

# Stories That Tell Us No Nothing

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## Episode 1

When it all began a destination wasn't proposed. One of them had defended the idea that a landscape is more exciting than a path, after all a path takes you somewhere, guides the traveller towards this or that location. A landscape spread out and good landscapes make no difference. How wonderful to journey without acknowledging the increased proximity to a terminus, but keep up with a sense of, here we are and here is everywhere all the time. Then again landscapes are never that open but crisscrossed with destinies, road stops and more or less pleasant places to pick up necessary snacks, maps or contraceptives. May that be as it wishes, what's evident, and probably romantic, is that in a landscape you don't bump into things but things bump into you, with a certain degree of indetermination.

Taking off was easy on some levels. To depart is at times more relaxed from places you're familiar with than the opposite obviously depending on whether you're going back home or to a relatively unfamiliar or even altogether new place. One of them had, with quite some hesitation, talked about how coming home always, or too often, was associated with a bit of anxiety, a return to base mini depression, too small to be taken serious still powerful enough to create reverberations in the inner system to make it into the Richter scale. After months of travelling, or just coming home after a few days for whatever reason, it actually didn't matter if the house was empty or not. Coming home to an apartment where nothing had changed, except the sensation of a certain low-key staleness, had its privileges in the sense that the inner emptiness could be engaged with through degrees of bottomless self-indulgence. What bliss to fall into that lukewarm grey, forgetting to unpack, using a webpage to order in too much food and surrender to a sense of gloom located on the far side of the spine.

It could almost feel intimidating to come home to a flat where somebody was present, or even waiting, having to act as if excited and happy to listen to whatever had happened during the days of absence. It's kind of awkward how the anticipation of that first hug, those familiar arms around two bodies, is completely asymmetrical to what really is happening and experienced. Finally, one can feel grounded and can let go of tension built up, breathe out and feel stress and back pain evaporate into thin air, but no way, perhaps an exhalation takes place but with that an immediate anxiety about some domestic disaster, an eviction notice or a water boiler that has run out of options, bubbles up like an internal landslide. There's no sense of the heart falling into place but instead, the opposite sensation that the heart is ascending in the chest through a mixture of guilt, anxiety, fear, emptiness and regret that definitely is fulfilling but not in a pleasant way.

For a while at least one of them had taken action and simply abandoned the idea of a home or room of one's own, just in order to not have to stand there with empty hands with the half-broken bag on wheels being the only support structure.

Later, when already underway, a conversation around preparing surfaced. Panic packing at the last moment feeling an existential meltdown arriving, or anticipating the stress and taking one's

time which on the other hand suspends the time of worrying about what might have been forgotten, extending a sense of non-time or distancing from living as the bag is filling up. "I hate packing", what an embarrassing thing to admit. Isn't there something deeply vain about, "I hate packing". Only beautiful people can state something like that, can afford having delicate problems in regard to what outfits to choose, what extended toiletry to bring along or even what suitcase is suitable for the upcoming voyage.

I love packing, is perhaps, not really but almost, an equally regrettable utterance. Those are people that have swapped the word masturbation with self-care. That transfer the body lotion bought at the local drugstore to a glass container charged with sentimental value.

It was an easy take-off because of the absence of direction. After all, if there's no destination it's difficult to feel disappointed, more or less at any moment perhaps even after arriving at what ended up being the last stop of the trip.

Can one only explore something already known, or is exploration venturing into the blurry territories of not knowing? It seems that exploration is directional, goal-oriented and perhaps even associated with a set of tools. Exploration can perhaps be conducted in a whimsical manner but it can't avoid departing from somewhere familiar or stable. If nothing else the explorer appears to be stable to him, her or themselves. Exploration, although connotating some kind of openness, a sense of venturing freely, is also trapped in a matter of taking in, harvesting or gathering, if nothing else, information of some sort. Exploration at the end of the day is an activity that annexes vague territories superimposing value in regard to already established forms of knowledge. Nothing new obviously but exploration is, perhaps vague but still colonial practice.

As it had become increasingly impossible to choose how to travel, it was decided that the preference was to let it all unfold organically. The means, implicitly already propose possible ends, so if the means could be approached without determination, but rather by chance, that would postpone possible destinations. It was, predictably, objected that chance isn't that arbitrary, after all, especially not when options are finite. But why bother, this was not an excursion tailored for systems theorists or a guided tour for scholars engaged in critically examining statistical methodologies. So live and let live, organic sounded like a good approach. Satisfying somehow, knowing, at least loosely, about all possible objections.

It was a difficult departure. What are you supposed to bring on a journey to who knows where, except your visa card and a charger? Perhaps that was why the preparation would have been never-ending hadn't it been that the opportunity showed up so abruptly it was halfway out of the question to develop more than elementary expectations. Still, in the interval between getting to know and taking off, a moment occurred.

It unfolded something like this, although it was difficult to recall who started it or even who continued it. The dark side of accountability is how it cannot not consolidate power, more over power recognisable to Power.

It's difficult to show up, show up as in really show up. Not in the sense of being in time for an appointment. To show up is different. Isn't it the skillset of leaving any presuppositions behind, to journey without expectations, to ask for nothing in return? Normal people, whatever that means, arrive with heaps of expectations, and expectations are soaked with political subtext, ethics and morals. And that's just the beginning, after all expectation in today's society cannot be detached from economy, symbolic, relational or actual. Expectations are like looking into a set of binoculars turned the other way around and it goes without saying that expectations

stand in the way of experience, or operate as a shield against indetermination. Expectations are a defence system against being caught off guard, with one's pants by the ankles or, as they say, with the beard caught in the letter box. Expectations are a symbolic dress code, including gloves and a balaclava.

To show up.

Departure estimates that something has been left, that there is some form of remains. Relief, maybe guilt. Shame, betrayal, friendship or a house. Memories of course. Always a problem concerning departure. Memories in general is a problem, but it seems the world we live in currently is particularly attached to memories and being sceptical is dubious. The amount of memories collected correlates to how much future an individual has. Memories are barriers in regard to what is to come, they clog systems, and create paths in landscapes that otherwise would be uninhabited.

A thought appeared. An image started to take shape. A person backing into the future mourning what must be left behind. That's departure. There's a delicate difference between cutting threads with a pair of scissors or with a knife.

They smiled and knew it was time to turn around, leave without departure and travel with the back to past, letting go of whatever it was. That very instant they discovered that it's much more difficult to leave than depart. Perhaps the ability to leave demands training or talents to the same extent as showing up. Leaving unnoticed is really a beautiful ability. Is it possible to do so gently, with such a whisper that one's being present retroactively is fading? She left so discretely that it was as if she had never been there. To let absence take one's place, even to permit the absence of absence to reverberate in what wouldn't be said. On the other hand, it could also be considered that to be allowed to leave is a privilege. Departure implied that responsibilities are maintained and continued, whereas to leave exhales responsibilities in favour of loneliness, or perhaps better solitude.

In films about forbidden love, the lovers fantasize about leaving together. Let's leave all behind, live like ordinary people away from all this, where we can truly love. There's never any chit-chat about departure, not at all, it's an unconditional leave this world behind you.

At some point, there was an accident. It's curious, it was reflected, how an experience inflicted on a body can carry so many and incoherent traces. With closed eyes, an individual can trace indentations, scars and marks. Some of them still visible, other have faded or healed, but just because they are not visible doesn't mean that they don't still reverberate with the skin. Eyes closing again, recollections of touches are overwhelming. The skin is open, at times sealed. At the airport, a man raised his voice, and with a tone that didn't belong, announced, "Don't touch me". Maybe it was expressed a second time, then spiced up with some degrading words and unnecessarily aggressivity, which made the guy just creepy. It could have been the outcry of a person who without having learned how had had to leave too many times. It's possible that he was afraid of closing his eyes. Traces of a mother's touch when she was a young woman. The same touch many years later, this time carried out with hands worn by life. A touch that passes on experiences, that resonates of all the touches it has encountered. A mother's touch is a trace of her mother's touch, and her mother's, until there were no more mothers. This lineage can be broken, and a new touch must be found.

## Episode 2

Travelling, how do you know a journey is yours? Is it even possible to make somebody else's, or is that some form of illusion where destiny plays a role and journey is something fate organises? This trip was certainly not an inner one. Not at all, but instead one that with determination withdrew, or was to constantly distance itself from fantasy. Fantasy. They had already talked about it quite regularly and, even though it felt somewhat too Asian, you know like zenish, agreed that fantasy rather than being something desirable reverberated with lack or shortcoming. Fantasy understood as a vulgar activity, stuff that is made of idealised versions of reality that at the end of the day concerns itself with confirming the person busy with escaping reality. It is on the other hand tempting to turn fantasy into escape, as if it would be a substitute for religious attachments that contemporary societies have forgotten, lost or destroyed. A replacement for the speeding up, and notorious sub-division of time experienced in recent times.

The commodification of time's smallest entities, although in an out-of-focus kind of way, must be taken into account when examining the impossibility of having visions. Visions belong to the past, to epochs during which history wasn't always now. During the first part of the journey, it became obvious that fantasy instead of being a lack was something that humans lacked, and at the same time was, at least so it seemed, was flooded with. Fantasy being provided with such exaggeration that nobody had time to fantasize whatsoever.

She couldn't help it, and she detested it when she found herself reflecting critically, but perhaps opioids is the latest addition to the consumption of fantasy, even if the fantasy is void of content. In any case, may fantasy be more or less this or that, this journey was actual and a matter of physical transportation.

Travelling in the footsteps of somebody else. Why not but it's questionable if it in fact is a journey or something else, something like forensics. Retracing is such a melancholic technology, re-performing such a self-pleasing form of management, awarding the architect a self-fulfilling gist of immortality.

In regard to the understanding of responsibility travelling an already threaded path could be experienced as a form of relief. After all, the original traveller could be held accountable for all kinds of choices. It wasn't me I just did what I was supposed to. Or, an option is that these kinds of journeys open up to altogether different perspectives, new modes of seeing and hence alternative discoveries. When the path is something followed what can the travelled be allowed to see or take in. What alternative forms of agency can emerge when the trajectory is staked out in advance. Counter intelligence, she associated. To re-enact falls into the category of self-enhancement, of a loop that confirms itself somewhat in the style of auto-tune. Re-construction, is something otherwise, more like an exploded view that corrupts attempt of evaluation and feedback.

She wondered how many people have followed Phileas Fogg's adventures around the world. Hopefully, fewer than one would guess.

Is it with journeys, like one tends to say about letters that they always end up where they were supposed to? A postcard sooner or later arrives to the right destination, even if the address doesn't coincide with the one written on the backside. Maybe this proposes that all journeys at the end of the day are one's, or, so to say, belong to the traveller. A journey is never another's. If it's not the other way around, because the journey always finds its destination, with or without the traveller's support.

Another option contemplated, is to what extent all journeys are journeys back, in the sense of returning to a starting point, a sense of regress. Or does that simply mean that all trips are a matter of returning home. That would be terrible. Really, it would be so sad if travels were all about roots, grounding or finding oneself. All my journeys are journeys in regress, journeys back. Even if the destination changed a thousand times, where ever I ended up implies finding one's true belonging. If that's the end of the story I'd rather not move at all. A different route could propose that return isn't reflected in notions of origin or true belonging, but instead that it's a return, almost in the sense of conquering or claiming. What one returns to no matter what is in front of us and return doesn't mean coming back. She thought about the importance of not equating return with home. But then again, if one doesn't have a home, a place from which one departs, what is a destination?

They were both afraid of the silence that inevitably would arrive, still talking in order to fend off the awkward moment equally scared them. There are too many stories about people that have overcome impossible situations, because, it's said, they never stopped talking. Hadn't it been because of the talking we would have frozen to death? When driving at night it's the job of the passenger to keep up talking to ensure that the driver don't doze off. As if chatting about about whatever, automatically would keep our spirits up. In Hollywood movies, they always insist on talking to wounded people - "Stay with me..." - but really, who needs to die listening to clichés about you can do it or don't you dare leave me now.

Once, she recalled, she had been robbed. It wasn't so difficult to recall. In fact, the incident, even though it happened years ago, was forever etched onto her cortex. Not exactly traumatising but still present and always. Or exactly traumatising because being constant. That would mean that a mother is a form of trauma, or a child, or The Beatles, which no one listens to but is seriously difficult to get rid of. Maybe Rolling Stones, in that case, is worse, mummified even though still breathing. If they still do breathe.

She had been robbed, or in fact not really because she had nothing on herself worth taking away, by a man with a gun. He didn't shoot her but poked her with it, initially on her torso and the pockets of her jeans. Later, it felt very long although she knew it took only minutes, he did it to her head. Every day when she brushes her hair she re-experiences the sensation of the end of the barrel tangled in her hair. It didn't hurt, maybe a bit and the skin didn't break, but it was probably the most degrading experience she had ever experienced.

It's perhaps difficult to determine but, and she needed to know, is trauma active or passive, or is it active yet immobile? If trauma was passive, it would, it might be painful but still possibly be removed. Like in films where a particular memory can be removed, either through something technological or magic. If trauma on the other hand is active, it means that it undergoes transformation and therefore loses its status as trauma and becomes perhaps an oddity, a wound or just irritating.

Maybe it's different in different parts of the world. What about Spain? It's not a contradiction that trauma is related to culture. Is trauma a phenomenon exclusive to ethics founded on Christian belief structures? Didn't somebody, a poet or something from the Soviet Union, propose that psychoanalyses in USSR would be a contradiction in terms? After all, everything was state-owned, meaning that an individual subject, with trauma, hysteria or even Oedipus-complex, simply didn't exist. It's capitalism that was traumatised by communism, not the Soviet Union because, as a matter of fact, trauma was a phenomenon incompatible with the existing culture. It was a poet, I think even a Nobel prize laureate, what do I know, she thought and didn't know how to return to whatever it was that she had been developing in her mind. As

associations followed, she found herself occupied with whether or possibly not the mind actually did associate with development. It took some time to contemplate especially since she didn't want to end up developing anything as much as she tried to not develop, as any counter strategy would end up acting out the same illusion. Had she bumped into the same problem as with trauma? That the mind cannot understand itself in any other terms than how humans comprehend the world. That development would be somehow inherent to humanity that was something that she immediately dismissed? Something develops or doesn't that's the gloomy side of how we humans have been taught to arrange things in binary oppositions. She took her time thinking about it. Then she took some more. How much time could she take without it being weird? If time is something one takes, and that can be approached as entities placed after each other, does that mean that thinking is inscribed in the same modes of attention as anything else in the world? She quite openly despised individuals that would refer to being in their own movie or to whom thinking precedes like a film. Images are far to present in human cultures. That was her conviction. Not all cultures probably but too many. Journeys, this journey that they were somehow suddenly already part of, also related to images. How tragic that Hollywood had made all journey into road movies, to dramatic outlines that smelled of tensions and release, and that just had to come to an end. Because journeys have been packaged into cinematic ninety-five minutes chunks, they have lost their meandering whimsicality or irritating nomadic homelessness. High-class journeys don't depart, manage to dissolve the experience from here to there and most of all shun even the vaguest rumours about destination.

### Episode 3

From the backseat a plaintive murmur. When are we finally there? Until we are halfway, we are still progressing, but as soon as we are on the other side of the middle it's as if the destination constantly withdraws. The further we travel the further away the journey ends. It is first at the moment when the place can be seen that the travellers' can relax, breathe out and let go of the traveller's tension. Before that the distance can always be divided, and half way is always far away. Journeys cannot not be disappointing precisely because by definition they have a beginning, middle and an end, and we seem endlessly to be in the middle, which is great but only as long as it's not preceded by a beginning and can avoid coming to an end. A middle that is attached to a direction is simply not a middle enough. She arrived at the conclusion that as long as life is understood as a journey, as a path, ageing equals to possess less and less future. A younger person has more future to look forward to. To announce "I'm too old", is to mourn one's vanishing future. At some point the past catches up with a person's future. To live with the experience that one's future lies behind is to cope with loneliness. A path offers a traveller the comfort of knowing whether or not the direction is correct. It gives a sense of safety to be able to backtrack and identify when the journey deviated, fell out of the path.

"Now I know where we are", is connected with a sense of melancholy. So that's where we are, and nowhere else. It's difficult to have expectations in regard to a somewhere we don't know where. As long as a journey is thought about as a path, it's difficult not to look back. People say things like, it's important to know where one comes from. Is it really? She wanted to be like a Japanese garden in which where one comes from is quickly erased by somebody with a rake. People with a rake never have names. A Japanese garden, because they are woven through asymmetrically entangled imperfections that seem to emerge without past, without origin and without expectations.

Suddenly she became aware of the pressure created between her body and the backrest of the seat. It's a shame that a person almost exclusively is defined by their past. A person at ease leans back, and the leaning shifts the direction of pressure so that the spine pushes against the backrest. That shift, or was that her projecting some something appeared to change a sense of ownership from being owned by one's history to possess that history. Confidence is another word for owning one's history. She, didn't like the experience. She didn't vibrate with the proximity between ownership and history practiced by the world she inhabited. She didn't like the sensation given by the realization that history could be claimed as private.

First of all, my history is never mine, it's a mishmash of intersecting particularities so irritatingly complex it could never be straightened out. Secondly, what kind of people would produce pressure onto the past in order to ensure personal prominence. People obsessing about ancestry or lineage are sad and carry a primitive image of history. It's possible that they have a primate image of other things as well, for example that ancestry to the same extent that it safeguards identity rejects change, migration and journey made without an economy class return ticket.

The sound of a metal detector in the hands of an elderly overdressed gentleman on a beach. Quite endearing considering its general randomness. It's the proximity to an object not its age or lineage that increase the frequency of the sounds emitted. A devoted archaeologist worships the ground not what's hidden in it. Findings are more like a beauty-spot that makes the whole even more attractive. It's not the archaeologist that find or discover, it's the earth that gives permission for something to be found. The soil's spirit brings things to the surface and guide the

archaeologist towards them. There's something curious about these findings, is the archaeologist discovering or is it a form of witnessing. If archaeology is about discovery and extracting something from the earth it means that the practice is reproducing known forms of production. Archaeology transforms into theft, economy and glory. If it's about witnessing the archaeologist turn into a host and caretaker. A caretaker different to a parent that cares in order for the child to be happy, feel safe, gain confidence, learn to swim and do good in school. This superimposed identity witness and care taker cannot engage in forms of care for a reason, or want something in return. The witness is anonymous and so is this form of care taker. There is genuine generosity in not taking side, and it is brave to dare indifference.

Why would anybody bring a date to a theatre performance or a concert. To her it seemed a bit ridiculous to invite somebody in order to sit next to each other and exchange as little as possible. Perhaps with the exception for an affirmative gaze, accompanied by a tiny nod of approval.

"Well, then you have something to talk about afterwards." Really, if we need to go to the theatre in order for a verbal exchange to take place, perhaps what we need is not a date. What about the third or the twenty-first date, do we have to go to the theatre again, one more play. A strange form of role play.

She, was astonished about the fact that she wasn't travelling alone this time. Had she surrendered under the pressure that a shared experience, a shared journey is better. That a journey made alone, without company, is considered negative. The only person that travels alone is a somebody who doesn't have a friend, who is so disliked nobody want to join in. An adventure without someone to share it with sucks. Isn't that what everybody has agreed on. A journey made in solitude, is not really a journey but seems to be transformed into a pilgrimage or a mission, like some a Hollywood comedy about an elderly lady who needs to bring the ashes of her husband to some special place, or again the idea of making amends.

I don't, she ruminated, want to go to the theatre with somebody else, because in company I will spend half my attention on whether my friend will be disappointed and the other on coming up with an intelligent, yet unorthodox enough interpretation of whatever it is that we've experienced. The best part of theatre is going home alone afterwards, not having to express something smart or feeling stupid for not having had the right experience. Theatre, or art in general, that make you talk, sparkle with enthusiasm and long sentences, or staccato statements, wasn't her preference. She favoured art that made her silent, that didn't want to be talked about, to which there were no words available. She didn't mean speechless, that's elementary, or words don't come easy, not at all. Rather a silence that consisted of superimposed incompatible layers, where something unsettling coexisted with a sense of, but not for more, longing.

To stand in front of a cathedral is never as exhilarating as when alone. Then and there, the relation is two way and not triangulated, which obviously happens when a second person gets invited or involved. The two-way relation is this relation, whereas a triangulated relations introduces quality and negotiation. Quality she though, is really a naissance.

When I'm finally there, or perhaps the effort wasn't that much to talk about, I don't want to engage in anything else than the sense of being overwhelmed. If at all the sensation of being overwhelmed can be considered a form of engagement. Perhaps overwhelmed, or call it being blown away, is exactly the opposite of engagement but instead a matter of making oneself available. Engagement implies expectations and the actualization of value, which is an antidote



for being overwhelmed. There is a connection between being overwhelmed and a gentle form of anonymity. All that crumbles when you do it with somebody else. Together is overrated. I don't want to be judged because I prefer travelling alone.

She looked around but nothing surprised her. Her concern was still not to develop anything and that made her presence come across as slightly remote. Going to the bathroom together is sympathetic, not in order to have a conversation, do drugs or put on make-up but to do what one does in a toilet. Especially in a rather ordinary toilet. Without noticing, the toilet of Café Beaubourg in Paris flashed by as images in her head. Horribly over designed, sort of overwhelming but for the wrong reasons. Perhaps that form of overwhelmed is easiest described as a WTF feeling. Peeing together can be quite subtle exactly because it's so underwhelming. If it's with a person you don't particularly know it might just be sublime. We are doing it together but we don't share the experience. Peeing together is something we do together but what we do is made in parallel. For people that visit men's rooms it's different but not impossible. It's not a matter of sharing the sensation of relief. That's all wrong and having it done with. When it's at its best it must have nothing to do with desperation but rather with the rhythm of taking its time.

In front of that amazing church or Grand Canyon. When you do it together with somebody, especially somebody you know or sleep in the same bed as, it seems like the together part always has prominence over the what part.

"Do you remember when we..." and we tend to forget *what* it was in favour of "and you had that ridiculous hat" or "my god a bottle of water was so expensive and not even cold". Standing there all alone, nor the ridiculous hat or bottled water is what will define the experience.

I arrived to the city, went to see the thing, went back to the hotel. The experience was really lame, almost aseptic, but the encounter with the things was overwhelming.

"But what was it, how did it feel? What did it make you think?"

"I didn't feel anything and it didn't make me think no nothing. I have no idea what it was. It was, overwhelming?"

## Episode 4

They sat down. It wasn't a particularly cosy room. Neither big nor small and certainly not too big or too small. It was exactly the size a restaurant of that kind should be. Perfectly ordinary including an architectural peculiarity that emphasized a sense of authenticity. Everything here is homemade and every dish is carried by a story that confirms that traditional is good.

She was sceptical about the tradition of sitting across from another person. Spatially it might be efficient but all other reasons? It doesn't make sense. Across is either confrontational or dinner should end up in something fundamental like marriage, break up or, enough of this let's get down to business.

Across is not a good beginning. No, in restaurants one sits next to each other. If nothing else it's much easier to overcome an embarrassing silence. Next to each other one can observe and exchange about guests, passers-by's by on the street or just contemplate the beauty of an autumn sunset. When you sit on the same side it never gets awkward because next to each other makes it easy to laugh and physical proximity just washes those uncomfortable silences away. Behind a table together is a pact, not a confrontation, and the table protects us a little from the outside. Yet the space created is not closed. It's not an invitation but a gesture of availability. Maybe that's why conversations in cars can be so satisfying, or why cars are one of the few places where men talk to each other. Where men engage in conversation and not in any of all those confrontational modes of exchange.

It's beautiful to speak to another person without it being obligatory to look at the individual. Across and you don't look at the other person, you've most certainly been unfaithful or gambled away the upcoming vacation. Across also has the inconvenience that every physical contact runs the risk of being interpreted as hitting on the person or trying some tacky "I care for you", his hand on mine. Next to, is so much more dynamic, a whole arsenal of gestures is available from a bro fist on the shoulder to something totally unacceptable or perhaps daring. It's when we sit next to each other that we giggle. It's when we are side by side that laughter brings us together. Across from each other, we seal a deal or celebrate a union of forces. Next to is a holding hands somewhere between friendship, trust and a baroque sense of intrigue. Next to is the domain of shallow water.

Two women on a beach, standing a few meters into the water, pants rolled up talking about something. The sun reflected in the water and it's nothing special. Next to is where we end up not knowing what belongs to who and the conversation become a landscape.

There's something tragic about how incapable men are of laughing together. Some might find the distinction oversensitive but there is a huge difference between laughing at or with somebody. There are obviously too many exceptions, but like restaurants, that's not enough. Men, especially men who experience their identity as a lineage, tend to laugh from up to down. They laugh at fellow humans' mistakes, faults and shortcomings. It's a laughter that represses, that's demeaning. It's laughter between people sitting across from each other. How sad, how extremely sad to have to realise that so many have lost or perhaps been dispossessed of their ability to laugh, to truly laugh.

She thought about a friend. She got it now. He had stopped laughing many years ago. She thought it was a scar, the result of a trauma. She understood, after all these years, that it wasn't. It was a form of resistance, perhaps even involuntary. A refusal to participate in forms of laughter that take on direction. That has a destination or, simpler, that happens on behalf of

another person. Maybe it was a trauma, after all, perhaps a form of grief, because he hadn't been strong enough to insist on a laughter together.

White walls enveloping wooden tables and chairs of a darker timbre, or perhaps it was chairs with too high backrests that make people sit a bit too straight to match the aristocratically high ceiling. Although it didn't cause her any annoyance, she was always perplexed by her mother's desire to dine with dimmed lights. She felt at home in pizza restaurants with big windows, especially if the staff was taking their time and didn't treat serving pizzas as a sport. She wanted to leave. Even before they had received the menu. She just had to get out of there. There was nothing wrong with the place, it just completely caught her off guard to realise what all this amounted to. The deliberately badly proportionate room. The too evenly placed tables. The way she would have to walk through the tables to the bathroom after finishing the main course. The badly fitted vests of the waiters acting out a rowdy personality. At least waiters in Paris have the dignity of keeping things anonymous.

"It's so personal", as if that's something good. Here you're invited to our kitchen, our internal conflicts and by the way three generations of the family works here. I come here to eat not to be an extra in a documentary film. It seems food is gaining quality if it's spiced up by temperament, family grudges and a recipe that has been passed down through generations. A dish cannot not be great if it's been in the family for as long as we can remember.

All these things are smokescreens installed in order to cover the fact that the place is pretty damn dirty, that the owner is too lacy to change the menu and the son too dependent to move out. Perhaps at some point before the word globalisation had been invented personal, rustic and authentic could serve a purpose. To visit the local Spanish restaurant was like a brief excursion to the world of bullfights and Almodóvar. But today why do we insist on an outdated notion of nation-state when we go for a meal? Whatever, but it gets a bit weird when all personal come across as identical, which never mind is not at all weird since anything personal in today's societies has been turned into a product ready to be circulated.

Did her friend also want to leave? No particular signs of distress. Probably not, but if she didn't inquire, they might just sit here suffering through a dinner none of them wanted. On the other hand, most people have dinner every day so what's the big deal, it's just a dinner. No celebration or anniversary, just dinner. She sat back, didn't bother to think about the relations between her spine and the backrest, and her mind decided for her that when you sit next to, just dinner is exactly what one need. Across is the starting point for examination, for stopping up and reflecting. Next to, is more like lifting the gaze, a continuation and acknowledgement of all those reflections to make us us.

## Episode 5

“Walk with me.”

“Where are we going?”

“Nowhere in particular. Why do we need to know, can’t we just walk?”

“Isn’t it a bit weird to ask me to walk with you when you don’t know where?”

“Why? I enjoy your company can’t that be enough? The more we know where we’re going, enjoying the company is diluted.”

“Then why walk at all, we can just sit down and it will be terrific. All that walking, it’s quite likely that the enjoyment will be swallowed up by complaints and blisters.”

“You’re not the blisters kind of person, and you might complain equally much if we sit here, especially since the sun is quite strong?”

“What do you know about me and blisters?”

“There’s also the fridge, the phone, all the small things that can interfere with the rhythm of conversation.”

“I tell you, my childhood was an endless row of blisters. Ten toes bursting with them. The heels, both of them. Sometimes my mother tied my shoes so tight the laces gnawed into the skin until, more blisters. And now, calluses on both sides, big ones because I was wearing high-heels every day until I left university. I get blisters wearing socks, understand. My feet have been so exposed to those water-filled horrors and other forms of pain they will never forgive you for taking me out walking.”

“Okay then let’s go.”

“Let me just grab my bag. I need to bring plasters.”

“Plasters, why?”

“Just in case. You never know, accidents happen. Bringing some plasters is a good insurance, nothing will happen. Don’t let bad karma get a foot in the door.”

She had no idea what to put on. It felt as if they had been on the way for too long and all her clothes, even though they were clean, felt like a sad rerun on a channel with three digits. He was anyway complaining about how much she packed, no matter what. Even though she was half his size she carried twice as much luggage. She just couldn’t put on any of these, not one more time. Maybe she could borrow something from him. Girlfriend jeans, worn too high and with the strap of the belt halfway to the ankles. But she didn’t have the waist for it. He would laugh at her, roll his eyes and say, of course, knock yourself out, borrow whatever you need to feel fabulous.

Years ago, a stranger made love to her. It was nothing out of the ordinary. Vanilla would probably be a satisfying wording, and although it was sex it was something altogether else. All of her nerves were close to the surface and desperately sensitive. Although it was their first time, she felt safe and the gentle progression allowed held her to climax without much effort. Her eyes rolled back and she pleaded, “No... please... I can’t again. I’ll die if I do again!” But involuntary contractions rushed closer, and closer together and she was gasping in her third or perhaps fourth orgasm, which they with shared passion prolonged until her fingernails were clawing frantically at the nap of the sheets.

She was there; textures, weight, touch, it was like sitting by a stream experiencing the dark flicker of the water, reflections of light absent without a trace. She was present in herself, without thinking about anything, without making an effort to serve or satisfy, and then all at once, a calm indifference came over her like a slow wave. It was a feeling she almost

remembered from being a child. All the pressure and confusion and fear were gone. They dissolved away, and she felt light. She felt like she was transported somewhere else, someplace she'd never been to, but that she knew very well. It was sunny and still, and there was grass all around her, and she seemed to understand everything. Almost as though she and the grass and sun were all being one, part of the same thing. She was part of everything. She was in the flow of everything, within and without mingled to become the same thing. She was brought to the meadow, a flowing motion... a stream or a river, maybe a wind making waves in a field of high grass, the glitter of leaves moving in a gentle breeze, clouds flowing classically.

Afterwards, she brought herself down slowly. She was held and her aura caressed, cooling the muscles of her buttocks, stomach, and thighs quivered with fatigue of repeated orgasm, and she lay still on the pile of pillows and feeling the flesh melting.

In the morning there were only the vague traces of a second body. The scent of lovemaking and nothing of that Bridget Jones post-coitus messy hair. Her body was calm, her skin porous and she felt light. There was no past nor future to the experience, and the impersonal filled her lightness, with the feeling of being invincible.

She wondered how long she had been daydreaming but didn't check the phone, put on a pair of short pants, frizzy just above her ankles. She had hot articulated ankles that were worth taking a look at. It was her secret pride and they were almost always featured in her erotic fantasies.

She would let the recollection linger in her body throughout the day. Let it fade over dinner without engaging in anything to make it stay or amplify it. She knew she would postpone eroticism for a while, in order to stay with the feeling of the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze.

It was much better to walk of course. The conversation was flowing easily especially since none of them had a need to show class or sophistication. They were just walking, most of the time engaged in conversation. At moments in silence, even long moments until something brought them back on track again. It was particularly easy this afternoon as the environment was quiet and non-intrusive. No shopping that could engage them or interrupt the flow. The nature was not overwhelming and the occasional view wasn't in any regard impressive. Still, they managed to drink a cup of coffee. Small but not curiously tiny, and they stirred with undersized spoons a little too long.

At times they walked next to each other, at others like two geese on their way to a nearby pond. The sliding dynamic from side by side to after each other, the distance between them changing intuitively, she felt, removed the conversation from the idea of ping-pong. Why would one wish for a conversation on a too small table, and moreover with that terrible sense of staccato that is all about finesse and hiding one's intentions? Along the road, even on the pavement, stories could unfold and indulge in the most minute details. Questions could be asked that appeared irrelevant just in order for an even more fine-tuned observation to take place or for the conversation to swivel away into unknown lands simply to continue or to gently undo ownership. Conversation is a way of dissolving one's privacy, to lose one's self in favour of a kind of commons.

## Episode 6

There is a dynamic to new cities. Initially, when you've just arrived it's as if the only possible means of transportation is walking or taxi. She couldn't drive and therefore didn't have much of a choice but to love taxis. Most of the time she couldn't afford them but she didn't bother and utilised the service frivolously anyway. This was probably one of the reasons why she had such an aversion to Amsterdam. It's a town – it really doesn't deserve to be recognised as a city and it's too cosy to be called a village – where taxi is just not an option. It's simply too expensive. Since day one she has only, without exception walked in the rubbish town. Okay, maybe she enjoyed an occasional tram ride but only with a native or almost. Bummer, once she stayed in a hotel and had to take the subway to the main station every morning. She hated it beyond comprehension and mind you the hotel was a sort of design hotel with way too small rooms and some or other glass panel between the shower and the rest. Whatever the rest was, and the breakfast, how degrading to have to participate in buffet breakfasts. It's just too good to be true, don't hotel executives understand that the guests get it? Buffet breakfast is cheaper and yet it comes across as voluptuous and rich. The breakfast room was on the top floor which was a plus and the buffet department generated something of a social context different to the business hotel model. Still, it wasn't nice and arriving late everything was a bit sticky and orange marmalade on the side of the jar.

A new city and taxi rides seem to swallow half of your daily expenses but it in the taxi life is safe, you're shielded off from layers of reality. The journey is nothing and the destination is everything. Taxi becomes a primitive version of teleportation, and it's warm. Teleportation, she had a feeling was a very cold experience. Falling through universe must be seriously freezing. Your body temporarily disintegrated into individual microparticles that can't warm each other and totally naked on top. Maybe that's why people who just teleported need a cup of tea first thing when their bodies have been assembled again.

In a taxi there's only here and there and nothing between. Then there is walking, which especially in regard to tourism, is the opposite. You often have no particular destination in mind but explore the city letting circumstances be your guide. When walking the conditions are flipped, now it's only the journey that matters. Here is everything, and as much as every here is unique differentiation slowly becomes impossible. Here is everywhere and strangely identical. Instead of safety and destination, the traveller gets to experience urban texture, eavesdrop at the local bodega, smell the garbage or perhaps be approached by the neighbourhood hustler who can't just offer you a Louis Vuitton bag but has an endless menu of services that can be acquired to an incredibly favourable price. Only for you.

The problem, however, is that after ten minutes everywhere looks and feels the same and it becomes impossible to keep up an enthusiasm, not least because whatever it is that we value must resonate with stuff that we recognise. Nowhere is home better than the second day in a new city. Day one is exciting but then.

Walking we never find that amazing restaurant but will end up having some half-sad remix of something we already know how to pronounce. Isn't it weird how people tend to become increasingly conservative regarding food the further away from home?

"I don't want to end up eating chicken feet or, holy kamoly, intestines or traditional blutwurst. Better go for a pizza Margherita, a burger or grilled chicken." When sleeping in my own bed I'm up for experimental cuisine but the moment I can't read the menu an inner traditionalist climbs out securing that nothing out of the ordinary will happen.

It's when you take the bus in a foreign city that you've become part of its textures, or when you take the bus, a city isn't foreign anymore. This however doesn't mean that you can take the subway. Not yet. And in some cities, the order is reversed. It's always evident and never a maybe.

She liked song lyrics including the word maybe. A strange phenomenon, to express doubt in a song text, kind of beautiful in a somewhat too ordinary way. Then she didn't know exactly what she was afraid of but the sensation didn't want to leave.

The emotions experienced when finally, being capable of jumping on a bus without fear in a new city can be intense. She connected it with a deep sensation of power and independence. Not power in the sense of having power or being able to execute power onto others. Power in the sense of being unstoppable to herself. Accumulated power, the power of capital, she thought, isn't combinable with independence. That kind of power has, without remembering signing the contract, traded independence for surveillance or straight-up paranoia. To be powerful but without means, that's independence and the feeling she had when she jumped on that bus. Especially, this time since she had strategically put in her earbuds so that climbing into the bus was accompanied by a cinematic enough house beat. The kind of house one associates with cappuccino.

The bus, was not at all empty but certainly not full. Her sense of power was not disturbed, not because somebody had to move out of her way or her having to apologise in a language that didn't belong to the city. The road was open and the future stripped naked, ready for her, even though she was walking towards the back of the bus. Paradoxical, but she didn't mind. Why would she, she had the power and the cappuccino beat was even? Maybe, not the maybe of song lyrics, that particular sensation of independence is connected to being no one, or being someone who is no one. Of being anonymous, although not in the sense of being erased, having no representation or being part of the mass.

She sat down on a seat that was blue. Multiple blue colours arranged into something that a well-meaning person possibly could recognise as designed. She wasn't that person, not today. It's curious how bus and subway seats, as long as they are not made of hard plastic, come in that weird, is it designed or have too many colours and nuances? It obviously has to do with that dirt of any sort or kind is absorbed by the irregularity of the pattern.

Breathing in she thought, that anonymity could be exchanged for autonomy. Could it? There was some twist in how relations are formed. Autonomy in the western world is like liberalism. What people mean is never really autonomy, or it's not autonomy enough and connected to power. There's a mix-up between autonomy in the sense of an autonomous country. It has its own laws, maybe currency and of course borders, but it's always in relation to another. It's a reactive autonomy. As in *not that*, or in America, no trespassing, but where is the independence in that? This kind of autonomy is hypocritical, autonomy as long as the surroundings are friendly and we can defend ourselves. Alternatively, it's kamikaze in the sense that it also invites whoever wants to disrupt, claim or generally mess up. It's enemies. That, never the less proposes that there is something to invade, take over or steal. Anonymity is otherwise. Anonymity, her form at least, is an autonomy that to others has no value, that claims nothing and therefore cannot be conquered. Almost like a parallel universe, it walks among us and we don't even know it. Real independency means that you have absolutely nothing to lose, not even your you, since that's already a form of property.

This was precisely what she had experienced with that stranger when it all fell in place and she was resting with the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze. There she becomes at the same time independent, autonomous and anonymous. She wondered. No, she knew that that night had transformed her forever. It wasn't a transformation though it was worse and harder.

She thought about surfing. A friend had told her that the first time when you stand up on the board is an experience beyond reason. The absolute acceleration and the realisation of being part of something impossible. Something completely irrational.

What surfers do the rest of their lives is to hunt the impossibility to experience it again. Those men and women sitting there searching for the next wave, what they really do is mourning that moment, postponing the realisation that it's gone forever.

Was she a surfer in her own way, mourning the sensation of being one with her environment and the grass, the sun and the breeze part of her? And because they were together and one, she was the grass and the grass was her and neither was anything else than all of it, at the same time, all the time?

Pinched by panic she thought maybe the stranger was Satan. Perhaps she was cursed and would have to live with that sense of loss her entire life. Live with the lingering sensation of an inner emptiness. Was it an emptiness in the same way as a glass is empty, simultaneously also full of emptiness? A full emptiness, or was it a darker form, and emptiness empty of emptiness? That was just too existential, so she concentrated on taking the bus not knowing how many stops already had been passed. Maybe those stops were not, in fact, stops but caesura, moments of suspense making it possible to continue.



## Episode 7

It's always much later that she picks up her diary. Coinciding approximately with the moment she starts to get bored with a new city. The diary moment overlaps with that the city isn't new anymore. The melancholy of yesterday's new hand-in-hand with the implicit untimeliness of diary writing. Two daily writing practices with diametrically different understandings of time. Question is if it's a tiny bit sad and regrettable or a positive thing, but if nothing else as the city is caught up in ordinary at least the diary gets activated. If it is a diary, she doesn't open it every day and certainly doesn't write regularly. Regularly but not as good practice. She never does anything except stand up, peeing and brush her teeth as a practice, the rest sways in and out, at times regularly like a clockwork but all of sudden she slips, forgets and can't even recall what it was. At times, on a daily basis, without exception, rehearsal is not identical to repetition and repetition with a purpose is either scientific or fear of getting lost. She thinks, it's small people that write diary every day, read the same newspaper every day, does the same yoga program equally often. Don't they have anything better to do or are they completely void of fantasy, or is it imagination? Are fantasy and imagination two different things, and has it always been two or one? Then she reverses and ponders her own flimsy appetites, her inability to keep up, not giving into superficial desires or just approaching life with a bit of ordinary consistency. However much she has tried it just doesn't happen. At the end of the day, she is happy about her inability. Better to have problems in that direction than the opposite. Being so committed that no deviation is feasible, so stubborn there's no room for improvisation. Those people must be really mediocre lovers. Over years, from partner to partner, optimising the act into only the most essential. Even worse being very agile but without the ability to spontaneously give up best practice or start laughing just because. There's probably a word for this form of perversion, which obviously, she laughs at herself, must have to do with a trauma or something that created an insecurity around sex or life in general. A need to confirm oneself through a set of actions, shielding the individual from any irregularity, disappointment, doubt or equivalent expressed by the erotic partner. She admired her horrible psychoanalytical skills and thought about her own fucked up sex life. At least the disaster it was wasn't her fault, after all, she only knew improvisation and letting go was her single erotic talent.

For the third time in almost no time the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze appeared in her mind. She enjoyed it, paused to take in the memory of her body reverberating with fading pleasure, her sex closing like an oyster after a good storm, and thought, I really have to revise the narrative. She was disappointed with herself. Why had she fallen for the temptation, the cliché applied on so many thousand stories about female desire and sexuality, of making the other into the image of somebody that had delivered her? That through an almost godlike ability had given her the gift of pleasure? It wasn't like that. She was the master of her own sensations, pleasure, body and climaxes. Master, she revised it to owner and then revised again, she was the place, the tumbling, the next to, the play and the tears of all that and much more, with herself and others. No one was in charge and all had their ways. That night was great, perhaps even full moon, but there was nothing supernatural about it, except two bodies and minds that for a suspended moment came together.

She decided not to mention this in the diary although it was tempting. Actually, she had never written anything about it, at any time. And never told anybody about it either. Or had she? It wasn't the physical part. Neither a moral decision not to expose the other person, whose name

she never mind didn't know or remember. It was the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze and what happened there. Her place of rest that she mustn't write or talk about. She was afraid that if she shared the place with anybody it would be taken away from her. Not because it belonged to her but the opposite. Because it didn't it had to remain a secret. Not because it was her private thing, but because it was too public, too open. To share it would mean to bleed its unconditionality.

Honestly, it wasn't a secret. It was something else. A secret is something that you keep because it mustn't be exposed. The meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze were a different story. A secret relates to an ethic and an ethic implies that something is divided. Our secret. Our secret is not for them to be part of. Her place of rest was just a place and it was precisely the lack of ethic that made it that. I wasn't this or that place, it was just a place and it was indivisible.

She was solitary in the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze, and at the same time, not part of it, but she was it and the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze was her and everything at the same time. Yet everything was not the same, interchangeable or one. A secret is not something you have alone. This is my secret, is not alone it's something that depends on some or other form of relation. For a secret to be a secret it needs to be shared with another person. Not even two is enough for a secret. There needs to be a third person to attest to it. A sentinel. The third person cannot know what the secret is, but is the guardian of the secret she is not part of.

For a moment, there on the bus, she closed her eyes and felt all those touches from the recent and not so recent pasts. He felt the touches from the future too. She had hoped that when she opened her eyes some or other words would start to crawl on to the paper. Gently emerging like a small rodent drowsy after a long winter's hibernation.

It wasn't a fresh notebook. Not at all, this was her diary and there was already quite some scribbling done in there. Even though she wasn't very precious about her diary, not concerning timing and regularity but also not about what ended between the covers, she would never doodle in the margins. She wouldn't cover up her lack of imagination, literary skills or laziness by adding random illustrations to the pages and absolutely never in the margins. She judged herself for being judgemental about people that fill notebooks and whatever papers with pen-fiddling. Probably the same people that played with the melted wax on a candle? Once an older female friend had told her about the importance of coming across as mysterious. If you were interested in a guy and he asks you about something count to at least thirteen before you answer. The longer you can count the more mysterious you will become. The more desirable. Once she had counted to twenty-three but had forgotten if she slept with the guy. Whilst you count, explained the friend, twirl your hair gently between your fingers. When she opened her eyes, no words arrived.

When you travel the diary easily becomes a deposit for more or less interesting documentation. "Today we walked all the way up to Acropolis, but we were so exhausted when we arrived and weren't able to appreciate the view. I had expected it to be bigger" and so on. Perhaps those and similar practices had been abandoned with the advent of digital photography. Today writing is not a necessary method to document one's adventures and life, we use images, most of the time too many of them. She thought it was interesting how the value of images changed with the introduction of decent digital pictures. When photography was analogue, it meant something to push the button. Stop motion, very good, but what a disaster. Then, before, it was an economical decision to take a picture, even if you decided not to develop it. Today cameras operate differently. The more pictures you take the cheaper the camera so to say become. If you take one

picture it's an expensive image, but if you take ten thousand each of them becomes very cheap. Ergo, keep clicking and you will save money. It's a tragedy that memories to such extent are kept or archived through photos.

When you write down your memories you generate images. Not photos but images, and those images are more than the photo of the event. Much more, so much more. Some years later perhaps the memory resurfaces in your mind and you write it down again. New images are made, new perspectives captured and different layers are allowed to unfold. Photos are bad news for imagination. They, especially personal snapshots, tell too concrete stories, forgets to dream and capture how it really was. People that carry cameras on journeys shield themselves from experiences, adventures and mistakes.

She thought about a photographic image she had seen in an exhibition recently. A naked female figure, a nude that in the picture without being vulgar exposed the frontside of her body. Both her nipples visible to the camera and her pubic hair equally, but in a slight diagonal that made the gentle curve of her butt felt but not visible. In front of her stomach, as if about to bring it to her face, she held a camera. A proposed contemporary camera (nothing vintage) with a longer lens and she held it with the attitude of a professional.

She found it interesting how the nude body simultaneously was protected by the camera and reversed maintained the power implicit in more or less all nude portraits and images. The power expressed by the viewer onto the female person in the image. Through having the power to look at you, I also possess you, I own you. In this image, the camera in the hands of the nude figure becomes a weapon. She owned the power to document the power of the viewer, carried the puissance to expose the abusive currents of the viewer's gaze. Perhaps the idea of looking back, she hesitated, is a bit of downer in regard to how it almost resonates with revenge, it reverses power but doesn't deviate or change it. When thinking about it, she preferred other dimensions than that the viewer by definition is a predator and the viewed a victim without agency. Isn't a guy who acknowledged, and critically, those binary power structures still repeating, and hence consolidating them. It's a perpetual problem that dominant discourse, or people in power, that decided who has and what kind of agency.

As she recalled the different layers of the image, she wrote it all in the diary. She got stuck not being able to remember who the photographer was. If it was a woman or a man? Would she remember it differently had it been a woman, or did she forget it because it was a female photographer? She was convinced it was Merlene Dumas, but then it struck her that she was a painter and paintings with cameras in them didn't feel so exciting.

## Episode 8

She didn't want to think about art. When in a bus, especially in a new city one should look out the window. Certainly not think about art or artists. It was sort of rule for her, no art writing in the diary and she realised she had just stepped over the thumb, even the whole hand. It's easy to step over when concerned with diaries, or perhaps this is exactly what one is obliged to do in order to avoid that the lines on the pages becomes regulations to thoughts and impressions. Why would one write diary in order to recall something, pin it down as it really was? Her starting point was the opposite, you write in order to transform impressions, cities, people, meetings and so on into something more, to expand an occurrence. Filter them through consciousness, and even more importantly the unconscious. Colour and remix them with other experiences, impressions, reflections, incidents and accidents, until the words that finally sits there has become its own experience, has created a form of autonomy. How, endlessly boring, if a diary is something you return to only in order to verify. "Indeed, it was the 24th of the month of August" or "I'm most correct you, on the day you refer to it was in fact raining". How utterly British. A log book is not a diary. Observation is not being personal. Perhaps a log book is something you sit across and a diary next to you.

Whether one likes it or not a diary is literature, it's fiction even to the most compulsive witness. Some people, in her teens probably her too, keep a diary in order to work thought something, but that's, she thought, is mostly in America. The cinematic diary in which the teenage daughter writers about how much she hates the stepfather. Coping mechanism turned into evidence for being a total sociopath. Nowadays the narrative is different. What for centuries ended up in the diary is today a person posting conspiracy theories on social media or videos online with erratic rants and a doom metal as background music.

Other places, diary writing can function as a cupboard. Its purpose is not to remember but instead to liberate oneself from being occupied with some or other moment, episode or occurrence. She wasn't convinced about her own writing, on any level, and she didn't think her scribble deserved to be thought about as a junkyard for stuff she didn't want to think about. Diaries are machines for forgetting, she thought, and every time the owner returns it's a small disappointment. Evidence of not having forgotten properly. It was hard for her not to feel attracted to a sentence like. Not it's wording or beauty but what it proposed. It's obviously not enough to forget, the difficult part is to forget to forget. As long as you know your put away memory it's still present day out and day in. Like being a passive member in an association. A supporter without ambitions. Sort of joke, isn't it, she asked herself.

For her the diary needed to be organised through bunches of rules, because if they weren't there, she wouldn't first all write at all. That would be far too demanding, where would she start? The confinement that all those rules posed onto her and her writing functioned as a door opener to compose sentences that almost didn't belong to her. They liberated her from self-consciousness. Not that she felt free or anything on the contrary, it was a form of liberation through being restricted. The diary incarcerated her writing, kind of too much but nevertheless. If she ever where to publish a novel. She would write under a pseudonym, for example Ernest Hemmingway or Marguerite Duras. So much more fun to by anonymous behind a literary star than a random, carefully chosen name. It might be difficult to convince a publisher though. In the novel she'd never write, she would have somebody tell a story about a prisoner that was offered a deal.

Liberty and freedom are two very different things. Diary writing didn't liberate her. Not even a little bit, but it set her free. It offered her, her freedom, but only because it withdrew more or less all her liberties.

It's kind of an inconvenience for languages that don't have both terms. German for example or French. The questions are only which of them is more painful to miss out on? In French both freedom and liberty translates into liberty and in German the opposite, there's only freedom. Tough life.

Years ago, when she was still wearing high-heels, in a seminar it was argued that it is impossible to write without a potential destination. There's always an assumed reader. You always write for somebody else, even if that self is yourself. The writer and the reader yourself are two different persons. It's like being in two places at the same time, she thought.

To her the argument was clear. Writing without an audience, why would you bother to do anything else than doodle. Random curves, lines, dots and circles because after all it's only the writer that needs to get it and everything can mean everything. Had it been possible to write for oneself only, she thought, the consequence would somehow be that the writer and the reader would be interchangeable and possibly diagnosed with schizophrenia.

She knew that she was a person carrying quite some prejudice. People that have too tidy dairies or note books are not normal. The same black leatherbound book, one after the other tidily stacked in a bookshelf. When opening one somewhere in the middle realising that there's not a single crossed out word, not even a spelling mistake. Or if it's a notebook that drawings, diagrams and sketches are perfectly crisp and crafted meticulously.

Doesn't that testify to deep insecurity. So deep one would like to hold the person for a moment and whisper encouraging words. It might just be the opposite, the doings of an extremely determined mind that cannot not assume that in the future these dairies or notebooks will be made public and be admired by scholars, dinosaurs and museum visitors over the entire universe. Pretty scary if you ask me, showed up in her head.

For her, the diary, even if it couldn't fully avoid writing as a form of directional practice, with all its rules and determination instead was a challenge to write her way out of this deadlock. Her job was to write, and with conviction, as if there was no reader, no direction, yet without losing precision in regard to the writing.

So deeply entangled in her thoughts she for a second popped out of the inner landscape. For a moment she had no idea where in the world she was. Felt her head flicker from side to side desperate to find something for the gaze to hold on to, some or other sign to coordinate her identity with. For a second, before she found something to grab, she felt the hair-raising panic of her identity fading away. She experienced, with a growing void in her chest, that as long as she had nothing to identify with her identity would quite rapidly dissolve. She was in a rush now, because she was about to disappear, but at the last instance she found enough phenomena to be able to coordinate her existence and return to life.

Something lingered in her body afterwards. She was disappointed, because in combination or the aftermath of concentrating on dairies it was evident that a person's, animal's or even thing's identity likewise always is directional, assume an audience or reader. It's not just dependent on an audience, without reader it quickly withers away unconditionally.

She looked out the window across the aisle in the middle of the bus. As long as writing is directional, as long as a reader is assumed, doesn't language become a service, a tool, although mighty complex, for at least the person writing, most probably also for the recipient? Irritated, perhaps with herself, something cleared up. Even though humans are dependent on diverse

forms of language to maintain identity and, so to say, keep up life, using language in their favour, as a tool, implies being superior to it.

What passed by outside the window rendered a different impulse. The bus entered a green area of the city, a park of some kind. Passing by the trees offered a different perspective. She really didn't like people using point of view in their day-to-day conversations. Perspective is already questionable but point of view, for her that was a no no. Orientation can at times come across as relevant but not if the subtext has to do with finding out or clarification. Passing by trees, leaves and the layering of different greens against the grey sky gave way to a more vivid experience of the surroundings. It was as if the bus previously had passed through a landscape, discrete in regard to its surrounding, whereas the vegetation instead surrounded it teased it out of its autonomy and made it continuous with the shifting nuances, densities and superimpositions.

Does life come to an end when a person has nothing more to say? Life is not a stretch, not from here to there or some line one walks. What about if life is something one passes through again and again, and every again is a person's utterance, proposition to the world, large or small. Everything said or exclaimed is a passing through, and each initiative, every beginning, is a turning back, in a forward motion, into the vector of passing through. When there are no beginnings left the returning motion is suspended and a life dissolves.

It would be nice to figure out an understanding of life that allowed for multiple, superimposed and yet incompatible forms of time. If life is conceived in regard to some or other form of line or stretch, life becomes an irreversible arrow piercing through time. What a disastrous image. No wonder we experience teenage revolt, loneliness at old age, intergenerational trauma. Life can only be attached to a single homogenising aspect of time. Life viewed in respect to something circular or circulating. Cringing inwardly, she corrected herself, under no circumstances was she thinking about some stereotype in the direction of: in a previous life, history repeats itself or, heaven forbid, string theory. This was, to her mind, strictly speaking about an individual's life. Passing through wouldn't mean one after the other but multiple passings at the same time, at different speed and direction simultaneously.

Her attempt, not really a strategy, concerning writing diary was instead of using language to survive, to deal with trauma or express herself, to allow language to abduct her ability, to possess, not her, but capacity to write. She thought it rubbish when some creative writing teacher would explain how you have to make language yours. Writing is good first when the author owns his (obviously his) language. When it is carried by a signature, when it's privatised. She wanted the opposite. She wanted to write her way out of the troupe of ownership. Wanted to operate in parallel to the writing, lose herself in it. Not in the activity, all of a sudden it was dark outside. Times flies, when you have fun and forget yourself. Instead lose herself in the sense of being carried by the identity of writing. Given a form of allowance to dissolve as an identity, to become indistinguishable from and carried by writing.

No, it wasn't, to write and simultaneously be written. It was, giving up selfhood and direction in favour of an anonymous yet autonomous writing, where what emerges is material. Something created through a complicity between anonymous materials.

## Episode 9

She wondered what that was supposed to mean, directed her attention to the window and what was behind it. The window in itself was not particularly inspiring but nothing one should overlook. The rubber attachment between the pane and the frame was ageing, crisscrossed with dry cracks. She couldn't avoid making a comparison between the traces of time in the black plastic and the cracks in the paint of a painting from another century. Cracks in time or cracks that is the physical evidence of aura. Crack made to give the impression of aura or authenticity. Teenagers had scratched a letter or two creating interruptions to the surface. Used a sharp object to dig out a hole. The result almost like a map where roads and paths at times coagulated into a city. Maybe a texture of knowledge where the letters and holes signified rules and conventions, solidified into obstacles that needed duress to pass through.

The aluminium inner frame had enough many traces from stuff it had been in contact with to come across as an encyclopaedia of ordinary and not so ordinary stories. Since this metal in the first place didn't have a polished or shiny surface the scratches and scars in the material told its stories differently. Rather as if they were part of harmonic whole through which it simultaneously brought forth a distinct destiny.

She liked frames in general. Physical frames in front of economical, ethical or symbolic, but thought frames in the contemporary world had been degraded to something that wasn't much more than wrapping paper. Her part of the world was indeed quite vulgar concerning wrapping. She considered it an offence how wrapping had lost its value. Wrapping was an expertise not to be underestimated. She wasn't thinking about gifts or Christmas presents. Especially not the ones that were wrapped just after you pay for your goods. Wrapping is a delicate affair that's both protecting and highlighting the content. At times its job is to conceal, even generate a sense of anonymity. She was too young and lived in the wrong part of the world to have experienced parcels that guaranteed discretion. It's so adorable with packages, even gifts, that are wrapped in impersonal brown paper. Where the paper's colour or patterns is subordinate to the method or technique with which something is wrapped.

She wasn't sure where it arrived from, but she found herself immersed in remembering the experience of slowly sliding her right index finger along the edge of a paper wrapped around a book or a smaller rectangular box. She didn't remember what it was, what colour the paper had, even what the occasion was, just the physical sensation in her fingertip. It wasn't a memory in a conventional sense, she actually had the experience again. It happened in her finger, the tiny impression from the superimposed layers of paper tangible in the skin.

Even though the sensation was just a whisper it was overwhelming. From the fingertip, it reverberated into her neck, spread out in her throat from which the experience expanded into the room she was in. It was as if she could feel the entire room through the connection between the top of her finger, amplified through the energies present in her body. The space surrounding her was present in the creases of the skin of her finger, at the same time as the room become tangible as it overlapped with the sensation of the texture of the paper wrapping the rectangular box.

She was in an apartment she had spent time in, but it wasn't hers and she didn't know the owner or who lived there. The walls were white and the floor cheap wood. A door to a cupboard was slightly open. Not enough to give away what was inside. A queen-sized bed assuming it was accommodation for one person and an occasional guest. The bed was made although casually. The energy emerging from it was light with an undertone of loneliness. Since long only one person had slept in the bed, but never with clothes on. Naked, at times with underwear but

never in a t-shirt. A solitary individual had closed their eyes night after night, and opened them again in the morning, without anybody to share the new day with. It was difficult to detect if it was she that had slept in the bed. Perhaps it was and wasn't at the same time. Perhaps it was somebody else, or perhaps she was simultaneously her and somebody else. It wasn't a desperate energy, still its flavour was such that she wished it found companionship. The balcony doors were sliding glass panes from the floor almost all the way to the ceiling. It made the room light and perhaps slightly vulnerable, but something told her that nothing would happen. The sense of exposure was from within rather than in regard to a possible intruder or an undesirable pair of eyes. The electrical cable connecting the air conditioner was hanging along the wall not being attached to the socket. Maybe because it wasn't summer nor winter, but the time of the year when it wasn't needed.

A moment later she held the rectangular package in both hands with her thumbs parallel along each long side. The texture of the paper slowly became more tangible. Almost painfully present as it spread from the skin into her thumbs towards her wrists where the somewhat rough quality of the paper mingled with an almost erotic sensuality located just there where the hand loses itself and continuous into the arm. She knew now that the paper was green. A somewhat darker pale green blending with an orange sensation in the heel of her hand. From there the energy continued through her sternum, her breastbone, and reverberated with its green tones, now somewhat brightened through the interaction with the erotic textures in the wrist, in her ribcage. In her heart that, although anatomically impossible, were located both on the left and right side. The paper's texture, the sensation passed from the paper to the flowers of her thumbs was present in her heart, that filled with a sense of directionless love.

Wrapping is not just a covering, a holding together, it's an experience. It's a peculiar experience as it somehow withdraws from both form and content. In regard to form it's ordinary and, must in order to be a wrapping never become impressive or spectacular, as it at that moment becomes something in itself. It's no longer wrapping. Wrapping, she thought, is the opposite of autonomy. It's the flip side of a diary, yet it's specific and elaborated through an engagement with rules. Wrapping must never develop into something. It avoids narration, it's not telling stories and in order to remain wrapping can't unfold content.

Wrapping is, she wasn't really able to articulate what. It's not really something, because something expresses itself into the world, and yet wrapping isn't nothing, it's not an absence. How is it that one says, it is present in and through its own absence? In the case of wrapping it's the other way around, it is absent in and through its presence. Wrapping is present but without direction. Strange, she thought, if that's true, even just a bit, then wrapping, in being absent through or despite its present, suggests a form of autonomy. Interestingly an autonomy that has nothing to protect.

She scrutinized herself, and thought, is it actually like that or is it me who really want it to, and make wrapping fit my argument. She was leaning towards the latter.

She had forgotten about the window and found herself looking out through it. The bus had since a moment left the green part of the city behind and was now passing through an area with predominantly institutional buildings. Through her window, she looked at rows of windows. Hers were moving and although the ones on the other side, she knew, were immobile they were still in motion. They passed through her field of vision one after the other at the same time as



they formed a continuum. They were molecules in a body, a body constituted by endless molecules, yet experienced as a whole.

Windows don't melt like sugar. The following building had a glass façade wrapping the building, creating a smooth surface which in this case wasn't reflective. Perhaps due to the grey weather. Her experience changed and the divided whole was exchanged with something that although it stretched out in space had no continuity, because it was impossible to divide. The regularity of the rows of windows, although it suggested that the building was filled with boxlike office-spaces, was exciting to look at. Perhaps because between the windows, metaphorically speaking, there were glitches, interstitial textures that invited to mischievous behaviour. They were spaces where you could be unseen, even though not hiding. The smooth building, with one big pane propose a form of symmetry, in the sense that inside there were no boxes placed next to each other but an office landscape. Where the first building concealed compartmentalisation the second seemed to announce a more democratic open situation where the lack of closed door secured a sense of laterality.

She looked up but had to lean forward to see the sky. The sky didn't move, it was just there however she did move. The sky wasn't passed by, but was present and therefore somehow overlooked. The bus passed by a public square. A monument. A king or conqueror on a horse. The sculpture was left behind but the horse disentangled itself from the fundament where it had been standing for a century or two. Slipped out of its reins and took off. With the mane caught in the wind it defied laws of gravity and with graceful frenzy sped along the façades of public libraries, police stations and buildings that housed institutions with ancient names. It had shaken of the saddle and stretched out, brown and with articulated muscle. She wanted to touch it but as she stretched out her hand, two knuckles were bruised by the aluminium frame of the window. Somebody, that was probably her expressed that it hurt, but the horse continued its flight over and across the buildings. It was in front of the buildings, above the ground and still not airborne. She felt the wind in her face. She had to lean forward to not be thrown off. It was harder than she expected to ride without saddle and reins. Especially uphill but the horse climbed the façade with rows of windows as if it was a path through a beech forest.

She had to watch out for branches. A face of an accountant as they passed by a larger window. A surprised janitor as they sped by another. Most of the people occupying those buildings didn't take notice. Maybe notice is not something we take any longer. Notice went out of fashion with the advent of push notifications.

## Episode 10

She wasn't much of a horse person. When they showed up it was almost wonderful but she didn't go looking for them. So, when this horse took off in a different direction, she wasn't particularly disappointed but felt safe back in the bus. Both her sit-bones against the plastic cover. Nice, her shoulders had dropped a little and she felt a vague numbness in her underarms after holding on to the horse's mane and neck. She looked down and felt the warmth from its coat on her torso. Her eyes took in her full width, without actually taking notice of her body, the shape of her breasts or the gentle curve of her tummy. She wore denim pants, not tight but almost, her legs not thin but fit enough to make an impression. Automatically her eyes zoomed in on the texture of the fabric of her sweater. Lines and crossings formed patterns responding to the weaving technique. A seam created a needed interruption in the flow of the fabric. Folds shifted in concert with the movements of the bus. It was as if she forgot to lift her gaze. With the chin to her chest, she vanished for a moment or perhaps it was a moment that vanished from her. She was back on the horse, but she didn't see anything. It wasn't dark or night, and although she became aware of the compact darkness, she experienced a soothing calmness surrounding her. First it was through the inside of her legs that she sensed her own and the horse's movements. Through the fabric of her trousers, she felt each individual hair of the horses back and flank. Their movement together were coordinated by thousands of hairs on the horse and on the inside of her thighs. The texture that formed between them shifted constantly with the movements between them. At times rough and resisting and suddenly glossy as the hair moved synchronically in the same direction. She felt the pressure created by the muscle in her thighs as she tensed her legs around the horse's body, whose muscles she felt with unrestricted clarity. Their muscle exchanged secrets expressed through forms of knowledge to which she had no access. It was her muscle and still she was completely excluded from their exchange. Initially she felt irritated but soon her emotions settled and she became excited about the idea of not being entitled to her own muscle. Was she not the boss to which her body reported? Or was what surfaced in her minds system just vibrations of what really was going on and what she experienced as her just a façade that never was invited to the board meetings.

With her arms around the horse's neck, pressing her torso against its withers she could coordinate their heartbeat, their blood pumped through their bodies in the same pace. Their breathing fell into each other. Not in the sense of a pulse or rhythm, more like a flock of birds the last days before they start their autumn migration. She was sinking into the horse's body, felt how she descended through the coat into its flesh. A warm sensation enveloped her, slow even though the horse and she was flying passed buildings of all kind. It was calm and she felt addressed by undulating currents. The horse's body were one giant system of waves that without arriving were raising and falling. From her position she could sense the waves rolling in, take in their powerful slowness before they broke and the blue mixed with white. With each wave she experienced how she underwent at first negligible transformations but as the waves came over her it was as if the changes, she experienced accumulated power. She was overcome with the rolling movements that reverberated in her body. Before descending into the waves, she felt air rushing into her lungs and she closed her eyes. A body, a body that was her and yet it was not her body, opened it eyes in the meadow with the grass, the sun and the breeze. The sun, that was her but not just her, offered its warmth without conditions. It needed no boundaries, had no boundaries. It had nothing to show but remained in its own existence. There were no efficiencies here, nothing pendular, no distances to me measured. At the same time as the grass was everywhere it was not not under her feet. She had the sun inside her but when she opened

her eyes it was also up there, and she was part of the sun up there and still down-here. She and it, was in two places at the same time, or through two times in one place.

They were two in the bus and she could sense her friend's impatience beside her. She left her resting place, took farewell of the grass, the sun and the breeze. Together they felt the textures of the city pass by. It was good to be together again, after all they sat next to each other and next to is a pact, entanglements and whimsical continuations. She knew they didn't share the meadow, with the grass, the sun and the breeze, but as much as she couldn't pass on the experience there were places in the individual next to her that carried similar qualities. Next to, she thought, doesn't mean becoming one, it's not a motion towards an organic unity but rather an acceptance in regard to what cannot, must not, be shared and therefore dividable.

## Episode 11

The person next to her, her fellow traveller. A companion? It took some time to make her mind up. No, in fact she didn't want a companion. Really not. There's something disturbingly asymmetrical in a relation configured as companionship. A parent is a companion to the child who wants to see a scary movie. Not so different from an insurance. One party is in need and the companion guarantees, a safe return or eliminates all possible risks. The companion is a shield against adventure.

Were they friends? Not really. Maybe they knew more or less everything about each other. More than they should, more than what was healthy? But friends, she would prefer not. There's something sticky about friendship. As a friend you're obliged to be there, give up whatever you're busy with and devote yourself unconditionally. Disturbing she thought, and if not then there's only one currency, guilt. And the name of the bank is revenge. If friendship was qualified, she didn't find it particularly attractive.

It's elementary, she thought, it comes down to how a relation situates value.

A sentence like, I have always been there for you, followed by, and therefore you are obliged to, this or that. Like you had to sign a licence or deposit. Friendship can't be contractual, and reciprocity can't be its foundation.

Another person in her life would no matter what get in touch every three weeks. Since the habit had been introduced, she couldn't consider the guy a friend. The once sparkling interaction had turned into a business agreement. Perhaps it's a big-city attitude.

In any classical sense, they were not friends. She had no expectation in the direction of being there for you and they were mutual. What a relief, she considered, between them, there were no transactions. There was certainly no debt. Their relation, or non-relation, was unconditional, similar to the I'll be there for you version but in reverse, any expectations were abandoned and left behind.

Funny, their journeys together were without any understanding of trust at all, but because of that, she concluded, their time together was vibrant and alert. The absence, which was not negative and not the result of a betrayal, made it crucial to negotiate every moment of their interactions. This was the point: there were no positions articulated, there were no models and there were no givens in regard to responsibility. There were no episodes just an ongoing, a continuation. If a rant is something that can be shared, that might not be a bad image. What their togetherness brought forth was not a trajectory and not a settlement, it was a landscape and luckily, they had forgotten to bring a map.

Companionship implies an agreed upon ethics, and that agreement must be consolidated by a third party which is usually not an individual but convention. Since the view from the outside must possess the ability to recognise the agreement to be capable to support it, she thought, the ethics is never that of the companion and the companioned but imposed from the outside.

There's a difference between being responsible and encountering a situation that requires that one articulate an appropriate dynamics of responsibility, in particular in regard to an individual's relation to a whole. It might be demanding but to be responsible is rather simple, there is after all a script to follow. More or less every situation in which she found herself comes with a protocol for how a person should react or participate. Responsibility in any customary sense is hierarchical and homogenising, and why would she expose herself to those forms of power, if it wasn't because she was lazy and preferred to stay in her comfort zone.

She, she reminded herself, didn't appreciate Bartleby. To approach a difficulty, forms of responsibility perhaps, with I prefer not to, was under no circumstances her style. For some the scribe was an admirable person, to her he was passive-aggressive and avoided responsibility through undoing any angle of approach. At times, when she wore high heels, she had felt a bit stupid for not being able to understand the scrivener's brilliance, his zen outlook on the world as some have proposed his attitude. She had even read a few books analysing Melville's novel but either they bored her to sleep or she lost track because of how the authors seemed to want Bartleby to be, I don't know, a stoic character.

The only ambiguity that Bartleby presented to her was his job description. He copied things, contracts, manuals who knows what exactly, and she thought it was curious to contemplate if a copy is a product, something you manufacture or create or if it's something else. She thought about bands playing cover songs, night after night at skiing resorts or on cruise ships.

Performing copies of other people's originality, what does that make a person in the long run? It was admirable to be so devoted to the practice that originality, creativity and possible recognition were secondary or needed to be nullified. What makes a person wish to be creative and show off on a dance floor? Of course, she knew it was reactionary, but to her it was tragic to experience people trying to be funny, or simply special in a disco or club, being so nervous about being carried by the dance, of just dancing, that comedy had to be over executed. Dancing to her, instead, was all about losing oneself and being on a break from identity, responsibility, confirmation and, although escapist, class, age, size, gender, sexual preference, and even race.

Dancing, in a club, to her was maybe farfetched not that distant to writing a diary.

She liked to make the difference between equality and equally. The concern isn't equality, but to be equally. We are all equally on the dance floor, which can cause anxiety because what you give up is yourself, you dissolve a little.

She was looking for environments where prescriptions concerning responsibility were weak or even non-existing, in order for relations, interaction, reaction, activity, support, power and so on, were something that needed to be articulated and understood. Those were places and contexts where trust was practised and not adhered to. And those practices required to be constantly scrutinized and renewed not to end up remaking precisely what they were ungrounding. Equality is not a state but an ongoing practice whose function is to avoid the possibility of anybody exclaiming: "Tada, now we are all equal!"

She couldn't remember how many times she had said, in different tones of voice and intonation: "Loyalty and solidarity are not interchangeable." Loyalty is something you swear to, like those knights around the table. It's not practised its cut in stone. Solidarity on the other hand is practised and continuously. It's a pity that balance, in the sense of being out of balance, and balance – the measuring instrument - in English is called the same. Balance cannot reach stability, it's always, even if impossible to detect, out of balance. Balance is continuous and seriously unreliable. Balance and solidarity, in her mind, were not friends but friendly, and loyalty always sits across from whoever is around.

She had difficulties with people that talked about the importance of boundaries. Perhaps she was oversensitive concerning the presence of violence, but it seemed apparent to her that a boundary first and foremost is exactly that.

"It's important to establish boundaries. To know what's okay. Know right from wrong."

To her, the idea of boundary was the birth of violence. Prohibition cannot be the foundation of human relations, for living together. Or with oneself, she added.

Isn't already to be given a name to be installed in a boundary? Her name was pushed on her like cellophane wrapped too tight around a sandwich. All that that her name made her. The boundaries she had to accept because of her name. It had taken a lifetime to accept the name she was given but she had never considered changing it.

Identity has always at least two sides. I'm privileged, she thought, but more than being or not, privilege, to her, was a matter of how rather than if or not. She meant how it is practised and how it is understood as a form of property.

Without identity, you are free but cannot be taken into account. You are boundaryless but can't buy a ticket, can't have a voice. Identity is the prerequisite for putting up a struggle, for being heard and recognised but it's evidently also a prison.

She wasn't able to think all this through before her fellow traveller demanded her attention, but how unusual, and evident, that the prison is so attractive for so many, in particular for those closest to the ground and still ungrounded, and for those who have most to lose, that is closest to the sky.

Without a prison, there is no voice, and without a voice no struggle, but prison is simultaneously the warranty against change, the guardian of value.

Next to, makes the prison less prominent. To choose next to in favour of across, she thought, is an act of resistance. Small and insignificant perhaps but persistence is not to be underrated.

## Episode 12

“We better get off now, please it’s urgent?”

She popped into a self that she recognised as the person other people saw. It was only partially her and not all exciting but she enjoyed the possibility to navigate and be surprised by all those selves that she encountered. She was particularly pleased with, at an early age, having given up any interest in reaching a true self. She was in essence inauthentic. It was for her inconceivable how so endlessly many human beings in the world, currently and for centuries, had been occupied with discovering their true selves. Fine enough, people do lots of weird things and loving it, but in this case, what baffled her was that all those people must have overlooked how extremely boring it must be after the discovery.

“I mean, the journey, the workshops, the gurus. Trips to mythical mountains, smelly candles, extremely old men that speak solely in oxymorons. I’m all in. Who’d miss out on such an adventure, but the true self, can be nothing else than static, stable, outmoded, identical to the world, or even universe. The true you don’t move, change doesn’t anything at all. And it is one without any variations. The true self is void of happiness, tragedy, mourning, sadness, sin, embarrassment, bad jokes, pleasure, guilty pleasures, self-pity – well maybe that the only thing it can experience, a slight regret.

She found it almost comical how some of her feminist friends at the same time as they were convinced about how identity is fluid were completely immersed in practices obsessing about the possibility of a true self.

“What’s suddenly so urgent”, she blurted out.

“We have to get off here, right now. Come, come!”

They made their way into the aisle, managed just before the doors closed to exit and, to their surprise, found themselves at the mouth of a bridge over the river the city was named after. The bridge, a highly complex construction in rough wood with metal stairs connecting several layers and walkways. Horses were funnelled onto the bridge from all directions and poured out of the bridge with restless hooves, creating a deafening clutter as the horseshoes hit the wood and reverberated in the hollow spaces of the construction. Women dressed in heavy grey wool dresses stepped into the light after exiting the bridge’s dusk-like atmosphere carrying fruit, vegetables, leather and yarn wrapped in large textile bundles. Peasant women balanced baskets on their heads filled to the brim with sausages, dried meat, salted fish, nuts and herb all to be presented in the city’s crowded market. Hysterical piglets running off among the legs of the crowd, followed by yelling children, men on foot or on horseback looking for work or returning from passages through the endless woodlands in the east ready for a brawl in one or many of the city’s wet establishments. Entertainers performed tricks where the bridge merged with the city, musicians of lower quality and red faces forced everybody to listen to the nasal sounds of their bagpipes, and in between hustlers that offered uncountable scams, distractions, pyramid schemes, shell games, all while their underaged disciples, in ragged outfits, picked pockets and made valuables vanish. There were noble women on the wooden seats of caravans, wounded patients discharged from the hospital, mentally weak talking to themselves next to local drunks that slept off their hangovers with their heads between their knees. A group of smoking young men, students of the ancient university on the other side of the bridge. All of them were streaming out of the narrow portals of the bridge as if swept along by the cold, damp wind that descended from the mountains raising outside the protective walls. There were many at this time of the year seeking refuge from the dark forest that surrounded the city: those who feared the landscape beyond the reach of the law and those instead who had their reasons to disappear

in the labyrinthine shadowlands of the city; those who sought protection because they had something worth guarding, something valuable enough for others to take an interest in. And those who only wanted to hide in the sprawl in order to act undisturbed. Each feared their individual survival was at stake, and where any talk of solidarity would have seemed out of place because what counted was clawing and biting, hustling and dirty tricks to clear a path for yourself, there was nevertheless a kind of shared ground and understanding, so that however uncertain the future, efforts were joint and all understood one another without a plethora of words. Instead, people screamed on top of their lungs, most of it degrading, decorated with words signifying bad smelling genitals.

It might have been this or it might have been that in the general confusion, but in crossing the wooded bridge a satisfaction and light-heartedness came over her. A harmony with others, with herself and the world, that she hadn't tasted for a long while.

"We have to find it. If we don't, all this will be in vain", screamed her fellow traveller who just surfaced next to her. She had absolutely no idea what they were searching for or what was missing, if she played a part of just happened to be in its way.

They were already approaching the end of the bridge when the flow of people forced them closer to the edge, without having any choice they found themselves descending metal stairs leading towards the shore of the river, the water brown due to sedimentation, stinking of human excrements and decomposing matter clotted together forming islands with birds socialising with insects larger and more poisonous than jealousy and imagination together. Well into the stairs the sound ebbed out and there was enough room to check one's pockets and packages. Steps were taken more slowly in order to give way to those who were moving upwards. Children were sleeping under worn-down coats from which the lining years ago had been torn, hiding in plain sight in alcoves and nooks in the staircases' landings. Although their faces were turned away and one could only detect the outlines of their malnourished bodies, fear oozed from dry and dirty skin through the coats forming a mist that when traversed brought darkness and misery to the soul. The harmony she had just felt was sucked out of her and she felt a cold wind in her bones. The waistband of her petticoat unexpectedly felt damp against her skin under her brown wool dress and she felt cold sweat trickle down along her spine. She lifted her left hand to the upmost part of her chest and when sliding her hand downwards noticing a thin layer of sweat along her breastbone. In order to rid herself of the discomfort she moved her hand gently up and down and realised, astonished that her nipples were erect under the many layers of fabric.

Flustered she wondered if her physical reactions were the doings of malevolent forces but to her bewilderment, the discomfort of the cold sweat was accompanied by a sense of warmth in her breasts, which she observed was amplified in the area below her bellybutton, as if the warmth trickled down over her pubic bone, continued further and enveloped her labia.

Disgusted she tried to exorcise the sensation but as she intensified the fury through which to block her body's reactions, what occurred was an increased sense of pleasure, which combined with the damp cold along the centre line of her torso brought her into a state of anxiety.

Desperately she sought the arm of her fellow traveller, which as soon as she found held on to and with the other hand over her eye leaned forward breathing heavily through her nose. She had to stop even though the movement in the staircase got crumbled and a fat woman that still had the face of a child started yelling. Even though what had occurred had no explanation it was impossible for her to admit the presence of forms of desire that to her reason was abominable.





## Episode 13

She recalled dreams in which she was immersed in darkness. What she experienced, what her body reacted to, was not the meadow with the grass, the sun and the breeze, but she knew it was a place to care about however she felt repulsed at first. Those dreams had reoccurred during her life in periods that couldn't be easily connected except through forthcoming change. They were not nightmares nor did they settle her soul. They were not static sensations resembling solitary confinement, it wasn't a prison but neither a darkness that opened up to an abyss.

There were times when she had to take distance from the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze. In the beginning she didn't understand why and she didn't have anything to replace it with, nowhere else to bring herself, but it was urgent not to escape into where things coincided and dropped into places too familiar. The meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze was characterised by a form of presence that allowed for a sense of drifting, being caught by waves of calm horizontality.

In the dreams' darkness something else made her remain which was not an allowance or permission but an intensity experienced as a necessity or call for action. She hated the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze or herself for taking refuge within it since she knew it was equally a place of forgetting and passivity. A place to which change was unknown, and feeling connected and in place was all that mattered. The darkness was demanding, called her to engage but withdrew the moment she managed to reach out. The availability of everything was exchanged for a sense of playing hard to get.

In the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze everything was images that superimposed looking at and being part of as if you saw and was in it without differentiation. Everything was images and they confirmed her being in all its facets. There was nothing that she could disagree with or even comment on, it was void of opinion and she at times experienced a vague yet distinct sensation of being silenced. It wasn't a disciplinary intervention nor a punishment as much as a bolstered, cosy controlling process that was like how she imagined it to be suffocated with an expensive down-filled pillow.

The darkness instead asked her for something, it teased her to speak, to voice, to interfere. It carried no images, didn't communicate anything and therefore made her create not just images but something else. She thought the dreams where she found herself in the dark didn't just make her make images, it gave her no, or at least very little framing in regard to what those images were. It wasn't images that she *took* but images she made. They were her creations which was confusing since they didn't confirm and were not of her. They were images she created but they didn't belong to her.

She squinted as they continued downwards further into the belly of the bridge and thought, they were not images, what really happens in the darkness, not always but too often to be ignored, was that she created ideas and she knew that to have an idea and to create one was two different things. Having ideas is easy, relatively easy, but creating them is not, not least because it is a form of creation that requires darkness, utter opacity.

Ideas are not light things they reside in the dark. They are unpredictable and take no responsibility. When she visited the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze she dissolved into everything and everything became her but as that was experienced as a descent into things it overlapped with a sense that everything was hers, belonged to her like a garden to a house or person. This sense of being secluded and private was juxtaposed by the darkness where she instead felt that images and especially ideas emerged from her but didn't belong to her or she to

them. In the dark, her identity was blurred, out of focus, almost erased and what she experienced, what came out of her, was public, it was everybody's.

Whatever, she concluded, ideas belong to no one and when somebody takes them home, claims them, they are not ideas anymore but proposals, maybe theories, suggestions or even worse advice.

What she experienced, what her body expressed on the bridge seeing those young children sleeping with their faces to the wall and passing through the mist that brought sorrow and resentment to the soul was not a reaction, it was actual and real but it was not directed to the children, not causal to the poverty and torment which she wholeheartedly took part in, recognised in herself and was ready to do something about. The sensual or even erotic sensations in her body, the irreversibility that desire exposed her to, the sensation to which she was completely nude, that that she knew happened to her but couldn't comprehend or give an image was a form of continuation. It was not a reflection in regard to the situation of the sleeping children. It was nevertheless a reflection but in respect of how the sun creates reflections in a glass, how shadows are created through light passing through a crown of leaves, how coloured panes in church window gives delicate colours to the atmosphere.

The sensations in her body that made her tremble with disgust. What initially made her fear herself, was the darkness of her dreams leaking into, or out of reality, making itself tangible through the warmth animating her body. It was the darkness calling her, it was ideas searching for a host. Something new was in the making, change was coming.

## Episode 14

She closed her eyes, felt herself breathe in through the nose sensing the colder air take hold of her spine expanding the space between the shoulder blades slightly before moving forwards protruding her stomach as a result of full lungs pressing downwards on to her solar plexus. The first breath with closed eyes was to her connected with a temporary letting go. Still, she knew that the second time air passed through her trachea her body would make itself heard and it had been a particularly intense day which meant that messages would be soaked in pain, malfunctioning, even refusal.

She can't remember perfectly when it started but one morning, she discovered that she couldn't remember the last time she woke up without the body signalling that it was in pain or that it urgently needed, if not medical at least some form of attention.

After having experienced a work-related injury a few years back she had as a result woken up every night because of pain in her lower back and pelvis. It hadn't been a major incident but for a few months, it haunted her sleep, infecting her dreams and allowing only for a shallow form of rest. Trying to shake it off didn't help and after only a couple of weeks, a depression started to form behind the, at the time, semi-transparency of her consciousness. It was as if she became afraid of sleeping because when descending into dormancy the pain's persistent grinding would invite the depression to come closer and closer until it found a cavity or crack to move into permanently.

An older man living in the same building as she had once told her that he had spent his whole life in construction but had retired early as his body was in too much pain. There was nothing wrong with him the body had just been worn down and he was in constant pain, not just in two or three places. He was a cheerful character but when coming close to him his aura was trembling with a pain that was simultaneously his demise and what define his being.

And there it was, a cluster of complaints as she brought air into her lungs for the second time. When she returned she would enjoy spending time healing for a moment, opening the door to her body's asymmetries and finding peace together with the pain.

Her eyes remained closed when a calmness started growing inside the pain of her worn body. Out of the blue, she thought about New York and how easy it is to navigate on Manhattan. As long as the streets are numbered it's interestingly difficult to get lost. In the Big Apple, you might not know where you are but you're never lost, after all the next street can only be a higher or lower number. Perhaps that's why it takes three days before people start calling themselves New Yorkers? Other cities, Asian metropolitan areas for example often function the other way around, you're more or less always lost but you know where you are. Because you're always here. She had lived in cities that it took lifetimes, in plural, to understand and properly navigate. Mind you, maps weren't really an option either. She preferred the second type of city of course, also in regard to how life, especially on the street vibrated differently.

She thought that there, generally speaking, are two kinds of big cities. Some where it's always the day before the apocalypse and the city spends an enormous amount of energy to keep back the critical moment after which it's too late. Those cities hold on to their past, and take pride in their history. It's all about preservation and to uphold an image of what a city should look or be like. Those cities are ruled by homogenising powers that like to stroll in Montmartre speaking about authenticity and value, not to mention the evils of gentrification.

On the other hand, there are cities where life is conducted as if it's constantly the day after the apocalypse. Cities that lean forward and move on with a sense of nothing to lose. The apocalypse has already happened so what are we waiting for? Are we about to pick up the

pieces and resurrect Notre Dame or are we creating a new city that doesn't care about conventions and norm? An open city that totally fail in being orderly, doesn't bother about its façade and where it's completely regular to open a restaurant on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor in a building where the 7<sup>th</sup> floor is occupied by a physiotherapist, an accountant and somebody that manufactures high-end hair products. She loved cities with too many layers, she adored urban textures where neighbourhoods had no consistency and yet that were proud enough to keep the streets tidy. Cities that kept up the orderly disorder of nature without obviously having nothing to do with it. Cities that because they were so structurally messy one had to care for them, make them one's own in a way.

It somehow annoyed her that the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze, and the darkness had so much in common. This made things more complicated. Something in her told her that she needed to choose, side with one or the other. Like in the movies, where the ethical complexity can only afford binary relations. There's only the good and the dark, and the dark is always portrayed as an exemplary hierarchical structure where repression is something everybody agrees to and worships. The good side on the other hand are happily joining ad hoc gatherings to discuss the whereabouts of the heterogenous tribes' futures. There the future is plural and diversifying, open ended and creative. The wise and elderly next to the young and they all understand each other perfectly hadn't been for dark forces lurking around out of frame, hungry to expand their power.

The meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze, and her darkness were both places, and times, where she was lost but always knew where she was. She was always here and here is everywhere. In the meadow, the grass, the sun and the breeze she was here because she was merged with her surroundings and the surroundings with her. She was in place, there was nothing dividing her from the world and the world was in her. There were no maps there, there was only expansion or a pulsating movement like breathing in and out. Because there was no division, because she was part of her surroundings direction was dissipating and everything became flat. She, her surroundings and everything else slowly moved towards becoming synonymous with horizon, and from then on also horizon, which moreover was her and her surrounding, started to wither.

The darkness, her darkness, was altogether different and not. Here she was merging with the environment and the environment with her. In the darkness maps became superfluous. There were no hierarchies possible, everything ascended towards coexistence and there wasn't even the possibility of horizon. The darkness in her was in her but was not hers. How could something that had no properties, that was the absence of identity, belong to somebody or something? It was the darkness and it had no interests, it was absolutely indifferent. The darkness didn't whisper anything about openness, which implies forms of border or "until here but not longer", but practised an unconditional open. It was completely without boundaries.