen again to her thunderous laughter, to travel through her fantasies and her stories, to feel the warm and proud mommy that embarrassed me when she told her friends the adventures and the small accomplishments of her five little ones.

Instead of finding my lifesaver, I felt an inert body, boneless, which with great effort stood up and hung on my neck to not faint.

She was like a baby who without understanding a thing cuddled disconsolately on my chest asking for help. I felt all that moisture that injured my skin. Her tears hurt me. For the first time in my life I saw her cry and I felt her suffer.

What I had in my arms was not my mother, it was just a human being.

Everything fell apart. My idol, my fortress, my fighter, she wasn't God, she was a flesh and blood being that trembled full of fears like Joserra, like Mariana, like Josefe, like Lolis and like me.

I caressed her like a puppy trying to protect her, to take care of her, to transmit her that security that I no longer had, that force that I needed so much, trying to give her some peace, of the peace that she had always given me, but realizing that this one had also stayed at the hospital, I felt that I was sinking by her side.

Like this, embraced, we mourned our grief, our loss. Without any strength, without having on something to cling to not to keep on falling down in that bottomless deep abyss.

## DAY TO DAY

I was born under the sign of Libra, with the north node in Pisces and in the twelfth house, therefore I was an excessively worrying person, analytical and I lived in search for perfection. I was inflexible and intolerant. My Achilles heel, as of everyone who has the north node of their astral chart in Pisces, was my obsession with order. My survival depended on everything being in order, life should keep the order that I established and also this way had to behave the others. So the disorder and the instability that provoked my brother's illness unhinged me.

I had to flee, and the only way out that I found was to take refuge in my work. I became a compulsive and insatiable worker. And overturned in my job I managed to keep at bay the madness, the disorder, the ghosts, the loneliness and the fears.

Alone, without the strength nor the company of my mother, I found myself coward and weak. I avoided all feeling, wasting all my energies and my will by working. I would finish them until the last gram, so that I would not be in the mood to think or to try to understand.

I left university without getting my title and I worked, worked and worked. The great excuse was money. I had to support the house, pay the tuition and give my brothers for the day to day, because my mother abandoned everything, starting with herself.

We sold everything we could, until we didn't have anything left. The hospitalization had to be paid, the therapy, the doctors, a permanent nurse, the medications and the different analyzes which they came up with each day. My father, on the other hand, gave us some of his shotguns, some silver he still had from the wedding gifts of his two marriages, and even one of his favorite pictures that Fernando, my boyfriend, was in charge of selling where and as he could, because of the urgency of the money.

Ernesto, my mother's partner, my daddy Neto as we called him, he was present all the time, becoming a great support. He visited my mommy every day, he was the only one who entered into her cave and stayed with her for long periods of time and from time to time he would take her to the clinic. He often shopped for groceries, cooked and looked after my brothers while I worked.

At night I would arrive with Fernando, we prepared dinner, and we saw that everything would be ready for the next day: the tasks of Lolis and Josefe, breakfast and lunch. We had dinner all together with Ernesto and Fernando, our protectors. They were great, they had that great ability to make us forget through laughter.

After picking up the table and washing the dishes, we watched TV until we fall asleep. In those days, Fernando and Ernesto almost always stayed to sleep over at the house. Among them, they were good friends, they got along very well, and in the absence of my mother and my role as the strong one, they took the place of the new men of the house. They gave us that security that we needed so much. ☺

X

Fer was totally a Mexican male, traditional and conservative, a man totally in love with his female, I. He always wanted to have me in a crystal palace. Unfortunately, my momentum of self-sufficiency, independence and permanent overcoming, never allowed him. But he loved me so much that he would have tolerated even what he had never imagined: my freedom, my values and my family.

We were so different. Fer was a junior from Ensenada, Baja California, foul-mouthed, northern, crocodile skin boot, brewer's belly, plaid shirt, jeans, leather belt with wide buckle where his initials glared. He was good looking, or at least I liked him. He looked like Luis Donaldo Colosio, he was charismatic and flirtatious. Curly hair, wide moustache, dark skin, big guy. I loved his long arms and wide hands with which he hugged all my body; also his hat and his trucka, as he called his van.

I remember the day that I took him to the house for the first time to introduce him to my mother.

Let's go in my auto – I said to him.

What the fuck! Not auto, it isn't auto! It's called car. Speak well. Oh my huerca that she's so from Mexico City, I'm even ashamed just on listening to her. She is so prepared, my woman, and just look with what comes out of her. Auto! It's not auto. It's car. Is it clear? Yes, well. Hey, Fer, don't swear with my mom when we arrive, huh? Pli, watch your language, ok? At least until she knows you a little more, ok?

See what I'm telling you? Pli! You should say please. But that's fine, then, let's go already, come on. You'll see how I will impress the mother-in-law, I'm a frigging fucking fox.

Fer! Don't swear. Pli.

Don't get hot, iron. We aren't even there. It's just here in confidence with my gal that I express myself with freedom.

So we got to the door of the apartment. After making him promise once more that he would take care of his language, I finally opened the door.

Come in, Fer. Ma, we're here! – I said.

Woof, woof, woof! – barked Nefasto.

Mother fucker! This asshole fucking dog where did it come from? Hey fuck! Get out of here, you sucker dog! – Fernando shouted with all his might while he jumped and pressed me against himself.

I tried to turn and silence him, but when I turned my head I saw my mom laughing out loud at the kitchen's door.

Come on, Nefasto, stop barking and get over here, don't scare the guests – my mother said in the middle of a big laugh.

She said Nefasto? It's called Nefasto? – Fer asked.

I had already told you about my dog. You knew that it is Nefasto and that's why at the university they call me the Older Nefasta.

What a fucking name! So just like that, you screwed up this poor animal.

Fer, don't swear, my mom is listening to you – I answered him.



Hey, what the fuck, so the matter has already been ruined. I had planned to be good, at least on the first day, but this Fatal spoiled everything. Didn't he, mother-in-law?

My mom couldn't stop laughing. More and more loudly, with that marimba laughter that made the whole colony rumble.

I no longer knew if I was more embarrassed about Fer or my mommy's laughter, so I better got relaxed, and I also laughed at the thought that a harmless cocker puppy had made my big guy jump.

Weren't you very manly? What a scare you had with that poor and helpless animal – I bothered him.

No way, my huerca, it was to make you laugh, so you would loosen the muscle, because you were very stiff – he defended himself.

Oh sure, don't you pretend, you were terrified, I could feel you trembling.

Stop it already, chilanga, you better introduce me to my mother-in-law.

Ma, this is Fer. Fer, this is my mom.

Nice to meet you, ma'am, and I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to enter to your house swearing, but you know how it is. One comes a little nervous with the situation and then your daughter the catrina that threatened me all the way with preventing me from casting my curses, well, I turned more uptight, and when the Funesto barked, well, I got sad.

Nice to meet you, come in and don't worry, Mabel had already told me that you were from the north, so I expected that. Plus, with the jump that you gave you even made me have a good time.

That was the first meeting of many more, full of joy and fun, and more when we were joined by Ernesto: then everything was teasing, laughter and double entendres.

Ernesto was much younger than my mother, he was only three years older than Fernando, so they made a perfect dumbbell. "Hey you, father-in-law", "What's up, son-in-law", they greeted jokingly since they met.

My mommy and Ernesto got along very well. It had been more than three years since Ernesto was almost living in the house. They worked together making TV shows about different states of the Republic and shared most of their time and activities. So when Fer joined the troop, we all went out together. We went camping to the beach with Ernesto and my mom, to film the different cities, towns or communities.

A totally new experience for Fer and for me, and so rich that it made us forget our differences.

I met Fernando when I started to work, and it was almost two years after we started going out when everything happened with Joserra and all changed.

Although my mom liked him, since she said that if I was happy with him, for her that was the most important thing, my family didn't accept him very much. My uncles and my father said that he was not right for me, that I deserved another type of man, more prepared, more educated, of another category. They saw me as their little princess and they wanted a prince for me, but that was the man that I liked, he gave me security and made me feel very loved.

I remember once that my uncle Octavio tested him at a family meal.

Hey, Fernando, did you know that this madness thing is hereditary?

Yes, that's what they say, don't they?

And haven't you thought that if your dating with Mabel progresses and you have children, one of them can be born crazy? Have you thought about it?

Well, what do you want me to do, hey? No way I'll return it. If your niece gives me a crazy pleb, I'll send him to escort his uncle to San Rafael, or not? – after laughing for a while, he added -: Don't worry, sir, if that were to happen, I'll know how to take care of him and love him as a normal child, plus, he's going to have a mother experienced in this madness.

That was Fer. Plain and little complicated, for him everything had a solution, there was not much to think about. As he said, "he was a simple country man", and that way he faced life. There was not much to analyze or think about, it was yes or no and period, he was very clear and very healthy of mind. If there was no money in the house and he had it, he would give it to me and period. If we had to go to the doctor and he had the time, he would take me and go. If we had to sell things, we would sell them, and there was nothing to question nor to regret. If my brother was crazy, he had to be cured and now.

You the chilangos, and more the women, and above all the ones who really think like your family, analyze everything too much. They want to search where there is not. I don't know why they get so tangled up, things are as they are and period – he said to me every time that we got into a discussion or analysis at home.

The weakness in which I immersed myself with everything with Joserra, gave Fernando space to take care of me and to protect me. Despite the situation, I can assure that those years were the most complete of our relationship.

Fer admired us and loved us all and especially my mother. At our side he found a new world full of sensibility, intellectuality, culture, knowledge and brotherhood, which allowed him to discover new aspects of himself and find a corner of love and acceptance in this terrible city, so far from his family and his people. Towards me, he felt a true love, but in his own way, since he couldn't accept for me to grow; he was afraid and caused him insecurity. I, almost a trilingual engineer, having travelled, and with a professional career in permanent ascension, grown in an educated family and much read; He, a simple public accountant quite mediocre and stagnant in his professional career, son of a rural teacher and a housewife. He only wanted to have me for him and that I didn't get out of his control. I was his girl, and finally he could be the strong one and make me feel that. I needed him and he wanted to be needed. So, at the time of my brother's illness, we functioned very well. We became the one for the other.

I learned to enjoy baseball, I met the Diablos and the Tigres, I became familiar with the Social Security Stadium and even became a fan of his namesake "don Fernando Valenzuela". I enjoyed the palenques and the cockfighting; I sang with los Bukis and I danced Ranchero and tango. The weekends we spent the afternoons with his friends among drinks, jokes and guitar, and we sang till dawn. Next to Fer everything was new and entertaining. I was very happy.

When he bought the ranch, we interned Joserra and my mother locked herself, we stopped going out together. The weekends began to be very hard. Fernando had to see his horses, pigs and hens, and he had started planting watermelons, so he had to go almost every weekend and I couldn't go with him because I had to stay at home.

On those weekends it was very difficult to escape the depression of my mother and the reality of the madness that possessed my brother. There was no work, no fun, and

Fernando didn't like me going out with my friends when he was gone. He would get very jealous. So I was dedicated on putting a little order in the house. I would wake up early and I would fill myself up with chores. Once again avoiding to feel and to think. I became a housewife and mother of my brothers. I went to the market, I cooked, I cleaned everything, I bathed Nefasto, I took him out for a walk and, in the afternoon, I would take my brothers to the movies or to go for a ride.

## THE FOOTBALL GAME

That Saturday, when I got up, I found my mother bathed and dressed, sitting down in the dinning room.

Daughter, there's a football game in the clinic today. Joserra is on the team and we will be able to watch him play in the garden through the door. I need you to take me, because I don't know if I can resist.

Since Joserra escaped from us from the doctor's clinic at Guadalupe Inn, my mother had not seen him again and she didn't know how he could react. In addition, the doctor recommended her not to go alone.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when we got into the car on our way to the clinic. It had been more than four months since we left him there. Four months since we lost my mom, my brother, our little patrimony and our peace and tranquility. Four months in which my mother had gone to the clinic everyday to leave a small gift to my brother, because the doctor said that it was important that Joserra didn't lose contact with the reality, that although he didn't realize well in his madness, it was important to let him know that outside we were waiting for him, that he had a family who loved him and who wanted him to get better. So every day, through the nurse, Joserra received messages from my mommy, with chocolates, cigarettes, candies, a book, a poem, a little toy, a T-shirt or something. A sign of love and hope.

As I passed through the bars of the clinic, I felt my heart shrink again. That horrible barrack had my brother incarcerated. We got out of the car and I followed my mother down the stairs. We entered in silence and that's when I noticed the familiarity with which my mother moved through the reception and greeted everyone.

The filthy clinic was already part of her life.

Ma'am, your son is already in the garden, if you want to see him come this way, please – a nurse told us.

We entered a corridor until we reached a glass door, protected with bars, overlooking a garden. We got as close as possible to the glass to try to identify the players. At first sight I perceived more than twenty boys in the field. I tried to find my brother among the bodies, when I heard a scream that my mother accomplished to repress all of a sudden with her shaking hands.

There he is – she said, before bursting into tears.

I put my arm around her shoulders and turned my eyes to where she pointed to me.

I identified him, he was on his back. He had gained about ten kilos, I recognized his toad-walking, his slow and clumsy movements. He had never been good for sports, but now he looked worse. He moved with difficulty and without coordination. Look, ma, it's the goalkeeper, I'm sure that they are not going to score a single goal against him – I said after a great silence to encourage her.

For over an hour we stood there, watching my brother become an unknown being who trotted awkwardly between stumbles and falls caused by a disturbing lack of coordination in his movements.

We saw a game out of all logic, where nobody kicked the ball and much less score a goal, where everyone kicked in the opposite direction, or just without direction. We heard groans and cries of euphoria and madness. Cries of despair.

"I am crazy and no other crazy will take the ball from me", it was heard as a bald took the ball in his arms and threw himself to the ground. Everyone surrounded him begging him to give it back, but he didn't, so after a while, one of the male nurses entered the opposite building and got a new ball. After almost ten minutes the game continued its course.

"Be saved whoever can, be saved whoever can!", shouted a man running in a circle across the garden and ignoring the game.

"The ball is alive, it's alive, do not kick it, it is a trap, they set us up, the ball is alive", another player repeated in tears, in a corner of the garden as the game continued.

Suddenly, in the distance, in front of us, a very thin young man stopped sharply and met my gaze. Slowly he lifted his arm, pointed at me and began to walk determined towards me. I was afraid that Joserra would see us, my breath began to shake. Even though the glass of the crystal door was dark and anti-reflective, I was sure that the guy had seen me and that he was coming to denounce me.

The young man didn't take his eyes off me, he came closer and closer, and I was already really nervous. But for some reason I could not look away from him either. I kept my eyes fixed on his, as if attracted by a magnet, all the way as he moved to the fence that separated us from the garden. It was then, when my mother saw him, turned to me and,

seeing that I was looking at him, she took my arm and whispered in my ear, as if he was a rabid dog:

Don't be afraid of him and don't move. He'll be leaving soon.

The madman took the grilles between his hands looking at me more intensely, he stuck his face between the bars as if trying to touch my nose with his and started the first singing.

"There's a rat in the kitchen and I don't know what I'm going to do. There's a rat in the kitchen and I don't know what I'm going to do. There's a rat in the kitchen and I don't know what I'm going to do." That way he repeated it non-stop for more than five minutes, without breathing, each time more accelerated, more rhythmic, suddenly slow, sharp, to the rhythm of rock, blues, cumbia, jazz... But without blinking not once, with his eyes fixed on my eyes hypnotizing me like a cobra.

I was paralyzed for a moment, until I understood that there was no danger, I smiled and I tried to follow the rhythm with my body. Little by little I beckoned him to lower his voice, not to shout. I said hi to him. Nothing worked. I felt that there was something in my eyes that he was looking for, something that was not in me. I stiffened again in front of him, holding his gaze and hoping that he would find what he was looking for and to give me back my vital space.

We connected. His eyes stuck on mine and pierced me as he sang.

"yes, baby, yes. There is a rat in the kitchen, in the kitchen, in the kitchen, and I don't know, don't know, don't know, really I don't know, what am I going to do", he concluded in a deep tone of pain, of great and deep pain.

He released the grilles, he held his breath in front of me, and dropped his drool on his clothes. That way, slowly, very slowly, he turned and returned to the field.

I felt my mother's warm hands caressing my head and I breathed. Confused, I tried to catch my breath and the energy that boy had stolen from me.

Be careful, they are going to score goal against you. – As I turned my attention to the game, I saw an old man in black pants shouting at my brother.

Are you crazy? I am the best goalkeeper – he responded.

Yes, I am crazy – the one in the pants replied -. And I'm telling you that they are going to score goal against you. We're all crazy. But the difference is that I see the future, I know what I say, they are going to score goal against you, you'll see – he shouted while he melted in laughter -. They are going to score goal on you, they are going to score goal on you, they are going to score goal on you.

Suddenly the ball came towards the goal that protected my brother, who kept on arguing with the one with the pants and so, slowly, as in slow motion, we watched how the ball passed under his legs and entered the goal.

Goal, goal, goal! – it was heard at the soccer field. Screams and whistles rumbled in the garden. Some players were just running around, others were still, others sat down, the one who cried in the corner got up and ran to hug the ball.

You saved it, you saved it, you saved its life! – he said to Joserra as he fled with the ball under his arm.

I told you, I see the future, it was predestined, there's nothing to do, that was our destiny. I told you, I told you, I told you. It is the madmen's fate – the old man in black shouted -. There's nothing to do, this is over, I knew it – he said while he patted my brother's back.

The game was over, several nurses entered the soccer field to haul the patients to the door of a building in the background. We watched my brother walk away from us until we lost sight of him. He dragged his feet with difficulty, he walked defeated towards his confinement.

It was hard to get off the glass door. It took us a few minutes.

The impact had been strong.

We were in a madhouse. The madness could be felt, lived, breathed.

My mother was still crying, but she was calmer, she seemed in peace.

At last I felt myself recovering speech.

He was always bad for sports. Do you remember when we played in elementary school?

He was always the first one to be expelled because he was the worst – I finally said.

Yes, I remember, daughter, I remember very well – my mother said taking my hand.

We walked together in silence, we went through the reception and arrived at the doctor's office on duty.

When are we going to be able to talk to him, doctor? – my mother asked once we were sitting at his desk. They knew each other well.

We don't know yet, ma'am. Your son is in a process that can not be altered by confronting him with reality. As I have already explained to you, seeing him could lead to a setback, we have to wait.

Why is he so clumsy and so fat, doctor? – I dared to ask.

He is under a very strong treatment, with a lot of medicine to reverse the chemical alteration of the brain, and these medicines inhibit the normal motor coordination to him. Fat is caused by lack of exercise and too much food. Because of the medication is that he spends a lot of time asleep, but that is not serious, he will regain his normal weight once he resumes his normal activities.

Does that mean that he will be cured and he will be the same again? – I asked.

Let's hope so. There are cases that take a long time, even years, and others just a few weeks. There are those who recover fully and make their lives normal in months, there are those who improve but they never return to normal – my mother explained to me.

Do you see that boy coming out? – the doctor asked me pointing someone who was walking with an older couple toward the exit door.

Yes – I replied.

Since a month ago, he goes out every weekend, they pick him up on Saturdays and he comes back on Sundays. Hopefully he can go home soon definitely. He has been here only fourteen months and the improvement is notorious. Do not lose hope – he concluded.

On our way back, I encouraged myself to talk to my mom, it was the first time we talked about that subject, but what the doctor had said left me no choice but to face it. Ma, if I understand correctly, this goes for long. The doctor, although he wasn't clear, he let us see that this may take several months. How are we going to do it? We no longer have money and the situation is very hard. We must look for alternatives, maybe a public clinic or something cheaper.

Never. Your brother needs all the medical attention to recover and this is the only clinic that gives me confidence. Plus, it is the one recommended by Dr. Vargas Elias, and he is the only one who can cure him. So whatever it costs, he stays there.

Ma, but we have to be realistic.

I don't want to hear any more. Your brother is under a very delicate treatment. He is being given a mixed therapy. Do you understand what that is? You don't, if you knew, you would have saved your comment. You don't know what he is going through. Whatever it takes, he stays there, and if we have to sell everything, we sell it, and if we have to borrow, we ask for, we will see what we do.

Ma, forgive me for insisting, but perhaps you are not aware of the situation, we have sold everything already, there is nothing, my father has given us a lot and not even that was enough. Ernesto, Fernando and I are supporting the house, but we can not keep on paying the hospital.

Daughter, you have to understand once and for all – she told me softening her voice -. Your brother is being given electro-shocks. Mixed therapy means that, exactly that. They complement the medicine with electric shocks to restore the balance of brain chemistry. Do you want us to take him to a clinic where he gets electric shocks without anesthesia because they don't have adequate or sufficient medicines? We can't do that to him, your brother needs us and in this clinic they have the best. The treatment doesn't cause him any pain and he has a permanent nurse who monitors that he doesn't harm himself. We can't leave him. Can you imagine what he is going through? Didn't you see them? They are crazy, my daughter, and they only have us – she said before she returned to that silence that she had decided to adopt as a way of life since we interned my brother.

## THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

About a month after we were at the soccer game, one morning very early the phone woke us up. It was Dr. Vargas Elias to tell us that Joserra had suffered an accident during the night and that he had to be taken to a hospital because he was delicate.

I need you to authorize his transfer and to tell me the hospital of your choice.

But what's wrong with him? What happened to him? – my mother asked.

Apparently he has a broken leg and probably a rib, but he has to be checked urgently.

We called my father and he went to pick up Joserra to take him to the nearest ISSSTE clinic, where he was told that it was not a simple fracture, that the leg was totally broken and that he would be better off with a specialist. He immediately went towards the hospital where my uncle Pablo worked as an internist, which guaranteed that we would get the best doctor, good care and maybe even a discount.

When we arrived to the hospital, Joserra was being prepared for the operation and they didn't let us see him.

Once he was admitted in the operating room, Dr. Vargas Elias called my mother, my father and me.

I really liked him, he possessed the qualities that we all needed at the time, he was kind, affectionate, respectful and very even. He greeted each of us with the hand and took a little interest in us. "How's the electronics going?", he asked me in a greeting manner and then explained the situation to us.

Your son jumped out of his bedroom window last night, and although it's only a story high, he had a bad fall on the cement and he totally broke his leg – he said to my parents -. Apparently he was trying to escape. His leg is severely damaged. They will have to rebuild it, and with the anesthesia that it requires, we will have to suspend the treatment, because we can't mix them. This isn't common, so we don't know how he will react – he explained.

How? Did he jump out the window? Why did he want to escape? Are you sure that it wasn't a suicide attempt? – my mother asked.

Calm down, ma'am, we know that he tried to run away, for he told the nurse shortly before that he was well and that he wanted to leave. Apparently, he didn't take the medicines he was given in the afternoon and he had one of those moments of lucidity that surely made him reconsider about his situation.

What is your prognosis, doctor? – my father asked -. Which are the possible scenarios?

Your son may have two reactions without the medication: he may have a regression or, on the contrary, a breakthrough. The mind is amazing, but it remains a mystery to science. It is possible we could have a positive surprise – he replied.

What makes you think that? – my mother asked.

The fact that Jose Ramon has decided to jump out the window may mean that he wants to go out and finish all this. Sometimes, within the darkness in which they are, they accomplish to see the light at the end of the tunnel and they decide to follow it. I hope this is the case. We will have to wait.

Can we do anything to help? – my father asked.

Yes, a lot. At the moment it is not convenient that when he wakes up he sees the two of you together. It can create him a very big confusion. Many years ago that he doesn't see you two together and in his mind he has registered a physical separation. We have to avoid from him strong emotions and we should not create more confusion, so I recommend that only one of you be with Jose Ramon during his convalescence.

Who do you suggest? Which one of us? – my mother questioned.

Jose Ramon has already seen his father when he arrived at the hospital, and with that image he entered the operating room, so my advice would be that you don't see him during this period, ma'am – replied the doctor.



What about me? – I asked.

Of course, you have to support me – my father quickly answered -. I'm going to need you, Tlacuila, we don't know how this will be, you heard the doctor.

I looked for the doctor's eyes, hoping he would release me from such responsibility, but when I felt his hand on my shoulder and heard a "be strong, your brother will need you", I understood that there was no option.

I tried to seek salvation in my mother, but as I turned my eyes on her, I realized that what we had just heard affected her more than me. She was desolated.

Doctor, I need to see him, at least let me kiss him before he wakes up – she implored.

All right, ma'am, as soon as he gets out of the operating room, I'll tell you so you can come in and see him.

It was not until noon, when we were told that the operation was over. They had to put him several nails, because he had severely damaged the tibia and the fibula.

The whole family was gathered in the hall. We saw the stretcher pass in front of us. My mother got up and went to the door. She waited until the doctor beckoned her and entered the room. I saw her take two more steps and disappear. I imagined what was going on inside: she secretly approached as a ghost to my brother's side and stroked his hair, she kissed his forehead, hands, face, I almost heard her tell him how much she loved him, and to beg him not to give up. I felt how she transmitted him such great love that she always had professed us.

My mother adored us, in her very own way. She always lived by and for us, with that overwhelming overprotection and that suffocating love. I don't know if that intensity with which she loved us was the best for us, I don't know if that control and intense care and interdependence ended up giving greater benefits to her than to us. But it was this way, and why not?

Isn't it that when we love we are looking for our own benefit? I'm sure about it and my mother had it. She was happy getting overturned on us, always there, always present at all times when we felt weak or helpless, when we were in problems or when she thought that we were.

With that indomitable vitality that characterized her, with that vital fiber, hard, resistant, capable of waging any obstacle, that way she loved us.

How hard it was for her that we were stopping being her children; I think that we never grew up for her. I'm sure that even in that moment, there in the hospital room, she was with her baby, with her helpless little boy. I'm sure that at that moment my mommy would have wanted to take Joserra in her arms and breastfeed and care for him and pamper him, as she did when we were kids, healing us of all evil with her warmth. I felt her love and her suffering in my skin, I felt how my chest and throat were filled.

The pain had the strength of a large cascade that came out of my eyes, dragging all that suffering that was accumulating in me as I imagined my mother with my unconscious brother in there. I understood that my mother, with all her love, had fallen in a deep hole and that I had not even tried to stop her fall. I felt a whirlwind of sadness that dragged me and I didn't try to avoid it.

Suddenly I heard Fernando's voice in my ear.

And now what? Why are you squealing if everything's okay?

For nothing – I said as I stood up, and I went to the bathroom, where I took refuge to cry and cry until I didn't have more tears.

When it was my turn to enter the room, Joserra was still asleep. Seeing him so quiet, I remembered the happy days next to my brother.

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I remembered, for example, our walks to the ranch of my uncle German, where “La Ranita” milk was produced. It was a real ranch, with cows, ducks, frogs, tadpoles, hens, dogs and a huge field to play, where we spent many weekends and many vacations.

It was one of the best times of my childhood.

We built wonderful kites that we threw to the air, some of them flew, others didn't, but we entertained ourselves making plans, buying sticks, paper and string, we prepared the paste and we made figures of all kinds. We played hide-and-seek among the hay, we caught frogs and tadpoles, we enjoyed being with my grandfather and his witch tales, the big coins that he gave us as Sunday allowance and to sleep snuggled up in his arms. The playing fights, swords and frolics with my uncles, my mom and my dad. We spent the whole day in the field, we jumped the rope, they turned us around their bodies by just holding our hands and made us fly high, very high. We fished, we milked cows, chased dogs, we laughed and we had fun all together. It was the real happiness, the true life and there was Joserra, happy, enjoying it.

Now Joserra was another person. It frightened me a lot to imagine what he was going through. I was surprised to realize how much I loved my brother. To realize that in me there was true love for him and that we had separated so much. But there was still the memory of our childhood in which we remained so united.

Besides my mother, and sometimes Fernando, Joserra was the only one who told me “I love you”. He used to take my face in his hands or hug me gently before saying good-bye and said to me “Mabel, take care. I love you”. Joserra opened his heart to me.

I have never believed in God or in miracles, but that day I wanted to believe. To believe in something superior, to believe in science, in medicine, in technology, in my brother and in the light at the end of the tunnel.

Joserra, this time when you wake up, stay with us – I whispered into his ear -. Don't go again, we need you here, present. You were brave enough to return to this world, perhaps harder to overcome than the one you fled from, but this is the real one. Come and shape it so you don't feel pain and it doesn't hurt you. I help you, it's not so difficult, stay, little brother, don't go away anymore... I can't anymore. What will happen to my mommy if she loses you? I can not see her carrying that weight of letting you go; I can not see her survive with that guilt that is eating her inside.

I saw him sleeping there and I imagined him struggling to get out of the tunnel, to reach the light. I saw my brother how he died and lived at the same time: he had decided to die to our reality and to live a new one, his. I invited him over and over again not to give up. I explained to him that my mother, as well as him, had lost her spirit of struggle with the disease and that together we had to help her to recover it.

Who was he at that moment? How to understand all that complexity that encompassed his being?

I loved my brother, now I knew it, not only because we lived together under the intense and deep love of my mother. Not only because we cried together the desolate separation of my parents, not only for that splendid childhood full of adventures and pranks, but for himself, for his way of being, of thinking, of feeling. That's why I loved him, for being how he was.

X

Joserra woke up well. Although very sore, he seemed quite sane and reasonable. That's how he was the first two days. We were all jubilant and full of hope, except the doctor, who said that it was too soon to declare victory.

He was right, on the third day, the panorama became cloudy again. We were both alone, watching a movie in the room, when he suddenly yelled at me: Give me your hand, Mabel, hold me hard, I don't want to fall, help me, hold me, don't leave me! Don't you see how deep it is? Do something, don't let go of me, it's deep, very deep. Look at them, they want me there with them, they are laughing, they know I can not escape, help me, damn it!

I was holding him as hard as I could, I was scared, everything went so suddenly, but it was in vain, my brother left. I sought his gaze, but his eyes were empty. There was no one.

Don't let me go! – he shouted as he let go of me.

He was no longer with me, he went with them. He started to talk to them. He was discussing things that I didn't understand, he laughed, he got excited, he shouted, he insulted them, he pointed at them.

Suddenly, without understanding how, I saw him looking back at me, pleading, terrified. He was back. He was with me again.

Joserra? – I whispered -. Are you here?

Nothing exists, right? Nothing is real, right? They are my visions. The ground is flat. Mabel, there's no life down there, right?

He took my hand and caressed it, the vision was over -. I want to heal myself, I don't want to see them again, I don't want to go back, they scare me, save me, get rid of them, I hate them! – he said to me crying.

I hugged him a lot, very hard, I protected him as my mother did with us. They're gone, Joserra. It's all over, it's all over. You are here and we will not let you go.

Now Joserra knew that there was another world. A world where we were not, but them, with whom he didn't want to be. He had just decided that he wanted to stay with us.

I didn't understand the process, but I wondered if Joserra was ready to know the truth, to understand the scientific explanation of why that extraordinary mind that he

possessed, that mind gifted with a supreme sensibility made him falter between two worlds.

When the doctor arrived I told him everything and he said that he knew it, that the hallucinations would return.

Let's hope that they are light and sporadic – he said, but it was not so.

The next night, as I was deeply asleep on the couch in the room, I heard my name. Mabel, Mabel, come here, I have to tell you a secret, get up, come near me, come, touch me here – he said to me.

Still half asleep, I got up and went to his side.

Give me your finger, touch me here – he said putting my finger to his temple.

Feel the hole?

No, I don't feel anything, what's up?

Turn on the light, it's small. Pay attention and see it, pass your finger and feel it. Watch it carefully, it's a mark, here in the temple, it's also in the other side, it looks like a white spot and a little sunken, I felt it the other day while I was taking a shower and I already saw them in the mirror. Can you see them? – he asked.

Yes, I see something.

It's the mark of the shocks that they give me. They lock me in a dungeon in the basement, they tie me up from the ceiling and they give me electric shocks. They want to kill me, Mabel. Really, believe me, you can go to the clinic and find out for yourself, they do it to everyone. Ask them to let you go to the basement or go with the police and demand them to let you in and you will see the place where they torture us. That's why I escaped. Look at me, I'm already fine and they will not let me out, nor see you all, that's why I jumped out the window, I can't stand it anymore.

The next morning, first thing, I called my dad on the phone and told him everything. I was so mortified that I couldn't breathe well, I spoke quickly and choppy as without stringing together the ideas.

Take it easy. Don't pay attention. It's your brother's imagination. That can not be. The doctor would not allow it, you know him.

Dad, you have to see the marks on him, he showed them to me, he really has something weird and he doesn't have a reason to make it up. He's already fine, you have seen him these days. Why would he want to escape? If they treated him well, he would not have fled.

The doctor already explained to you. Don't believe him everything he says. He's sick. This afternoon I'll talk to him to make you calm down.

Dad, maybe the doctor is not that reliable, we better go to the police and don't tell him anything.

Stop talking nonsense.

When I listened to this last I hung up and located my mother. I knew that if my father wasn't going to listen to me I had to do something, I had to be sure that my brother wasn't going to go through the same thing again. Not if I could avoid it.

I knew that contrary to my father, my mother would overreact. I preferred it, I could not betray my brother again.

## MY FATHER

It wasn't that my father didn't believe me. It was that he had to be so man, so virile, that he could not show weakness. It took me a long time to understand why it was so difficult for him to accept my brother's illness. Of course, for him it was much easier to blame drugs and deny the facts than to try to understand, and above all to accept, our origins and the history of this dysfunctional family which thunders and uncovers the sewer.

Jose Antonio, my father, grew up among the Youth of the Spanish Phalange. He marched, being "flechette", with his grey short pants, his blue shirt with the emblem of the Phalanx embroidered in red on his left chest, his red beret, his socks, his white sneakers and his boots, singing:

Cara al sol, con la camisa nueva, que tú bordaste al rojo ayer,  
me hallará la muerte si me llega y no te vuelvo a ver.  
Volverán banderas victoriosas al paso alegre de la paz  
y traerán prendidas cinco rosas, son las flechas de mi haz.

Face to the sun, with the new shirt, which you embroidered to red yesterday,  
death will find me if it comes to me and I do not see you again.  
Victorious flags will return to the joyous passing of the peace  
and will bring lit five roses, are the arrows of my beam.

We were dazzled by the brilliance of his eyes and the pride very high which was evident on him when telling us his great feats that had led him to be from flechette to captain of the Phalanx, and then captain of centuria, with the responsibility of a hundred men to his charge. Uy! How he was thrilled to revive that day when the Supreme Commander delivered to him, in the Square of San Marcos, the banner that gave its name to the group: "The Centuria of Lepanto".

His youth in Leon, Spain, what melancholy, the smoke-dried meat and the good wine, the stained glass windows of the Cathedral of Leon, where I discovered with my grandfather how at a certain time of the day, when the rays of the sun penetrated them, at the top of the church, clearly you could perceive the harmonious movement of one of the horses that seemed to fly very high. Those weekly masses in the Church of San Marcelo in which, during the communion, the two flags of the Pro-Franco Spain were lowered opposite to the crucified Jesus Christ, between the singings of Cara al sol (Face to the Sun) and Marcha Real (Royal March).

"The Virgin Mary is our protector", sang my father so loud when he took his centuria from Alicante to the Escorial, to honor the path that traveled the corpse of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera when it was rescued by the phalangists of the prison of Alicante, where he died, and to be deposited in the Escorial, with all the honors that corresponded to him.

How hard it must have been for him to live in such a castrating environment. Just by thinking of the stiffness with which he was educated, my heart writhes. Just to think of the severity with which the grandmother Maria, his mother, punished him by dressing him as a woman and exhibiting him on the house's balcony to be the mockery of his friends, my soul shrinks.

Surely he had a bad time trying to justify with his family the decision of my mother divorcing him, and later the illness of Jose Ramon, but above all facing grandmother Maria.

I was the favorite of my grandmother, the first grand-daughter after six sons, so I had no major problem with her. On the contrary, she even tried to be sweet with me and offered to inherit me her lipsticks when I was a fifteen years-old youngster. She insisted on educating me against the indications of my mother, who was her real problem. So rebellious, so disobedient, so informal. She couldn't handle her, so she always rejected her, although she endured her while she was married to my father, I suppose that because of the convenience of the relationship between the two families.

What can you expect from a slut like Macarena, who opted to challenge us and ridicule us before the Spanish Colony and before all society, when demanding the divorce to poor Jose Antonio? Of course, a slut of that sort all she looks for is other men. It is logical that with that example the children turn out bad. Hey, but I am sure that Jose Ramon will be

only the first sample of the mother's lightness. She is the only one to blame and don't try to apologize for her. Just look how she became a television artist instead of following the decent life that my son offered her. God forbid! – she said every time she had the chance.

Of course for her there was no madness. The boy had gone astray, probably he was a marijuana consumer and the only one to blame was the mother who had dared to leave her son for a light life.

X

Unlike my mother, I adored my father. He was always my idol, therefore when my mother left him, I became his girlfriend. At eight years old, just after the divorce, Super Ramirez had only eyes for me and he devoted all his free time to me.

He took me everywhere; we were a happy couple. We traveled a lot and we spent most of the weekends together. Well, even the days that there was no school, he would take me to his factory and to his business appointments. One day he invited me to Monterrey to see some customers in a very elegant restaurant. I was very nervous: the plane, the appointment, anyway, everything seemed very serious. I understood that it was a very important issue for my dad and I didn't want to make him look bad. I managed to look very good. In the morning, my dad had taken me to the beauty salon, and I was wearing for the first time a suit that he had bought to me very much to his liking, for the occasion. But no matter what, I felt very insecure. My dad had told me many times how to behave, but it was the first time that I was going to put it into practice on an elegant date and I was scared to spoil it.

During the meal I was quiet and taking care of eating properly, with the cutlery well seized, mouth closed, small bites, careful not to spill the glass, to use the napkin well as my grandmother had taught me, cleaning just with the tips. And not laugh out loud, since my dad said that the girls smile discreetly, but there's no reason to laugh like a marimba, like my mother, like my sister Mariana or like me. I was also careful not to ask the waiter for my refreshment, but to tell my father very sweetly to do it for me, as he has told me to do. And, above all, I tried not to forget that the man should pull the chair when you sit down. So when I got back from the bathroom I waited for my father to do it for me, but he was so concentrated in the talk that the waiter had to do it. None of them got up when they saw me arrive, but it was the only bad sign that I had during the whole meal.

Although I was worried about the event of the chair, when we got to dessert I was happy when one of the gentlemen who said goodbye said:

What a pleasure to have eaten with such a distinguished lady, so beautiful and so well educated. Congratulations, Jose Antonio, you have a perfect daughter.

And that wasn't all. When my father and I were finally alone, the captain of the waiters appeared suddenly and, offering me a rose, he said to my father:

Allow me to flatter this beautiful young lady who accompanies you. Oops! How I felt. a true lady of society. I had passed the test. It was the first time that someone had given me a flower and had given it to me on my first elegant date with Super Ramirez, I couldn't be happier. I took it carefully from the stem and carried it as a medal all the way back to

Mexico. Everyone envied me when they saw me. Arriving home, I put it in a flower vase next to my bed and slept with its aroma. It had been my big day.

When the rose dried, I defoliated it and kept its petals between the pages of my book of Mujercitas (Little Women), where they remained many years.

X

He was my father-boyfriend, the idol of my adventures and my dreams, my fearless hunter. My Daniel Boone, my Captain Custer. One day, after having been in the jungle for several weeks hunting, he came with some lynx that he had killed for Lola, Mariana and me.

Let's go – he said to us -. Let's go to the dressmaker so she can take measures of you, since I'm going to make you some coats with these skins that I brought you.

I got into the car very excited and I kept on kissing him all the way, while he was telling us how a snake had curled up in his body and how he had escaped from the claws of a leopard.

I choose first! – I shouted when we arrived at the fabric store. Of course, there wasn't other way: I always won the front seat of the car, I chose the best horse in Ixtapan, I chose the movie and everything else. I was his Tlacuila, his daughter-girlfriend, his spoiled kid -. I want blue-gray! I shouted again, running to where the cloth I had chosen was. Mariana decided on a wine-red and we chose for Lolis the navy-blue. All of them were going to have the collar, the cuffs and the hem in lynx skin.

Wow! They were gorgeous, I didn't take off my coat not even in the hottest days, and I would tell everyone: "this animal is called lynx, and my father hunted it for me in the jungle after many going through many, many dangers".

I dreamed of going with him to the jungle when I turned fifteen, as he promised me so many times. I wanted to hunt monkeys, wild boars, lynxes, ocelots and many more animals.

Unfortunately, that day never came.

When I turned eleven years-old, one day my dad invited me to have dinner with him, but that day wasn't a date of love, on the contrary, it was a date of heartbreak. The reason for the invitation was to tell me that he would remarry.

What humiliation, so much jealousy, what a pain, a betrayal.

I kept on seeing him on the weekends and, for a while, retaining my place, I remained being his beloved child. I even was his page-girl at his wedding, which made me very excited. Moreover, at first, I even got along well with Esther, his wife, but then I realized that she only pretended affection towards me to catch him, because once he had him for sure, she became my worst enemy.

Everything ended between us the day that my mother was the television hostess of the transmission of Miss Universe in Mexico. As always, my mother borrowed a dress and some precious jewels from aunt Esperanza, and then she left us in my father's house before going to work. I was dying to see her, for I was sure that she would look beautiful, so when the time came I ran to my father's bedroom to turn on the television. As always,



we all threw ourselves around the TV and waited to see my mom appear. When we saw her appear, we were speechless. We were impressed by her beauty, until Esther broke the silence with her stupid comment.

Of course, now I understand why it's not enough the money that you give to her – she told my father -. If she spends everything in dresses and jewelry.

The dress, the necklace, the earrings and the bracelet are my Aunt Esperanza's – I answered back -. My mother has no money for those things, so my aunt who has a lovely wardrobe always lends her clothes.

Look at how well trained she has them; she has even taught them to lie so she can keep on getting money from you. Let's see if you now realize in the hands of what woman you were entangled and stop falling into her blackmail and manipulations – Esther insisted.

My mommy, she is no slut, she is a serious woman, not a whore like you! – I managed to answer just before my father closed my mouth with a slap and sent me to lock up at the study, where I spent the night.

How unfair, what a pig, if she had started it, I had only defended my mother. “of course, he prefers her, he doesn't love me anymore”, I thought at my confinement. I was sad and very angry, it is true, and my heart ached from my father's punch, but deep down I was happy too, for I had told that bitch was she deserved.

Since that day the relationship with Esther was more tense than that of a skin of a drum, we almost didn't talk and I tried not to go to my dad's house to not see her. I felt offended and displaced. But that was nothing, because the real abandonment came soon after, with the birth of his first daughter, Maria Esther. That was like mutilating me. As if the most precious of my being had been taken away, my father-boyfriend. That ugly and crying girl who from the first days occupied all the space, she and her ridiculous dog, Cuchicuchi. They couldn't find a more mellow name for that tiny, cheesy, ridiculous French-poodle, that guarded day and night the baby's cradle, with its sharp and hideous barking.

Thus began the loss. Little by little Maria Esther was stripping me of everything. She began by my room, my closet, my weekends, until she ended up taking my father away from me completely. His attention, his cares, his caresses and even that loving smile that he had only for me.

After a short time, things got worse, because Maria Antonieta arrived, their second daughter, so if anything had remained, then it was totally lost.

It was a loss after another, spite after spite, shock after shock and pain after pain.

When I couldn't handle it anymore, I imitated my mother and I also decided to divorce him. That day I arrived to my father's house to pack my clothes, just as I had seen my mother doing it. I ran to the closet to get my coat, but when I opened the door I couldn't find it. There was just a small white coat and a pink one which had the collar, the cuffs and the hem with lynx skin.

Dad, what about my coat? – I asked.

Daughter, they didn't fit you or your sisters, so I undid them, I took the skin out and I made one for Maria Ether and another one for Maria Antonieta, look at them in the closet, they are gorgeous.

I cried and cried until I was empty.

I understood that it was no longer my home, there was nothing else there for me, so as a teenager of fourteen –years-old, hurt and deprived from my father’s affection and my few possessions, I closed that chapter in my life.

My dad and his new family moved to Veracruz. Once or twice we went there to spend Christmas, but it was so unpleasant that I erased all my memories of that season. The woman wouldn’t let the girls see us, and when we went there she would send them to her mother’s house. Even when they asked about their brothers and sisters, she responded that we weren’t their brothers and sisters, so we lost all contact.

About four years after my divorce from my father, one day Mariana told me that my father’s wife had died. I don’t remember if it was cancer or something like that. But even under those circumstances, I didn’t forgive him. I never liked her and I had a lot of anger and resentment towards my father, so I said to myself: “he who does it, pays for it”, and I continued to live my life as if nothing had happened.

X

It was not until the University when I saw him again, when I tried to meet him again.

I was already twenty-years-old and I had worked hard through my psychoanalysis on the theme of the abandonment, so I even thought that I had forgiven him. We approached a little, we had breakfast together once a week and we met happy at the hallways, but it was not until Joserra appeared that day at his house, after Valle de Bravo, when I had to really approach him to solve the situation together, because my mother refused to do it.

My decision to go to the University where he was teaching was deliberate to approach him and to try to get him back.

Then, I realized that my father was someone else. That during all those years he had been changing. That the fascist that I knew had become a leftist thinker, a socialist militant who had gone from authoritarian to liberal, and that he was an extraordinary man. Now he was a college professor, an investigator, a responsible man, pleasant, hard-working man. But above all else, he was my father.

I knew then that my father did love us and that he suffered as much as we did. And recently I had the chance to confirm it. I organized him a meal at my house on the occasion of his seventy years, and it was there, that Maria Esther told us that the day that we locked Jose Ramon at the Clinic San Rafael, that day that I saw my father so whole, so harsh and insensitive with me, as if nothing mattered to him, when he returned to his apartment, he opened the door and collapsed like a baby into Maria Esther’s arms, unable to hold back the tears.

After my mother’s death, it’s the only time that I’ve seen him cry – Maria Esther told us and she added -: At that time, we were going through a severe economic crisis, we were all fucked up, with my mother’s disease we lost all the money, my father didn’t have a good job and, nevertheless, every time that you needed money for Jose Ramon, my father got it. He gave you his treasures to sell, or he did it himself. He went out to sell the silver, the pictures and the valuables he still had. He would get us all in the car and we would go

from silver store to silver store going through all downtown, trying to sell a pitcher, a platter, a tureen, or whatever it was needed to earn money to pay for the hospital. It wasn't easy, since they wanted to pay us very little for each piece arguing that it was stolen. Of course, we didn't have the invoice of things. They had been wedding gifts, so there were times when we spent all day from store to store until we got something decent for a piece. He sold his shotguns, his trophies and everything he could to help get this one out – she told us pointing to Joserra, who was smoking while listening to the story.

That day I loved my father even more. It had been about fifteen years since I had forgiven him, we were good friends and we loved each other, but I realized that I had been wrong about him.

With his second wife's death he became responsible of his two daughters, despite the insistence of his sister-in-law, who, in the absence of children, offered to take care of them.

I already have lost five children; I'm not going to lose one more – he stubbornly repeated.

And so it was: he raised them by himself.

Divorced and widowed he had to be father and mother, and he did quite well. He rejoined us as a family. Today we are seven brothers and sisters, with a father full of energy, who teaches at the University, researches, writes books, gives lectures, and he even has time to spend some weekend with us. A year ago, we traveled together to Spain, Jose Ramon, Maria Antonieta, my father and I, and we not just traveled: we laughed, we ate, and we drank as Cossacks; but above all, we recovered part of our history and our origins.

Now I realize that my father, like my mother, he is flesh and blood and that he lived bad times as any of us. That he acted as he could at the time, trying to survive his pain and his loneliness, with no intention of hurting us.

X

These days, we sometimes get together to eat. And again we eat as he knows how to do it, as a Viking, in majestic quantities. About that, I do believe that he will never change. He is still very exaggerated, but so persistent that he manages to reunite us all, the seven brothers and sisters and one or two extras. And in those long and delicious after-meals, in which we usually do catharsis among great quantities of good wine, we talk about the past, striving to understand our history and each one's process, between joke and joke, laughter and laughter, with broad criteria and joy, but especially with great respect and much love.

## THE POWER

My mom was always very obsessive and stubborn. When something got into her head, she did not stop until she succeeded.

Some say, that as a girl she would sit on a chair that she would place on the edge of a staircase, turning her back to the void and touching the edge of the step with just the back legs, to begin to balance swinging herself on it. She said that it was something very difficult that no one had accomplished, but that she would find the spot where the chair would be on two legs without falling. So, she sat on the chair, with her back to the bottom of the stairs, and began the game by swinging the chair on her behind legs. Of course, in a few seconds you could hear the thump and the grandmother's scream: "Macarena, stop doing that because you're going to get hurt! What a stubborn girl! Why would she be determined to break all her bones and destroy all the chairs in the house? Play with something else".

She was impossible. She would only get up, rubbed the bumps, healed the wounds, if there were any, and start again. She usually ended up sitting in front of the corner where she spent the rest of the afternoon punished, to start with the balance game of the chair the next day.

This is just one example of the persistence of my "Super Power". She was born with character, no doubt.

Sometimes I remember that she decided to go on a juice diet for a week and that was all she drank, and there was no human power that would make her come into reason. She also opted for diets of water or grapes or yogurt or cucumber or whatever she came up with, that someone had recommended her or she had read. She had a great will power and determination and she was like that for everything: her children, her boyfriends, work, her studies and family.

I remember when she was offered to be the television hostess of the National Women's Soccer Championship. The poor girl did not even know what a goal was, but she did not think about it for a second. "Never say I don't know – she said to us -, accept, and then you study and learn. For the human being there is no impossible but the one that he creates himself."

She just left the television place and ran to the bookstore to buy all the books she could about football, which she studied for fifteen days and nights. My uncle Gustavo and Ken Smith, the famous TV broadcaster who was then her boyfriend, were fed up by her,

she asked them about every move and every game to make no mistake at all during the transmission. We learned during breakfast, lunch and dinner, not counting every traffic light on the way to school, what was a corner shot, an offside, a free kick, a penalty, when it was hand, or fault or long kick and much more. She even made a model in the house, where we learned what a soccer field was like, the goals, the center and what did each mark on the floor mean. She stuck a cork with the photos of all the players of the teams that could get to the finals, with their names, their age, their height, their weight, the state where they had been born in, the games they had participated in, football players in their families if there were, and I don't remember what else.

The two weekends that lasted the learning, my mommy played soccer with us in the condominium. We learned what a center-forward was, a defense, line judge, referee, and even reminded us of the goal keeper's importance. Saturday, before the championship, she called everyone to the patio to form a soccer field and a fictitious team and to review what a penalty was, a direct free kick, a corner shot, when it was considered to be hand, when it was an auto-goal or a goal.

Finally came the day of the Championship's Grand Final. We all got up early, we took a shower and got ready for the occasion, as if we were going to a party, and when we were ready we sat in front of the television. Full of nerves we shouted: "Come on, mommy, you can do it". We were sure that she would do it, and she did it. Without a single error, more expert than the very same Mago Septién, the then famous baseball commentator, or the now known Jose Ramon Fernandez, she related and commented every play even with more skill than the referee's own whistle. Not a single mistake. Each comment was successful and timely. Well, even the shouts of "goal" were in the tone and with the proper length. "Gooooooooool!" at the house we all shouted with all our strength, in unison with my mother when we heard her voice. We jumped and clapped as if she had scored the goals.

X

No, there was no impossible for her and that was the way she was with us, and much more, because we were everything to her, absolutely everything. I am convinced that my mother would have been happy giving birth and nursing children all her life. She had so much love to give that there was no end. She was wonderful. Always playing, always inventing tricks to entertain us with all the patience and love of the world. She taught us to develop our ingenuity and creativity, to enjoy reading, classical music and even opera. With her we had theater, danced, cooked, competed, we visited the museums and the parks, with that sense of humor that characterized her. Always smiling, always among her uproarious laughter that made her an exceptional mother.

How about our spring bicycles and tricycles? Phew! They had to be the best. Since she knew that there was going to be a competition, we began to make the drawings and designs, and once approved by each one of us, she had the frames made in my father's factory with Inocencio's help. For fifteen days she put us all to cut china paper of different

colors, to make paste and to assemble and paste each piece to make my bike the Cinderella's carriage with lanterns, doors and everything. Of course, I was disguised as Cinderella, even with the magic shoes. Joserra's bike was transformed into Ben Hur's carriage, even with spikes coming out of the wheels, and he, the warrior himself, with arms, boots and shield. Mariana's tricycle became a splendid queen bee and Mariana in a little bee. That is how we arrived to school. Transported by our psychedelic vehicles and disguised as heroes and characters of the moment, and leaving all our school mates with their mouth opened who sadly had adorned their tricycles with only some colored paper and one or two flowers on the handle, metal structure or pedals. Of course, we swept with the first places of the first, second and third grade classes. That was my mother, the super-powered, the invincible, the Power. She had to be first in everything, in her Russian classes, in swimming, in karate, in gymnastics, in her theater classes, at work, at school, but especially with her children.

Her love for us was so, unlimited, generous and absolute, never conditioned to our behavior. She accepted us as we were, making us feel always perfect, complete and finished beings

She was so intense, that her love became seriously a possessive and obsessive love. When I moved out of the house, my clothes' drawer and my bed kept waiting empty, without being able to be occupied by my sisters, for more than two years, despite the need for space that they had in the micro-department, because my mother always trusted that I would return to her lap, to her shelter. She did not accept our remoteness. She fell into a deep depression every time any of us left.

Now that I see from afar, I realize that because of that, very wisely, I never came back, not even for one night. I was terrified to fall back into that subtle possession and not again have the strength to free myself. It was so comfortable to live under her wings, so warm, so secure, that once in there it was almost impossible to escape.

She could not see her chicks suffer, that's why everything about Joserra affected her so much.

When Joserra broke his leg and she was able to see him in the hospital, my mommy regained some strength and began to go out of her confinement to go to the hospital at night to see her son while he was sleeping. From time to time, she would pop out to eat or dine with us, and she slowly regained her temper. Although she was never again the same.

X

After listening to what I told her about the dungeon and the electric shocks, she picked me up at the hospital and we hurried to the San Rafael Clinic. When we arrived, she demanded to speak with the director and to open all the doors. She wanted to corroborate the treatment that was given to the patients and demanded a tour of the place.

It is not permitted, ma'am, we are not allowed – said to her the director -. But tell me how can I help you. Why are you so upset?

I know that there is a dungeon where they lock up the sick and give them electric shocks and buckets with cold water if they misbehave. Let me through, I will find it and I will denounce it.

A what? What are you talking about? Who told you that?

My son, who else? My son, who tells me that he has been locked up there more than once. My son told me and I believe him, because he showed his wounds to his sister. But, ma'am, how can you believe that, your son is sick and you know it. Your son has visions and hears voices. You, in the other hand, you are a reasonable person. You can not believe him, it is his imagination.

I believe my son. My son does not lie. Now open the door and let me in – she said, cornering the doctor.

Ma'am, calm down, I do not want to offend you, but I repeat that it can not be. Please, have a seat and let me call the head nurse so she can tell you how we have acted with all ethics and professionalism with your child.

That is not what I'm asking for. I am not dumb. I know that all of you are colluded, but at this moment I am going to look for the police and file a lawsuit – she said turning around and leaving the doctor with the word in his mouth.

With that elegance and integrity that characterized her, she left the clinic with a steady and fast pace. Unable to contain my astonishment, I ran after her.

Go to the hospital, with your brother, I am going to see the lawyer. If I find something, these are going to pay very dear! what they have done to Jose Ramon.

The next day my mother had gotten Dr. Vargas Elias to go with her to go through the clinic, so we went there early. When we arrived, the doctor was waiting for us at the door.

Tell me what your brother told you – he asked me.

While I related the episode to him and repeated my brother's statements about the dungeon, my mother put on a white robe that was provided by the head nurse. Shortly after I saw the clinic's director arrive, who greeted us and asked my mom and doctor Vargas Elias to follow him. I went to the waiting room of the reception, as I was told, while they made the tour.

After almost two hours I saw them go out where they had entered. They walked in front of me, but they did not even see me. Doctor Vargas Elias embraced my mother, who cried with great feeling. They went into the director's office, while I waited.

At last, after another half hour, I saw them coming towards me. My mother was calm.

What happened? Did you see the dungeon?

No, daughter, there is nothing. It is a serious clinic. Your brother is making all this up. Dr. Vargas Elias explained to me that it is a good sign, apparently it means that your brother doesn't want to return, that he wants to get out of here and his madness.

That afternoon, in the hospital, my father told me how my mother had demanded that each door be opened, how she had inspected every corner of the clinic, every corner, every room, every closet, every shelf, every cupboard and every cubicle with the same

rigor as the Nazis sought in each house the hideouts of the Jewish in the second World War.

When I heard him, I didn't have the slightest doubt.  
That was my mother, all passion and all intensity.

## THE RETURN

A few days after the event of the dungeon, Joserra was discharged from the rupture of his leg and returned to the San Rafael Clinic. Fortunately, during his convalescence the doctor confirmed his improvement and authorized the visits. From the first day we were allowed to spend the afternoon with him, so our routine changed. After the meal we would get ready and went to visit. A nurse led us to a courtyard full of trees at the back of the building, where Joserra waited for us. There we sat and talked for a couple of hours among the crazy people who shouted, danced, ran or cried around us, with the difference that now we were not so scared.



Joserra told us his anecdotes in the clinic. He told us with great grace how one of them always tried to steal his chocolates at night. As soon as he heard him approach, he would pretend to fall asleep and let the madman get to the drawer, and when he had the chocolate in his hand, Jose would suddenly get up scaring him terribly and forcing him to put the chocolate in its place. Poor boy, every night he repeated the same thing and every night he got frightened, scolded and with his mouth drooling.

And why don't you let him to steal some chocolate from time to time? – we asked him. Because he has to learn to respect others' things and to ask for things by saying please – my brother answered more seriously than in his civic examination

He also told us about another one who chased him in the mornings to eat his breakfast: food seemed to be the subject of discord.

The madhouse, the anecdotes, the pack of crazy people around us, ourselves and my brother, we were different. Now we laughed and we had fun with those situations that months before provoked us so much anguish.

Even the disease had changed. What in a first diagnosis was schizophrenia, was now bipolarity. Only the doctor understood that, only he knew how to control the energy and the synapse, only he knew that it wasn't deteriorating or progressive like schizophrenia and only he understood of this extremely difficult science which we ignore so much. The nervous system and the human brain. Only he could determine that my brother had to spend another couple of months in the clinic, only he could say that my brother needed to return to medications, to lithium to control energy, to rest and electro-shocks to erase immediate memory. Only he knew what it was that he had to erase from that mind and what had to stay. Only he could prescribe that solitude and silence to finish quieting the voices. Without friends, without family, but especially without books. He must live with his feet on the ground at least for a while. For now, we can not allow him to read philosophy at all, nor poetry, moreover, preferably nothing at all, to retain from reading until he is better – he prescribed.

X

I've been dead, right, Mabel? – Joserra told me one day.

However, I am still alive. I hit bottom and my own impulse brought me back to the surface, right? – That was my brother. He was once again the philosopher from years ago, the crazy sane.

Mabel, you know? In the morning I'm afraid to open my eyes, I'm scared, I don't know if I'm going to wake up here or there, among them or among all of you. I don't want to go back, I want to stay here, with you. What do I do?

Don't listen to them. The doctor says that little by little you will stop seeing them and you will even forget everything. Now you know what they want from you, so ignore them.

Make yourself every day welcomed to this world, your world, and cling to it, learn to enjoy it. Be strong, sing to life, look at what it has given us. Life has returned my brother. We

must celebrate it every day, must not we? Long live science, long live modernity. It's a beautiful world, Joserra. Look at its glow through that tree, really look at each color. It is something incredible. Being well depends on you, on your will. You decided to be well, go ahead. You celebrate it, let us celebrate it.

X

And so we did.

The day Joserra left the clinic, we all met at my mother's house and ate the way my father did. Spanish side dish, Spanish ham, chistorra, loin, salami, a great variety of cheeses, asparagus and olives, followed by a rice with octopus and some delicious sardines that my father cooked at my mother's house. All together, we set the table and cooked. Ernesto, Fernando, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my half sisters Maria Esther and Tony, and even Lola and Mariana's boyfriends were there. It was very weird and cordial. Like those weddings where all the relatives who do not get along are reunited and hang out together. Even those who do not like each other, they greet and smile among them, they toast and touch while dancing. So it was, everyone around the table, in the living room, on the balcony, laughing, commenting unimportant things, just enjoying Jose Ramon's return, his awakening.

His metaphorical and real awakening as he spent all his day sleeping. The pills prescribed to him since his reinstatement to the family life, allowed him to wake up only at the time of his food, which he had to ingest abundantly and punctually with that pasty mouth and full of saliva, with a white and thick saliva that formed like a fence between his lips. With that mouth that only babbled a few words from time to time, monosyllables that indicated that he was following the conversation and one or two isolated laughs or some settlement. The pills did not allow him for more and so it should be. Gradually, we will remove him the pills – said the doctor -. For now, this is the dose he requires, as he should sleep most of the day.

And so it was, little by little, with time and patience, sometimes with relapses and others with great improvements, Jose Ramon was adapting to his new world.

It was not easy. The first few months, my mother had to take care of her baby again, she watched over him day and night in his dreams, she woke him up just so he could eat, to take his medicine and to go back to bed again. Twice a week she would take him to the doctor and from time to time to some analysis.

The doctor changed his medicine depending on his improvement. Each change was an anguish, because sometimes the medicine was too strong and knocked him out, or very soft and there were crises or relapses, so we had to be very attentive. It was necessary to take care that he did not talk alone again, that he would not distress or digress and that he ate and slept well. My mother became her nanny and nurse; for her there was only one purpose in life, that Jose Ramon would never go back to the clinic.

Fortunately, Jose Ramon also did not want to return, that was clear. So it was.

Once he was able to stay awake all morning, my mother began to give him some work, asking him to do the music of her videos, and little by little by himself, he started earning his own money. He managed to do more music, he began writing scripts for some TV series and even interviews and research.

As for his social life, he went back to his old acquaintances: Cuco, Puche, Botingo, Gordo, and if that wasn't enough, as in the best love novels, one Sunday afternoon, walking through Coyoacan, he bumped into his lifelong girlfriend, and they were struck with the same intensity as the day that they stopped seeing each other because of the illness.

## MY PROCESS

As Joserra slowly recovered, I started moving to Fer's house. I needed another space, I couldn't handle the load anymore, it was time to emigrate and I did. Fernando and I spent a good time together. I dare say that it was the most stable and happy period after that turbulent life of the recent months. I was very much in love and the relationship worked out great until I reinvented myself, I regained my strength and closed the space for his overprotection. Although I opened a new space, it was not the one he wanted. Fernando did not want to be my partner, he did not want or he couldn't with a peer-to-peer relationship, so he tried to limit me.

He proposed to me to go live at the ranch and to have a baby.

Let's go, leave everything, give me a child, let's go to be a happy family.

He spoke to my father and to my mother: "I want to marry your daughter", he said to them.

He wanted me to be the mother of his children, as a self-sacrificing woman, responsible for the ranch animals and for having the food ready when he returned from work.

Just the idea gave me the creeps, so I did not accept and little by little he quit.

Although we both knew that it was over, we could not leave each other. Deep down, I think that we both wanted something from what joined us. In a small corner of my being I wanted his protection: it was comfortable to be weak and to let him take care of me. And in his healthy side, I think that he wanted an intelligent and successful woman with whom he could grow and develop. But neither of us gave in, so he opted for the easiest way out.

Fernando looked for his ex-wife, that weak being who needed him, and in that fleeting reunion, she became pregnant. I suppose that he wanted it to be that way, since he needed strong excuses to tie himself into a relationship he did not want.

When they told me, I thought I was going crazy. I could not believe it, and much less accept it. So I denied it, I considered it as a gossip and deleted it completely. I continued with Fernando as if nothing happened. I could not bare another abandon. A new loss would sink me completely.

I did not understand a thing. I was sure that he did not love her, that she was inferior than me. Besides, I was his little girl, his chilanga, his protected. How could he leave me adrift?

Every day that passed was more evident. Fernando was no longer with me, there was always an excuse to leave me alone: the ranch, work, friends.

Every day his lack of love grew more and more and hurt me, so one day I could not take it anymore, I took strength and faced the situation.

X

It was early on Saturday, Fernando had told me that he was going to his ranch, to Veracruz. I had to fix the vocho, so I went with Eli, my dear friend from high school and university, to the mechanic's workshop that was two blocks from the house of Fernando's ex-wife.

As we passed by, we saw Fer's troca parked at the door.

It can not be, if he's in Veracruz – I told Eli.

Mabel, don't fool yourself. It's time for you to accept it. Fernando is back with his wife and she's expecting a baby – Eli said to me with the courage that characterized her-. Come on, let's go so once and for all you are convinced and you leave him. Forgive me for being so crude, but it is for your own good, everyone knows it and talks about it. His absence is destroying you, you are no longer the same, look at you, you look like a rag, you have lost

the taste for life. You have humiliated yourself and brought down on yourself, really, you are no longer you. Come on and put an end to this once and for all.

I remember each step crossing the street until I reached the door.

I ached the rubbing on my skin of that filthy world in every footstep.

I ached every breath of that rotten air of treachery and infidelity approaching.

I ached every every time I blinked.

The doorbell rang and she showed up at the door.

It was true, she was pregnant.

She saw me, I suppose she recognized me, and shouted:

Fernando, looking for you...

It was the last thing I remember. I ran into Eli's car and puked, puked and puked until arriving home.

X

I suffered a lot and for a long time. I was used to him, to his care, to his protection, to his company, to his jokes, to his way of being, frank and wild, to his affection. It was terrible, I missed his big and strong hand over mine. I missed him all. I abandoned myself for a long time. I could not love myself, I had lost all ability to love, even to myself. His absence consumed me, every pore burned me, every second penetrated me.

The pain blinded me for a long time. It was not until many years later and with many hours of therapy, that I understood his abandonment.

I understood that Fernando needed to be the strong one and that I began to be a threat to him. I understood that his wife and child were going to give him the opportunity and the space that I denied to him. I understood that I was a warrior and a triumphant and that he could not handle that.

I survived with much effort the pain that caused me to be changed once again by another girl, by a real girl, by his daughter, his chilanguita.

X

Little by little I understood the story, my story, and I regained my strength.

I became strong as my mother, although deep down I am still the hypersensitive and crying girl. The girl who gets excited and cries even when they sing Las mañanitas at birthday parties, when I see a sad movie, when I read a book where misfortunes occur and even with a program on TV or in the theater.

Jose Ramon's illness was a watershed in my life. The role I had to play made me strong.

I built an impenetrable shield so as not to expose myself to someone finding the helpless and sweet little rat in me, so that they do not harm me. So I hide in this shell of "I

can all”, of “I, the top notch”. That way I protected myself from my father’s abandonment, so I learned to live without being his Tlacuila. That way I managed to live without my northern protector. But, above all, that was how I stood when my pillar, my support, my idol, Doña Macarena, my Super Power, collapsed, which was when I really had to get all my strength and survive without leaving a minimum space for my sensibilities or my weaknesses. I got by putting into practice her great teaching to overcome everything, to achieve what we proposed, with great passion for life.

X

You are like a tank, nothing or nobody can stop you – say my friends from maduritas.com. You are like a man, autonomus and stuck to the job – says my friend Ginita.

And so it is, because with a great fear of being hurt or abandoned, for a long time I just worked. I married my job, which gave me almost the same as a husband. Money, travels, social position, a place in the world, security and even love for myself when seeing my professional achievements.

For a long time, that is how I protected myself and I did not allow myself to know another way of living.

Today, at almost forty-years-old, I begin to love again. Everything is different today.

Therapy, writing, life itself, have given me back my confidence. The past stayed there, far away, back, many, many pages back. Today my self-esteem is very high again, up there, far, as far as the past with all the abandonments and mutilations.

“When I was crazy”, my brother says from time to time.

“Do you remember when I was crazy?”

“You’re still crazy”, I think.

Yes, Joserra is still crazy. Very crazy.

And me too.

I have regained the joy of living. But to achieve it, I have had to go crazy a little. I have renounced to that square world, so full of rules and rules that had me prisoner. Today in my madness I allow myself to feel, to dream and to vibrate. Today I can make my job a song, a play or a story, and I laugh out loud, and I play and I invent and I let myself be carried by the air and sometimes I even allow myself to fly.

ORANGE  
"NARANJA"

Today is the presentation of my brother's book, Naranja (Orange).

The presentation at la Casa del Poeta, my brother's house.

Here we all are. My mother, my father, my brothers and sisters, who today have procreated and are accompanied by their children. My beloved nephews.

When I see them I realize that the love for my brothers and sisters, all, has an ingredient of protection that I developed by taking care of them for so long in the absence of my parents, and that gives a very special touch to it. It makes me feel responsible, committed and dedicated to them and their achievements. Yes, I am the one who is the proudest of my brother and my whole family.

My mother has returned to being that determined woman who goes forward, forward and always forward. She is an amazing woman who does not live from the past; on the contrary, with joy and optimism she builds her future, she dreams and she

struggles once again for her ideals. She has regained her strength. She writes, acts and lives with passion each day, certainly in love with her grandchildren. That intense love that always had for us, shines again with greater intensity, now by those mischievous little ones who prepare for the spectacle seated in her legs, with their little arms surrounding her neck.

There are also my uncles, my aunts, my cousins and all the friends of childhood, Luis Botingo and el Cuco. Cuco, as always, next to Joserra. Now he accompanies him with the melodies he composed expressly for this day, for this great event. The presentation of his brother's book, of his carnal. Under a mask and a medieval costume, accompanied by another pair of musicians, he is preparing to interpret fantastic pieces to give life to each syllable, to each word.

There is also the love of my brother, his partner. That ghost who spoke to him from the depths of his being, his girlfriend, his wife, his woman, to whom he dedicates the book "for accompanying him in his deepest falls and in the everyday".

Mabel, I need you to help me, I have to sell the books to pay for the printing, the toast, the salon, the music and something to keep on writing, and you are the only one that has that ability to sell them all today, would you help me?

Of course, I will not leave one, not even one, I will sell them all. Juani, do you want to be my partner? - I said to my six-year-old nephew, the son of my sister Lola, my Lolis.

"Oranges, oranges! - I shouted with the books under my arm -. Take your orange for eighty pesos, sweet oranges, take them dealer, fresh oranges, just eighty varos, how many do I give you?" - I shouted non-stop among the attendants.

"Sweet little oranges! - said my nephew's shrill voice behind me.- how many oranges, cheap oranges?"

The ceremony begins.

Can be heard that ancient music of Asian drums and sweet cords that leave the heart and the magic hands of Cuco.

We all listened.

Begins the presentation of the poet Jose Ramon Ramirez and his book, Naranja (Orange)

"...for one who has an explanation of the world immediately after the skin, the more outside, the more inside, does not need to nourish its truth with babbling, and does not require to frequent the avaricious presence of how and how it should be, only for those who know that they do not know poetry exists..."



El cisne blanco y el cisne negro

Sin miedo al enigma de ti mismo

VICENTE HUIDOBRO

Pronto boga la nave  
al acecho de mí.  
Lago en la cumbre estable  
¿hay dónde ir?

¿Alguna vez fui yo?  
—siempre conmigo—.  
Nunca he sido otro  
—no he sido el mismo—.  
¡Soy firmamento sobre el precipicio!

No puedo contenerme  
—ya no quepo—.  
El amor es el alma  
que vuelve al cuerpo,  
y es el alma el amor  
vivo o muerto...

My skin gets goose bumps, my throat closes, my eyes fog. That is my brother, that is what is inside him, that's the sensibility that took him so far and that now brings us so close.

I would have liked to be less expressive and less shrill, less transparent, not show my fears, my anguish, my emotions so easily, but I cannot, so once again I cry.

I cry for my brother, for me, for my family.

But this time is a different cry, a cry of joy, of delight, of happiness.

The reading is over.

Excited as we are we remain silent, still enjoying, still vibrating. Suddenly, we see our father getting up with glassy eyes. He goes up to the podium, he picks up the microphone and with a broken voice and great efforts not to let go of the cry, he speaks loud of his firstborn.

He fills him up of compliments about the way he has managed to drag the pen and reminds us that despite us, despite him and despite everything, Joserra has succeeded.

I never doubted you, son. And today I'm the proudest. Proud of me, although I do not deserve it, but above all proud of you. To see how you have managed to combine your two worlds into one: the world of the poet.

Graciela Enríquez Enríquez  
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