

The good days

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Part one

IS THAT OF THE GOOD GUYS,
DADDY, OR ONE OF THE BAD GUYS?

What can I say? I was a normal kid, from a Mallorcan family, who lived his normal life in Manacor, in the family house with his parents, Antònia and Blai, and his sister, Bel. My mother had one of those typical Mallorcan food shops of the sixties and seventies and I remember that I would swipe little cakes and all the sweets I could. Sospiros, amargos, cocarrois... I wasn't picky. My father had a carpentry shop. I was a happy kid, like most children, I guess. I went to a lovely school filled with normal, happy kids.

I don't know when it was, I must have been about eight or nine, but I started getting fat as a pig. I ate a ton in the evenings, sometimes I ate so much I would throw up afterwards. My father, when he saw I'd finished my dinner and my mother wasn't looking, would slip another slice of sausage onto my plate. He didn't think it could do me any harm, it wasn't like it is these days.

But it got to the point that they saw they had to cut me off and that was why—and also because I had a lot of trouble falling asleep—they had me sleep with Bel. That way, every time I woke up and told her I wanted a cup of milk, she would tell me “you just drank one five minutes ago” even if it wasn't true. I never had much of a relationship with my sister. Remember she was eight years older than me. When I was three she was already eleven and at fourteen she already had an office job. Her concerns were very different than mine and we hardly saw each other.

I had always been strong, you know? Stocky, with a round little face, not really fat. But one day, fucken hell, I remember that one day my uncles and aunts came round to visit. Well, they weren't really my uncle and aunt, they were just my parents' gang, but we considered them family. Uncle Lluís and Aunt Bàrbara, Uncle Pere and Aunt Rosa, and Uncle Bartomeu and Aunt Praxedis. My mom and dad were the fourth couple, they were always together; they'd come over to our house a lot and we went over to theirs too and, basically, they were my aunts and uncles. They'd drink coffee with cognac around the brazier table and then they could spend the whole afternoon playing cards. Sometimes the men would listen to a football match on the radio and the women would talk.

What happened is that on one of those days, I don't remember if it was Uncle Lluís or Pere or Bartomeu, when they saw me come in through the door to the living room, who suddenly said "hey, Xevi, holy hell, you're stronger every day, aren'tcha." When my aunts and uncles came over I always smiled and when they said stuff like that to me, I smiled too. That was the nice thing to do. But that day my father, when he heard Uncle Lluís or Pere or Bartomeu say that, he got all serious, stood up from the sofa, lifted the empty bottle of cassalla as if calling for silence and replied no, "now he's not strong, he's just fat." Then he left the room to put away the bottle and all I remember is silence.

Normal, happy kids have always enjoyed messing with the other kids. Picking on the skinny one, picking on the ugly one, the fat one, the short one... And Sínia, my school, was great and all that, but really, deep down, it wasn't the kind of school you wanted to send your kids to, with so many gypsies and lowlifes. And we didn't mess with those kids, no matter how brazen we were—and I definitely was. They were the ones who messed with us. But I wasn't like them, not by a long shot.

Our parents raised us well. But of course, then there were those other people who, for different reasons were kids who were a little... Well, really, I'll stop there before I say things I shouldn't say. If it hadn't been for that, I bet I would've liked going to school. Maybe I would've even ended up going to university or something like that, imagine. I got very good grades, believe me. At least until I was about twelve years old.

Once, when I was seven or eight, they invited me to take part in some poetry contest or writing contest or some shit like that. It was held in the Sala Imperial, a movie theater that's closed down now. When I got out of school, I played football for a while in the empty lot across the way, just like me and my friends did all the time. But when it was almost time for the contest I went back home because I still had to change my clothes and all that. I was wearing a tee shirt that was like beige or gray with a photo of Barça players on it and dirty as a pig.

My mother had agreed that she'd be there or that, if she wasn't, she'd leave the key in the lock so I could get in and get changed. She always did that. She always did it but on that day we'd made a point of it. She knew that I had to go to the contest. And she knew what time and all that. But that day she left without leaving the key in the lock. I got there, knocked on the door, and nobody opened up. I tried to open it myself, to see if the key wasn't in right or some shit like that, but it didn't work. And I was still in that filthy Barça shirt, my hands filthy too and I was sweating and my mother was nowhere to be found.

It was twenty after five and at five thirty I had to be at the Sala Imperial, so I had to go the way I was. I went up there, up on the stage, and it was full, I swear, it was full of people and I had to read the text out in front of dozens of people who were seeing me in a dirty tee shirt printed with a photo of Barça players and my hands black and my face red.

At fifteen we all got our motocross licenses. I had a Gimson bike, second-hand. It was pistachio green. Macià had a red one. We souped them up so they'd go faster and if we passed a Vespa we were happy. All we wanted was to show the rich kids that we were cooler than them.

In those days, Damià had an empty room in the top floor of his parents' house and we made it our hangout. We brought in a record player, two sofas, two chairs, a table... We would get there and each throw in five hundred pesetas, and with that cash, two or three of us would go down to buy bottles of Martini, which was the cheapest fastest way to get drunk. If there were six of us, for example, with three bottles of Martini and six or seven joints we were all set. Then we'd get on our bikes and go to the port and keep drinking and smoking. We only stopped to vomit. We were wild and we were young.

Then we'd be starving so we'd head to Moby Dick, which was the only place where we could get food at four or five in the morning. It was a pub/bar/discotheque that had a little toaster oven called a Vendor, it was like a Salamandra but with doors on it, you know? I don't know, basically they had hot dogs, hamburgers, sandwiches, and we would get there dying of hunger, "it's open, it's open!" and we would eat their entire fridge up, no joke. And it was all terrible, believe me, you couldn't eat it unless it was drowned in ketchup. But it was the only place open.

It was in those days when my mom got sick. Bone sarcoma. One day she went to get some shot. The needle got stuck inside

her butt cheek and she had to have it removed and that was when they found the cancer. They sent her to the polyclinic and the doctor decided to put cobalt directly on the wound. Because of that radiation on the open flesh, the wound didn't close up until fifty years later. When my father found out that she had been admitted indefinitely, he packed me up, put a bow on me and sent me to Cala Millor to spend the summer: "you'll be better off there, get a job and you'll have food and a place to live" and all that. Could they have sent me to my sister's house? Maybe it would've been a good idea. But anyway, as long as I had my joints and my beers and all that... I was sixteen years old.

Before I started working at the hotel, I went to fix it up. I was still living in Manacor and I would go to the hotel on the bus every morning. But the company was located in Sant Llorenç. That's where I met the guys who would be my teenage friends. Those townie kids were even more naive than me, I swear. They had no idea about anything, they'd probably never even smoked a joint in their lives. They were wide-eyed when I told them any of the anecdotes of stuff I'd done with my friends. I could have them sitting there with their mouths hanging open for hours, listening to my stories and responding to their absurd questions.

When we finished restoring the hotel and I started working in the kitchen, a lot of them were there too, tending bar, waiting tables, doing electric work... I worked almost all day, but then I slept on the hotel roof where no one kept tabs on me. I was free. Free and provided for, to boot. The cleaning ladies even washed my sheets. Not even the night watchman cared what hours I kept.

All those saps who had fixed up the hotel with me and were now working there too gradually became my best friends. And since they all wanted to learn from me, I showed them everythi-

ng I knew. The only thing I didn't explain to them was that I was ripping them off every once in a while. It wasn't a big deal, just when we went to score hashish I would take a little bigger chunk and put in a little less money. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't to be cruel, honestly, it was just my way of charging them for all they were learning.

I usually took them to Aiguarràs, a pub in the port where they sold the best small chunks of hash for two thousand pesetas and where I'd always gone with my friends from Manacor. Compared with what the gypsies sold, that shit was incredible. For a thousand, they sold us a fourth of what Vicenç, the boss at the Aiguarràs gave us for two thousand.

We always went there on our bikes, even in the winter, because none of us lived in the port. We would get there frozen and go down into the basement scared as hell because Vicenç was a fucking junkie, super tall but super stringy. And all his friends were, too. He'd wait for us behind the bar, with that lanky body starved of nutrients and a cigarette hanging from his mouth; as soon as we came in he knew what we were there for. "Five beers," and whoever was feeling the bravest would go pay and ask in a thin wisp of a voice if he had any chunks for two thousand. I don't know if they were good people or not, but we had a fucking great time. Vicenç would have the best music on, we would drink a little and go back home with our hashish, contented. Years later Vicenç died of an overdose, heroin.

I made a lot of friends, honestly. Riutort is a cop now, who could've ever guessed that! There was also Agustí, who's an electrician now; Feliu's brother, who's name I can't dredge up—another party animal; Alba, who was a lovely angel—she's dead now, she had an accident on her way to score. Oh, yeah, and Llorenç, but he didn't party that much. He was a really good kid, really good. His father would drop him off at the hotel and "listen, if

you guys need anything, my son can help you out. And don't forget to give him a slap on the back of the neck from me." And the poor kid got a ton of smacks for that.

It was one of the best summers of my life, truth be told. And I slimmed down a lot. I even lost my virginity with a German woman about thirty-five years old, on the sand at Cala Millor. And that was without speaking a single word of German. Well, *Guten Tag* and *Guten Morgen* and that was about it. But yeah, that's how it was in those days... The barman would help you set up the trap and... Sure, I was sixteen and not bad looking and when I went out to restock the buffet the foreigner girls would see me and all that. But it was Mercè who I was really into. Oh, yeah, she was my first real love, you know what I mean?

That winter I went back to live with my mom and dad and I started working in a wholesale supermarket, marking the prices, filling the shelves... It was comfortable, at least, and it left me time for myself. That was the year when me and my friends started going to the neighborhood of the gypsies, in Palma, in other words, really getting into it, to score smack. We would fill up a car and with a hundred pesetas each we covered the gas. At first we would just go there on Saturdays or Sundays. Then we started going in on Friday and coming back on Sunday. Then we added in Wednesdays. And on and on like that until we ended up going there every day.

“Two t’ousand pelas” each packet. We always scored white smack, the brown stuff was for losers, everybody knew that. “I got nothin’” was the worse thing they could tell us. We would go to Palma, we’d go into the worst neighborhood in all of Mallorca, we would go up three floors in a building that looked like it was going to collapse before we got up there, we knocked on the door and they wouldn’t even open up: “I got nothin’” Fuck! And we went back down to the car: “hey, they don’t have any. What do we do?” We had to really put our heads together and strategize where we could go to find some good shit. We were laughing though. I suppose that was why we did it.

In the gypsies’ neighborhood was the Bar Ciutat, who really was right in the city center where during the day they made sandwiches and all that. But in the evenings all the junkies gathered there, so many that the owner drilled a hole in all the spoons

so they'd stop stealing them. I'm not kidding: you would order a coffee and the spoon that the waiter brought you had a hole in it. You can't even imagine how many hooked people there were. All the friends of mine who've died... some from overdoses, some from accidents, others with their liver destroyed. I'm not trying to justify anything, trust me, I'm just saying that it wasn't like it is now. Anyone who falls into drugs now is just stupid.

Every day, every day we went to Palma with Sastre, Cortès, Manuel, another friend who's dead now. We were a little superstitious and we were paranoid about going to score with our kits because it would bring us bad luck, so first we would go score and then we would go to buy the needles. The pharmacy workers had the needles in a drawer up front and when you asked for them they didn't need to walk, just stretch out their arm. Especially at the emergency windows. "I want three insulin syringes," "American ones?", "yes, American." And the women would hand over three syringes. The American ones had thin needles and didn't work well for cocaine, because it would get clogged. So for the coke we had to buy one-millimeter needles. And that was it, once we were all high we went to the Rambla to buy coca-colas and croissants and we would sit down on a bench to eat and drink. There was a bakery that made this cream-filled croissants that were amazing.

I reached a point where I was shooting up every day all the time and wherever, even at my parents' house: my room, in the shower... And we didn't have any locks on the rooms. I was living large and I didn't care. I remember once my sister came into my room all pissed off. The company she worked out used the same bank where I kept my money and it seems the manager told her that I was taking out eight to ten thousand pesetas every day. If back then they'd had all that about data protection I would have beat him to a bloody pulp, fucking hell.

My sister came in, waving around a bank statement that she practically pushed into my face and shouting “what are you doing? What are you doing?” Shit, I was lying in bed, super high, and I did not understand what all that noise and fuss was about. “What am I doing? What do you mean what am I doing? I’m not doing anything. Nothing. I gamble,” I said. “I gamble and go with whores.” She gave me a lecture that harshed my entire mellow, but at least she bought it. I guess no one expects a nineteen-year-old like me to have that life. Besides, I’ve always been good at lying and when my parents were around, at meals and like that, I was a perfect child. I even helped clear the table.

My life went on pretty calmly, same as ever and, one day, the owner of the Mirador in S’Illot came into the supermarket saying that he had to go to the Canary Islands that summer and he couldn’t manage the bar. And did I want the job. The famous pub in S’Illot, the Mirador. The conditions were fantastic, so it was easy to convince me: I was the man. I took care of almost everything, but I decided to leave the cigarette sales to the waiters: “every pack you take, is a pack you don’t earn.” They were thrilled, they would put all the cash they earned from selling cigarettes into a glass jar we kept behind the bar.

I rented out an apartment really close by and I would live there sometimes and sometimes in the apartment at the port. The only problem was that there was no smack around there and I had to bring it with me. The first few days were hard, but coke helped me get through them. In those days there was a guy, El Primo, they called him, who had some kickass coke. He mostly sold it in Manacor, but he lived in S’Illot, so that was perfect for me. All I had to do was pass by his house, and sometimes I would even do it right inside. I was spending a ton, but it was worth it because the high was insane. For a while everything was smooth as silk, the bar was killing it and I was

killing it with the ladies—if it must be said, it must be said.

In those days I had a girlfriend from Petra, Sílvia, but obvs, I was running a popular bar, what do you expect? There was no way I wasn't going to cheat on her. Instead of going to see her after work, I went out partying and, since she wasn't yet eighteen and couldn't drive, weeks could pass where we didn't get together. And when it had been a really long time, I'd go to Petra and bring her some little gift. A perfume, some earrings, some crap like that. We really had a good time together.

One evening, behind the bar, I got with a hairdresser from Costa dels Pins who I fucked every once in a while, and out on the terrace, also stretched out on the bar, a waitress from Wimpy's who I was also screwing. Then Sílvia showed up with a bag in her hand, she put it on the bar, "I don't want to have anything more to do with you," she turned around and left. Inside the bag was everything I had ever gifted her. Shit, I think my mother didn't need to buy perfume or jewelry for five years. It was brutal, but the worst part was that the other two girls saw the whole thing. "Who's that?" I said "well, that was my girlfriend." Shit, man, I left the waiter in charge, I got in my car and I sped off. I took it really hard, that day. Later, Sílvia married Sion—another real winner. They're separated now.

The better things were going for me, the wilder I got, as you could probably guess. Fuck, I remember that, I think it was in that period, that I had a little dog. A boxer. But just imagine, a total disaster. I don't know how he came to me or how he got away, if I'm honest. All I can tell you is that I had him locked in a one-square-meter laundry room, in the apartment in the port, and I never let him out, not even to shit. I didn't see much of him during the day, but sometimes I heard him barking and I would give him so food to see if he would shut up for a little while. And believe me, he shut up if he knew what was good

for him, holy hell did I lay into him when he didn't. What do you expect? I was a nineteen-year-old coke and smack addict with money coming out of his ears. I was lucky I didn't dig my own grave.

I was really wilding and that's how I ended up the way I ended up. There was an accountant who would occasionally come by the pub to see me and every day I was expected to deposit the income from the previous day. Once, after three or four times when I failed to make the deposit, the accountant called me up asking what the fuck was going on. I don't know what excuse I made up, but it bought me five more days. On the fifth, the accountant showed up at the pub looking for explanations. No prob, "when I get home I'll send you the dough. I swear." And he believed me. But the dough he was asking me for no longer existed.

I had to do something. Maybe if I disappeared for a while everybody would forget about it, about the dough and all the other shit. So I decided to leave. I had to take all the cash that was in the till that day and, I'm not proud of this, but I also took the money in the servers' jar, with all they'd earned selling cigarettes for months. And I left.

I didn't have any clue where to go, but once I was in the car I remembered that the hairdresser from Costa dels Pins had told me about a commune on the outskirts of Inca. I found it without having to ask around much, it was a rural house and there were always about fifteen young people like me there, most of them eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. Almost all of them lived there and they kept up the house, brought in the food and all that, and basically all they did was fuck and get high. In other words, they lived. We didn't even eat much. One day one of us would go over to the neighbor's place and steal a chicken, another would go by a farm and get some peppers and tomatoes, and that was how we spent our days.

You could say it was some sort of permanent orgy but the truth is it was pretty different than what I'd imagined an orgy to be like. Sometimes, when I came down and saw that heap of horribly skinny, half-conscious, naked bodies I wasn't sure if it was really happening. Seen with perspective the truth is it was pretty terrifying. But hey, I was just there for a week hiding out from the accountant and all that. When I ran out of clean clothes, I decided to go back to our place in the port.

What I wasn't expecting was to find my entire family there waiting for me. Shit, when they spotted me! "He's here, he's here!" When I saw all that racket, I dropped the bag of laundry and ran down the stairs as fast as my little legs could carry me. My brother-in-law followed me and I swear that I think he leapt down the entire staircase in one bound, grabbed me by the shirt

and pulled me up, “bring him up here!” That was when the shit hit the fan. Between one thing and another, I had frittered away four million pesetas in a year and a half. My father was crying, my mother was having a nervous fit, I know Josep was dying to beat the crap out of me, my sister I think was in a muddle. They were all devastated.

I wasn’t even twenty years old yet and I was a wreck and I had wasted more dough than they’d ever see in their lives, including a million and a half that technically I’d stolen. My father had to give away a piece of his land to keep them from having me arrested, which my sister never forgave me for. I’m sure I wouldn’t have ended up in prison or anything, but better safe than sorry, especially since the Civil Guard had already showed up at our house a couple of times. It was a real shitshow, to be honest. Now that I think about it, when I went back the dog wasn’t there. My father must have given it away or shot it.

They took me to the house in Manacor and kept me under lock and key, literally. They didn’t let me out for anything. We looked into going to some association called The Patriarch or something like that, that had started in France. We called them, they came by the house, lectured us and explained that for me to get in there I first had to apply. Then I had to wait locked up at home, almost four months, until they answered. It was crystal clear that what they wanted was our money, because they started with “if you’d like, you can start paying, and in three or four months...” and stuff like that. They seemed like a bunch of vultures and I didn’t want to have anything to do with them. Whatever, it was their loss. Then somebody told us about Project Man and we went to visit it, in Palma. It was near Gomila Plaza, ironically. We decided to give it a chance and we started the first phase: admittance.

The project was very new. In fact, all the staff was still researchers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. In other words, there weren't yet any coordinators who were former drug addicts. They interviewed us, I told them most everything and the truth is they were floored. Mostly because I was so young, I was the youngest one there, I think.

In my head, the admittance phase, which was the path to the therapeutic community, lasted about eight or nine months. Every day my mother and I would catch a bus and head to Palma. The journey took about an hour and a half, and I wasn't allowed to sleep. That was one of the rules. There were absurd rules, but whatever, they must have had their reasons. "Read, sing, you can do what you want, but you can't sleep on the bus." And it was brutal, because I had to get up at six in the morning to do chores. Every single day, before leaving our house to go catch the bus, I had to do a whole housecleaning: the bathrooms, deep cleaned; my room, dusted, swept, and mopped, impeccable, until it looked like a hotel room; the plates and cups from tea time, scoured clean. After that I had to shower and shave. Shit, "I'm only twenty years old, I have no beard!" I would complain, "then use an eraser."

Every day was the same except for Saturdays, when it was Jai. Which was really GI, which stood for 'General Inspection' but we called it Jai. It entailed a super deep clean of the entire house. It was brutal, believe me. The person who was in charge of supervising us, who in my case was my mother, acted like goddamn Mr. Clean. She had to. If she ran her finger over a door frame and found even the slightest bit of dust, go on, "do it all again." I would do it because I had to do it or my mother would tell on me, because when we got to Palma I would go into my group but she would also go into hers. And when I hadn't done it they would rip me a new one, holy hell.

Just imagine that I went into the group and said “good morning. Today I got up, had a bite to eat, washed the dishes and put them away, cleaned the bathroom, dusted, swept and mopped my room, made my bed, showered, shaved...” If then it turned out in the other group that my mother let fly that I hadn’t actually felt like scouring the dishes, the next day was not gonna be fun. Both the staff and the other junkies would come over to scold me, “why didn’t you do what you’re supposed to do?”, and if I said that “I didn’t feel like it” or some shit like that, well “no, man, laziness is the first sign of drug addict. You can’t afford to be lazy, you have to follow the rules and do the chores, because otherwise you’ll always be a drug addict, at least in your attitude.”

And “how come you tell lies? All your fucking life you’ve told lies, your life has been a lie. Stop telling lies.” They were always reminding us that “honesty is the basis for change.” In the end, either because they made us feel bad or because we sick of their sermons, every day for nine months, every day, we scrubbed, mopped, dusted, showered, shaved and went to Palma to tell the truth. Until it was automatic. Until I woke up and, without thinking, got up, shook out the sheets and made the bed, swept, shook off the furniture, scrubbed, showered, cleaned the bathroom, had a bite to eat, left everything well scrubbed, the table clean, everything put away, and we went to the bus stop. For an hourlong trip.

Then, from Palma, we had to take the number three bus and we still had twenty minutes more to go from the station to the center. It was one of those old stately houses that had been renovated, with a lot of rooms; each group met in a different room. There were a ton of groups: some were for us, some were for our mothers, some were for our siblings, etc. They did that to make them understand that, even if I was the problem, I

couldn't fix it on my own. It was mostly up to me, but if my family didn't trust me again, I'd never find my way.

I often remember the tree metaphor. "You are a tree that has been knocked to one side by the wind, say the left. If we pull you into the middle, when we let go of you it will be very easy for you to go back to the left. So what do we do? We pull you to the other extreme, the right. That way, when we let go of you, you'll most likely stay in the middle." They loved anecdotes, too, like the one about the first Project they opened, in Italy. Seems some guy showed up saying that he had a big problem with drugs and all that and the guy from the Project gave him a broom: «OK, fine, here, take this. Sweep the yard." And the other guy goes "no, man, really, I have a big problem," but the counselor just said, "your biggest problem right now is that you have to sweep the yard." Sometimes I didn't believe all those stories, but I have to admit there was something about them.

During the Project I was only allowed contact with people they considered to be positive, in other words, people who didn't use. To make sure, at first they would interview the people I hung out with. I took Macià there with me. He explained that "I drink a little bit and some such, but I've never been soused or tried drugs or anything" and that he felt he was qualified to support me. Because of course, supposedly while I was in the Project I couldn't go out on the street alone. I always had to go with someone positive. I couldn't be home alone either. If my mother went shopping, then I had to go shopping with my mommy, for example. That made me incredibly pissed off. Sometimes I'd run into a buddy of mine in the supermarket and I had to pretend I hadn't even seen him. I couldn't say hey, nothing. Theoretically, the only communication I could have with a friend were, "look, you're a negative person for me right now and I can't talk to you. You'll be doing me a favor if you ignore me."

One of the hardest things I went through at that time was because of that rule. Miquelet and Nutty Jaume were two guys from Cala Millor, big partiers and really close friends of mine. Miquelet, who we called little Miquel but he was almost two meters tall, was dating Mercè, my teenage love. I loved all three of them a ton, but her in particular. It was Carnaval and there was the parade and I don't remember what Miquelet and Jaume were dressed up as, a polar bear or some stupid shit like that. They were wearing acrylic overalls with foam attached, like the stuffing inside the pillows, with Superglue.

Just imagine them dressed like that in a bar full of alcohol and cigarettes. A fucking fire. Someone must have brought a cigarette too close to them, or maybe it was their own cigarette that fell on them... They went up in a flash. Miquelet's whole face and hands were burned by the time they took him away. The next day Mercè stopped by our house because she needed to see me. I loved her. From the living room I could hear my mother telling her that she was so sorry she couldn't see me, that "he's doing this program and can't see any of his friends." I swear I don't know why the hell I didn't just go out to her. And I swear, that's one of the things I'm most sorry about in my whole life.

I had become a fucking lap dog, but the truth is I got scared when I had come back from the commune and found myself in that huge shitstorm, so in a way I had given up. "Alright, whatever you want, if I have to do Project Man, I'll do Project Man." At least that way my father and mother would be reassured, my sister too, and they'd let me see my nephew"—who'd already been born—grow up. When I was inside, especially that admittance center, I didn't even think about the future. They wouldn't let me, they wouldn't let me think about getting out. All we did was learn to be honest, I think more with ourselves

than with everyone else. And to be honest with ourselves, I had no choice but to be honest first with others. They could neither take us out nor could they hold us, but they put us in our place. And if we stayed, they put us there.

Some people got fed up of the whole thing and left, "I'm outta here, they're nuts." There were many who quick escapes, I don't know, like if they managed to swipe their mother's wallet or something like that. They'd split and later that day they'd come back to the center, high but with their heads bowed. And I understand them, I'd be lying if I said that it didn't occur to me thirty thousand times to just quit. Those of us who stayed were crushed and shattered from all the poundings they gave us. It was a lot of pressure. Why didn't I leave? Out of fear, I guess.

I never ran away, but one evening I was left all alone in the living room when my father and mother went to sleep. Every day, before going to bed, my father drank a couple of glasses of strong anis liquor. Then he'd put the bottle away with the rest of the alcohol, in a locked display case by the couch. But on that day, which was a Friday or a Saturday, he forgot to put it away. Slipped his mind I guess, what do I know, and he left it out when he went to bed. You can probably imagine that the next day the bottle was dry and I was in quite a state. Man, I went to town when I found myself alone with that bottle. "How could you do that?" they said to me the next morning; "How could you leave it out?" I said.

The truth is that sometimes I enjoyed the center. Even had fun there. We would arrive, have a snack and then they would give us an hour to be in the yard, which even had a basketball court. We'd shoot a little ball, a friendly game, in whatever clothes we had on. We made teams that were sometimes of seven to a side, sometimes four and, well, you know, we dribbled the ball. But a lot of times, when we were in the yard, we would

also open up to each other. Just us junkies, no staff or anyone else to force us to tell the truth, just us. A lot of us basically felt like we'd gotten ourselves into a fucking sect.

"Honesty, honesty, honesty", "sharing, sharing, sharing." They told us so many times that we had to open up that by the end of it we were split in half. "Open up, share your problems, and you won't feel the need to bury them with alcohol and drugs." In the end, we were able to vomit all the traumas we had inside at the drop of a hat. We cried, laughed and chatted. We hugged, sometimes. We listened to each other, fuck, we really listened to each other. I'm not saying we didn't feel like taking drugs... But we didn't give in to those feelings, and that was what mattered.

We did smoke, sure. They let us have a pack a day. But if one day we only smoked eighteen cigarettes, the next day we couldn't have twenty-two to make up for it. Those two left over cigarettes, those we had to give back, period. A pack a day. And a pack is twenty smokes. Every morning I would give my mother's the pack from the day before and she would give me a new one. I think I gave very few back. It was very difficult for me to get used to just twenty cigarettes because at the bar I smoked a lot, sometimes up to two packs in a day. I remember one time, towards the end of my time at the admittance center, I had like tow cigarettes left over. I kept them—that's the first thing a junkie would think to do, right?—but when I found myself alone in my room with the two cigarettes, fuck, now I've done it, I thought, goddamn, motherfuck. And the next day I confessed.

Part II
TELL ME ANOTHER STORY, MAMI

We arrived from work and my mother already had lunch made and was ready—mostly—for the bedlam that would fill the house for an hour or two. “This place is like a hotel!” She was getting stressed. “Girls, don’t get in the way, Papa’ll get nervous if he hasn’t eaten by a certain time! And you know that before he leaves, he’ll also want to rest his tummy a little bit.” When it was sunny, Papa would finish lunch and go up to the roof to “stretch his belly,” which consisted of lying down and sunbathing. He called it, “stretching my belly in the sun.” When we had all eaten and cleared up and everything, Mama would sit by the kitchen and rest, “I haven’t sat down all morning.”

In winter, we kept the brazier under the dining room table, right in front of the fireplace, and we didn’t move from there all afternoon. The seven of us all sat together around the brazier table, huddled together, and, depending on what was there for lunch, we ate from the pot itself, which was in the middle of the table. We did this especially with the second course, because the first was usually soup and it was harder to make sure it didn’t get everywhere if we didn’t each have our own bowls. I was the youngest of a bunch of five sisters but there wasn’t a big age gap, because my mother had had us all in just six years. She got started in sixty-three, and kept squeezing us out until her little body must have cried enough.

Papa was always a very silent man. He got home from the gas station frozen stiff and we only heard him say a few words confirming that he was dead cold and dead tired. Maybe I was

more like him than mama, because I wasn't much of a talker either. I got really lazy and in a bad mood when people asked me for things. That's why I liked when, sometimes, over lunch, we watched that soap opera, called *Wealth and Power* or something like that. But I don't know if my father was quite like me, because before, when he worked in the coves, he did tell us some story about some tourist or teach us the numbers in German, "eins, zwei, drei, vier", with those proud eyes, "fünf, sechs, sieben, acht", he always said that eight was the strangest and hardest to say, "neun, zehn," and he'd laugh.

After lunch, Beatriu turned off the TV and they all started cleaning and scrubbing and mopping and, since they were doing everything, I just let them do it. Ah! If only they'd left me something to do... The evenings were very similar to the afternoons: we had dinner, we watched television for a while, because we couldn't stand not to, and sometimes we prayed the rosary. One Our Father and ten Hail Marys, one Our Father and ten Hail Marys, one Our Father and ten Hail Marys, up to five Our Fathers and fifty Hail Marys. That's when we were all still living at home. Over time, my sisters got married and disappeared from the table at lunchtime, although they didn't completely disappear, because my mother has always wanted to keep us very close.

The chattiest one was Bea, and always the most restless. Maria was also clever, but in a different way. She and Mama argued all day because Maria wanted to go out all the time, out dancing and to the town festival and go out with friends for dinner and all that. All of us argued with Mama, but we loved each other, after all. It's just that my mother has always been very traditional and all that.

When we were younger we only showered once or twice a week and when we had our periods we couldn't shower, Mama

wouldn't let us, she said no, we couldn't, not when Aunt Flo was in town—because our periods, at home, were always called Aunt Flo. But then my friends told me that they would shower anyway, “I shower the same, my mother says that's okay.” So when we got a little older, my sisters started rebelling and showered whenever they wanted to. And slowly I did too, because you get to an age where you smell, you know what I mean? And sometimes my friends would mention it. Well, they never told me directly, but you heard rumors... And you noticed it yourself, too, that you smelled! But my mother has always had a hard time moving forward. She's always been more old-fashioned.

Anyway, Beatriu, I don't know if it's because she was the last one to get married or what, but I have so many memories of her, sitting at the brazier table in the afternoons and talking about things at work, some customer who'd sat on their glasses and demanded they be fixed for free, stuff like that. She often said she wanted to go and help Africans or some crazy stuff like that, but Mama and Papa would never have let her go, no way.

At that time I was still helping Aida in the daycare across the street, but when Bea had been working for the optician's from Can Mesquida for a while, she told me that they needed more hands and that Mesquida would surely take me, knowing that I was her sister. And she was right. As an optician, he was great. As a person, he was a bit odd. Often we would go work at his home, because he had a kind of warehouse/workshop where we assembled the glasses ourselves, dyed them and all that—before everything came from China. And, well, it was funny because sometimes when we went there he would still be asleep and he'd get up and eat his breakfast as if it was normal, with a sleepy face... Then he would go into the shop and we'd stay at his house.

When I was nineteen, I got my driver's license. I remember that Imma and I signed up for the driving school together, but she never got her license, because when she told her parents that she was going to driving school, she was actually meeting up with her boyfriend. Her father would drop her off in front of the driving school, where her boyfriend was waiting for her, and they went out secretly to do god knows what. At least they got married and had kids and all the stuff, and even now it's clear they still love each other.

I was the only one in my circle who still wasn't seriously dating, I would go on Fridays and Saturdays with whoever would let me join them. Of course I had some guys interested in me, especially when I went to Porxo. There were always a few long looks and sometimes there was a shared giggle and you know, silly flirting that came to nothing. For a while I went out a lot with Beatriu and her friends, who were livelier than mine and not so interested in men. Or maybe it was that men weren't paying much attention to them, I don't know. It was with them that I learned that if I didn't want to drink alcohol but wanted to make it seem like I was, I had to ask for a tonic, pour it into the glass and leave the bottle at the bar. That way no one would know for sure what was in the cup, and if they asked me I could say it was a mixed drink and they would believe me.

Sometimes on Sundays they would take me along on their day trips and I was happy to do something and not just stay home all day with my parents. On some Sunday afternoons, when my grandmother was still alive, we would go see her and all the sisters and all the cousins came and all my aunts were there and, well, that wasn't too bad. We'd all get in a car, Mama, Papa and all of us girls, and we'd spend the afternoon at our grandparents and we'd have some laughs, with our aunts and that.

But when my grandparents died, everything changed. We distanced ourselves from our aunts, we didn't see our cousins so much, my sisters got married... And Sundays sucked, when we didn't go out of town or to the Don Ramon. There was a period when we went to the Don Ramon a lot. It was the nightclub that was all the rage at the time, I guess. We'd have a drink there, and sometimes we even danced. It was very hard for me to just let loose, but I was trying.

One day one of the good songs must have been playing, *Love Shack* or something like that, and I'd probably had a drink, and I really got into it. All of a sudden, this tall, dark guy came up to me, with wide lips, and a big nose but it looked good on him, a small mouth and an honest expression. He was interesting and pretty fit, too. "You dance really well," and I laughed, because I didn't know what to say, and I was probably totally red in the face, from the embarrassment. I don't remember very well, but I think he bought me a drink and all that... Typical. I know I thought I was too tall, too tall for me, that I've always been so small. But hey, if he liked me...

The Sunday after that one he asked me if I wanted to see his car, "Do you want me to show you my car? We can go for a spin." And he showed me his car—one of those souped-up cars that were so popular, the kind that made so much noise—and we went for a ride and, well, you already know what happened then. Well, he kissed me and all that and then I stopped him, when then he kissed me longer, and I said "oh, I think it's time to go back." He was my first boyfriend.

“We’ll say we met on October 12th because that was our first kiss,” we decided later. I don’t know, I was all alone and my friends were all dating... But hey, the more we saw each other the more comfortable I got. Especially since we always went out for lunch or dinner and such and I liked being taken out. And since we always drank some wine and some champagne and everything was a good time, we had a lot of laughs. It was October, the weather was still nice and we went out a lot, he drove me all over the place in his car. He didn’t mind driving all around. He always liked driving and he always liked driving fast.

I remember that one day Imma came with us, because we were going to Artà to some fair, and Xavier drove and of course, he did the straightaway by the racetrack in five seconds. Imma was barely breathing by that point, “Martina, I don’t know how you can go around like this,” she said, “we were practically flying.” All my sisters and my parents also told me, «that’s one good thing, about, with Xavier». They were used to when Jeroni and I showed up it was like a plane was landing, with all that noise. Then when I arrived in the car with Xavier we raised up all the dust on the clearing between the trees, “whoa!” they shouted, “at least I think it’s a car.”

The only thing I didn’t like was that we were always spending and spending. We were spending more than I realized. Sometimes we even had to take money out of my account because either he hadn’t gotten paid or had a debt to somebody who’d lent him some machines or whatever. And we would do it this

way: I would take money out of my account and give it to him so he could pay when we went to lunch or whatever, because, of course, at that time it was the man who always paid. Besides, I was embarrassed to ask for the bill and preferred he be the one to pay. After a while, so we wouldn't have to go through all that rigamarole, I just gave him my passwords and, sometimes, he would go directly to the ATM with my account number and that way he had the cash for later.

Another thing I didn't really like was that it was all going very fast. He wanted to see me every day, and then when we saw each other he always wanted to meet again the next day and the next and the next and the next one after that. My mother also told me, "I don't know, you guys might go too far." We'd only known each other for a very short time, about a month, and he was already coming into our house like it was the most natural thing in the world. The first two or three times he came to pick me up for a spin, he would just knock on the door and wait for me there, but on the third or fourth day instead of knocking he came straight in. And not just into the entryway, he went all the way in. My father and mother were stunned. "Hello, it's Xavier and Martina and me and so on and so forth." "Boy can he gab on!" my parents would say afterwards. Because whatever it was he was gabbing on about, he seemed like a professional of whatever it was, a professional in whatever subject he was talking about, or a professional talker, you know what I mean?

When we'd been together for a very short time, he was already at our house every day until very late. My parents would go to bed before he was gone and everything. He would leave when the movie we were watching ended or, otherwise, when I asked him to. I remember that sometimes, if I told him on the phone that I couldn't see him that day, he would get very nervous, «Martina, I, if I don't come over, Martina, if I don't come

over... I don't know what'll happen if I don't come, I don't know what I'm going to do"; "Well, alright, then come over," I said.

It's true that there was one day when we couldn't see each other, I don't know why, and the next day he called me and was saying some very strange things. "Oof, yesterday, yesterday I had to leave and, well, I had to hide... I was missing for a couple of hours. Well, but that's it, that's in the past now." I didn't understand anything, honestly. Was he that eager to see me? Or was something wrong with him? He got real familiar, real fast, but hey, if that was how he was, what could I do. If that was how he was, then that was how it was.

It must have only been fifteen or twenty days that we'd been together when we had to make love, because "otherwise I'll go nuts." We went to his parent's house in the Port, which was empty because they only went there in the summer. He was the first boy I went that far with and the truth is that I still thought it was too soon and I felt really bad because we weren't married or anything.

Then, around November, we went to Barcelona with some friends. It was all really fast, one thing after the other. Well, they were sort of friends... One of Beatriu's friends let us stay in his apartment there and, since Bea didn't have a boyfriend, we went with another couple, another friend of Bea's, and her boyfriend. All four of us gone out together before, to dinner or whatever, but hardly ever. And in Barcelona we didn't spend all our time together either, of course, each couple went their own way.

Often they would go for a walk and we'd stay in the apartment, because Xavier wanted me all the time. I was a little overwhelmed. "Please, I don't know about this, what are we going to do, if I'm not married or anything, I don't know what I'm doing." But he never got tired or felt guilty about anything, or so it seemed. If just going to Barcelona with my boyfriend

was already a forbidden thing, imagine doing all the things we did all the time. We only stopped when I got a fever. I only told him and then we went for a walk. "Take a paracetamol," he told me. And I didn't care if I still had a little fever, I dressed warmly and we went out.

Everything was going really fast. One day he told me that he wanted to go see Colau Sunyer, a priest, «tomorrow we'll go see Colau, he's been really important for me, because he helped me a lot at the Project, you'll see, he's a really good man. Everybody knows me there, and I can't wait to see them," and that was that. We went there and he introduced us. I don't really remember what we talked about, but it was true, he did seem like a very good man. In the end he warned me to be careful, that "don't drink a lot of wine and try to always be vigilant." Xavier had already told me that everyone would give me warnings about wine. "But just a little glass of wine, that can't do no harm..." he always said.

We dated for about a year, and one day when we were out partying at the Carreró, he asked me if I wanted to marry him. I laughed and I guess I must have nodded my head or something, because he got all euphoric and started shouting "she said yes! She said yes!" At first, when I felt like going out, I almost always went out with him. If I ever went to dinner with friends or something then we would meet up. There were a few nights when we didn't see each other at all.

Sometimes I would meet Macià at Porxo and ask about him, but Macià would tell me not to look for him, "no, it doesn't matter, don't look for him, not today. I already told him! Holy hell, damn Xavito. I've warned him!" "But where is he?" I asked , "well, I don't know, he must be at Subterrani, maybe he'll come later." And on occasion he did appear, but much later and with a face that I can't possibly describe. I don't know, it was like he was

on the moon and with his eyes staring out into infinity, I really can't describe it. From drinking and not sleeping, I figured. Usually, when the fun wound down, he'd take me back to my parent's house, we'd spent five minutes chatting in his car and kiss goodbye a few times, and then we each went home to sleep.

There was one time I got a little scared, because we were in his car there in front of my parent's and I could see that he wasn't kissing me or anything and didn't understand why. I tried to kiss him, to see if it was that he was angry or something like that, but he didn't move. His lips were cold and not moving, and his hands and arms and all his skin too, he was frozen. Every part of him was cold. And this was in the summer. I went to bed feeling strange, not knowing what was going on. But the next day he called me like every other day and everything was fine, same as ever. "I had a little too much to drink, I'm sorry." I just wanted to put that coldness out of my mind and never think about it again.

Around the same time Xavi asked me to marry him, he decided he wanted to open his own company. "I want to open up my business because in the end, that's the only way to make money, not working for somebody else. How does that sound? And that way if we ever have to build a house we can do it, because just working a regular job we'd never get be able to." What did I know, I had my job, he could do whatever he thought was best, "sure, if you think it'll work out, go for it."

Then suddenly he introduced me to his parents, "come over to our house and I'll make you dinner." I felt like we were spending too much time together, that it was too fast, still, but okay. He cooked pasta, I think. It doesn't matter, he was a good cook. His father and mother were in the other room and his mother seemed glad to have met me, "go on, you two make your dinner. Nice to meet you. Oh, and your earrings are so

pretty!” She always paid close attention to earrings, “no earrings today?” and so in the end I always wore them, when I went over there. His father was really nice, too, he told me that he knew my father and all that, normal stuff.

His sister didn’t live there anymore because she was already married to Josep. He worked setting up furniture for hotels and some such and he traveled for work a lot, almost always to Santo Domingo. That was common in those days, and there were a lot of guys who had two lives: one here and one there. Of course, they spent many months there every year and the Dominican women would start seeking them out and wanting to marry them and all that.

The point is that Bel spent a lot of time alone at home, when Josep was away, and Xavier often suggested that we go and keep her company. We would go, spend some time with the kids, who were really small—Josepet was a chubby little thing. He had the same name as his father because Josep had insisted: “no matter what name you give him, I’ll still call him Josep”—and when the kids went to sleep we’d stay for a while to watch a movie with Bel or something like that. She always took the opportunity to give advice to Xavier, who was starting up his company then, «be careful, Xavier, because you know how when the money starts coming in, it goes out just as fast!». He’d always been a little tight with money. “I won’t end up like my father, with nothing, I’ll be rich at forty!” he said. “I hope so,” she said, “I hope you’re right, Xavier, and be careful, it can slip through your fingers.”

We started going to Project Man twice a week, in the evenings. First it was me, Xavier, and a secretary from the company, because they told us that someone from work had to keep an eye on him, it wasn't enough for me to just control him at home. But by the third day she got tired of going with us—"I don't want to have this responsibility». It got to a point where everyone advised me to get some insurance and a job and all that and in the end, because of one thing and the other, Xavier got me working at Grafincor: "it'll be good for both of us."

Meanwhile I didn't dare go out because I thought people would feel sorry for me, for the poor girl who doesn't have money to buy some sweater she likes because her husband is a drug addict, and I thought things would start to change because now at least I would have a paycheck. I walked into the office, and I didn't know anything about offices, I just did what the secretary told me to do, filing, answering the phone and stuff.

But I never received my salary and when Xavier realized that if he didn't fix the situation, I would have to ask him for money all the time, he decided that the person in charge of giving me a few bucks a week would be the secretary. "You have to pay Martina every week, it doesn't have to pass through my hands anymore," he said in front of me, "and you, Martina, you remind her," and the secretary was all happy, "yes, yes, I'll write that down." She paid me whenever she could, until the time came when the company was going so badly that we could barely pay anything anymore, "Martina, I can't give you anything. Talk with Xavier."

The whole Project Man thing didn't last much more than a month and, anyway, I realized that it was no use. "I already know what I have to do", he would always tell me on our way back to Manacor, "I'm not like them," he said, after laughing at the others in his group, "there's even a cop in there" and hee, hee, ha, ha.

Some of the employees who knew Xavier were starting to feel bad for the company. Others had a great time with him because they were the same or worse—and because they weren't married to him. Like Ignasi, "I went with Ignasi to see a client" and "I went somewhere with Ignasi" and Ignasi this and Ignasi that. Him, and Ignasi had formed a team with Verònica, who also worked there and was just as terrible as the other two. Sometimes we couldn't even pay our suppliers anymore and customers would call us complaining, "My T-shirts still haven't arrived?" There was no way they would ever arrive, since we hadn't been able to pay for them.

The only thing our family of four did together was go see Xavier's parents on Sundays. They always told the same stories. Xavier's father used to say that his mother hit him when he did bad things and he still did every bad thing he could. "There wasn't a single light bulb that worked on the street. When my mother was done with me, my legs wouldn't fit in my pants. She'd hit me with a espadrille because if she did it with her hand she's hurt herself."

His wife would burst into laughter every time he told that story and she agreed you should only beat a kid when necessary, but that "when it is, it is. Blai has never laid a hand on Xavier or Bel and I only did it on occasion, but when I did they didn't forget it." "Fuck yeah, I remember, I even remember how many rings you wore on your hand," Xavier admonished.

Once they said that someone's sister had thrown herself

onto the train tracks and I was reminded of that time Xavier and I were chatting about silly things—because I don't know why we were talking about that, but I also think it's something everybody's considered at some point—"If I had to kill myself, I'd do it with pills or something, so I'd be knocked out and wouldn't feel it." He told me he knew how he would do it, "I'd be very clear, you know, about how I'd do it. I'd be very clear", "how?", "if I had to die? I'd get high. At least I'd die happy." "Oh, go on, don't start talking about that," I downplayed it, but after that I was always wondering, "but.. Didn't you promise that you're okay now? Are we okay again, or are we not?", "yeah, I don't do anything anymore, I'm just saying that if I had to die..."

At the time, I was satisfied with having him home early. If he wasn't doing something or not, it wasn't noticeable. Sometimes he'd come home a little more upbeat than usual, sure, but I had always known him to be that way. Besides, the psychologists I talked to always told me that Xavier wasn't like that, he wasn't the kind of guy who commits suicide.

There came a time when he didn't show up on Sundays at our house or his parents'. Some Saturdays I would take the kids to the park, other times we stayed home because I didn't know where to take them and because I didn't have any money. I had to settle for whatever Xavier gave me when he'd collected on an invoice or whatever. He used to give me about a hundred euros to go shopping and for the week, but often that wasn't enough and I had to ask for more. He, on the other hand, had plenty to spend on his things.

One day he came home and "I'm going back out, me and Verònica and Ignasi have to deal with an order." I got the giggles, "What are you gonna deal with at ten PM? Oh, please, don't make me laugh," but soon I got scared when I saw him walk out the door. Goddamnit, does that seem right to you? That

he left me all alone with the kids again?

That day the whole street must have heard me shouting: “YOU SHOULD TREAT ME LIKE A PRINCESS! AND YOU’VE NEVER TREATED ME THAT WAY!” He was already well sedated, and he just ignored me and kept walking. I knew that when he was using he didn’t listen to me, but that was also the only time when *I* was the one who could yell at *him* and insult him. From that day on, I stopped asking him where he was going and where he wasn’t going, or why he came home late or didn’t come home at all.

After the bad days, there were always good ones. Sometimes I would lecture him or try to take him to a psychologist and things seemed to calm down a little, at least for a few months. Sometimes we would all go together to see my family, he would treat the kids really great and make us all laugh a lot. I remember that he always made that joke about the propane delivery man with Ferran, because his eyes were sky blue and his hair was so blond it was almost white, and he looked like a foreigner. “His mother is his mother for sure because I saw him come out of her, but he looks more like that Romanian propane delivery man than me” and he laughed and laughed.

On Fridays, when he was leaving work, he would often call me up and say, “Don’t make dinner, I’ll pick up some Chinese.” Then he would come home all happy with the bag of Chinese food and the children would pounce on him and jump for joy, “Did you ask for extra sauce?” The four of us would eat together, watch some movie—we never watched the ones that made me cry anymore, now it was always shootings, wars, and blood—and we would put the kids to sleep. When they were tucked in, Xavier would pull out a bottle of wine and then another one and we would hang out and have a few laughs. Sometimes we even ended up making love. We hardly ever did it anymore.

And the years passed, like two bicycle wheels that one day had shit on the top and none on the bottom and the next day, the other way around and that gradually deflated more and more and more but never went completely flat. I was a patch trying to cover all the holes at once, that the wind sometimes tried to blow off. But I always ended up sticking even harder, to those wheels.

Like that time when we had an end-of-school-year dinner for Ariadna's class, and Pilar called me to find out if I was dressing up or not, "because, honestly, I already know that I'm not like Victoria and all of them who always go so gussied up, girl, it's like they're going to a wedding, I can't even." "Pilar," I interrupted, "I don't know if we're going at all," and she asked "why?" And, in my broken Spanish, said "ay, because Xavi, me and Xavi, I don't know what I'm going to do with him. I don't know if we're going to stay together."

I don't know how the hell I told her that, she's a total gossip, but it just came out that way. She didn't know what to say, of course, "what are you saying, Martina, don't be silly, it'll pass, you'll see." I didn't want to go to the fucken dinner, I didn't even want to get dressed—and put on a good face and all that—load up the kids and have dinner with Xavier as if nothing had happened.

That was when my sister Bea showed up and "I don't know if we're going to the school dinner, I'm not up for it. I'm sorry for the kids, but yesterday Xavier was out all night and now I don't feel like going to dinner with him," but "you have to go. How does this fix anything? Go, get dressed, do your face and

hair and go, and that's it." So, of course, I went. When we got there, Pilar asked me «how are you» but we could hardly look each other in the face from the shame, «good, good». We never talked about it again.

I was a patch and I wondered if Xavier loved me, but less and less. Instead, I was more often asking myself: Do I love him, still? I guess so. But at the same time: how can you love someone who makes everyone who loves him suffer so much?

Meanwhile the kids were growing, like all kids do. Ferran's teachers always told me that he was intelligent but too lazy and that always distracted. What he did have memorized, from the age of five, was the name of every football player in the whole league. Boy stuff. Ariadna, after seeing that swimming wasn't for her, decided she wanted to sign up for theatre. She loved it.

Once she played a fairy, a sea fairy, and, with the help of my seamstress cousin, I made her a blue dress with little fish and starfish, it was lovely. I remember when she went on stage wearing her dress and crown and with that enthusiasm she always had when she was little, the whole room went "ooohhhhh" and I just melted. She performed there for many years, and her cousins did too. That's why there was always someone in our family doing theater.

At first, when I had to go somewhere, I would call Xavier and tell him to come home earlier and stay with the kids. Once I wanted to leave Ferran with him because Ariadna and I had to go to the theater to see some of the cousins. He came at the last minute, rushing and with his eyes popping out of his face, «I'm taking Ferran, I have to go back to the workshop for a while». He went upstairs to change his clothes and I saw that he had a big wad of money, in his pocket "where are you going with all that money?" "I have to go back, but don't worry, I'll take Ferran."

He grabbed the boy and started down the stairs. I went after him, “no, no, no! Give me Ferran right now. You’re not taking Ferran. Where are you going?!” He was already in the doorway with Ferran by the hand, “I’m going to do some work,” yeah, bullshit, “Ferran, come here, you’re not going with Papa. It doesn’t matter, we won’t go to the theater” and he “don’t be stupid, you’re being ridiculous.” “No. Ferran, come on, come here.” Ferran griped a little, but he came. Ariadna must have been there behind me, I had already dressed her and combed her to go to the theater and she didn’t say anything when I told her the plans had changed. She never cried anymore.

It was things like that taught me I couldn’t trust him and that I couldn’t leave him alone with the kids. I think the last time I did was one day when I had a dinner out with my friends. I went there with my heart in a knot and when I finished dinner I decided to go back home, no dessert, no drinks, nothing. When I got there, I found him out, on the street, his eyes also out, “What are you doing out here? What about the kids?”

In that wheedling voice he told me the kids “are already sleeping. And you, you’re back already?” But “what are you doing out here?”, “no, nothing, I’m waiting for a man but nothing, that’s it. Go on inside and get undressed and I’ll wait and see if he comes by”, “but who’s coming by?”, and nothing, “somebody’s bringing me a pack of smokes” or some other such lie. He had trouble articulating the words, and he did seem at all surprised to see me, didn’t seem to care he’d left the children home alone. He didn’t seem to care about anything because he didn’t notice anything going on around him.

Again I felt like the worst mother in the world. When the kids were older I started locking the house so Xavier wouldn’t be able to come in when he stayed out really late. It really pissed me off when he came home like that, I preferred not to see him.

He wasn't himself when he came home like that, you know? He'd come around the next day as if nothing had happened, "good morning" and "how are you, kids?" and I couldn't even. I was consumed by rage. It was eating away at me.

Xavier had a friend, Felip, who sometimes lent him money. It helped him a little with the business and Xavier got euphoric. "Well, we're going on a trip," instead of using the money for everything we should've used it for. He told me that he needed the trip to get a little fresh air in our lungs and have some fun, "I'll shake off all these headaches off and I'm sure everything will feel new and we'll be able to pay down our debts. It's gonna be a fresh start."

We went to Galicia. We drove from Valencia and through Madrid, so we could go to the Warner Bros. amusement park. We stayed there for two days, at a crappy little hotel. You remember that Xavier loved driving, but he also was sleepy all the time. He was always sleepy, it was so stressful. And of course, at a certain point he wanted to make me drive, but "I don't see myself driving on these roads." He insisted, "then I'm going to fall asleep at the wheel, Martina, what the fuck you want me to do?" In the end I made him pull over and sleep on the side of the road until whatever was going on with him had passed.

We got to Galicia and it was a lot colder than we were expecting and we had to buy jackets and sweaters. One day Xavier goes "I know what we can do. I'll call Xus to send us some undershirts from work so we won't be cold." Xus, another one of his gang. "Undershirts? Come on, that's nuts, Xavieret, we're fine with the stuff we bought." "No, no, no," I couldn't make him change his mind, "it'll be good for us, it's cold, it'll be good for us." So, that same day he called to ask for the undershirts and when I heard him chatting on the phone I understood everything: "yeah, wrap it up well in the shirts, okay?"

The same evening the undershirts arrived he left me alone with the kids at the hotel until about two o'clock in morning and, besides, he came back with those shitty eyes. Undershirts? Bullshit. I think I told him that, but he denied it, just like always: "What? Martineta, don't be ridiculous! Really? Come on, don't start making up stuff."

Felip knew Xavier well, because turns out he was mixed up in that mess too, although he was better at handling the money aspect. One day he told me: «I know you don't like all this, but Xavier took some money, he took some money from customers» and all that. The way he was speaking in a way that I didn't understand half the words, that man, with his mouth closed and spitting a lot, so gross. Anyway, I knew it was true, but deep down I was still hoping it wasn't. It was a "fresh start." "These things don't end just like that, I'm telling you because I've been through it, you know, and if he keeps going down this path..." I agreed with him because he was right, but whatever. In the end, one day he came up to me and "I'm done with Xavier. It's over. You, if you want, can keep work there." But in the end he didn't know how to run the business either.

Part three
THE GOOD TIMES

“What’s your first childhood memory?”

Is she really asking me about my first memory? Really? What kind of question is this? What do I know, I can’t remember... I’d say I don’t have a first memory. Everything I know about my childhood is because I’ve seen photographs of it, or someone else has told me. Isn’t it like that for everybody? Do normal people remember anything from their childhood? “I don’t know, really. I don’t remember anything,” “think about it. Think, talk to your mother, to your father, if you want. Think about it and tell me about it at the next session.”

As you can see, I have no idea where to start. Just like when the psychologist asked me that question, honestly, I still don’t know how to answer it. Of course I remember things, but scattered things, loose images, very brief flashes. But how can I know what the first memory of my life is? How do I know when I started to be self-aware? When she asked me, I remembered I’d had a more or less normal childhood. I knew there was something strange in my life, but I had never stopped to look for what it was, and over the years I learned that all of everybody’s lives had strange things in them.

I remembered the days at Murada Cove with all my cousins and with Ferran and my aunts and uncles and grandparents. We were always playing something, especially in the summer: water balloon fights, recreations of adult life (papas and mamas, we called it. But I didn’t like that game), the game with the rock you have to throw in numerical order and then you jump to where the rock is (I think it’s called hopscotch), dances and choreography...

We even made up songs sometimes. And languages. That last one was mostly with Coloma, the other philologist in the family. The only family member worth a damn, if we're being honest.

I also remember that I got really wad when all the cousins went on a daytrip with Miquela, and Ferran and I had to be left alone at Murada, with my mother or with our grandparents. I don't know why we couldn't go, I think we were too young. Then, in winter, I do remember one Saint Anthony's Day or some Christmas, we were bundled up, also at Murada or in Manacor, always with my mother's family.

I have to admit that in those days Coloma was my favorite cousin and I know she liked me too, I think because I was the youngest. When I could read and write, we'd sent each other letters, because she lived in Felanitx and I lived in Manacor and we didn't see each other every day. Coloma always said to Ferran and I "who looooves me more?" while she waited for us with open arms at the other end of the room. We ran as fast as we could to hug her, we threw ourselves on her and she held us both.

I liked the letter thing so much that I started writing to everybody. It was almost always me sending the letters, I usually didn't get a reply. Except for Amàlia, who became my best friend. We were like hand and glove. From the first day of school, when we were only two or three years old, we were inseparable until about eighteen.

We got off to a bit of a bad start; we were both strong-willed and liked to fight. Or maybe I liked it a little more, because I was the one who bit her and then, when her mother asked her who had done that to her, she said in a thin voice that it was me and her mother had to go talk to mine and *somesuch*. Until the teacher, who was a nun, because we went to a Catholic school, told them that actually we loved each other a lot. We loved each other very much.

And I loved going to their house, especially to the villa in the port, because they had a swimming pool there and they would let me stay there for two or three days in a row. “Mami, can I stay at Amàlia’s house for another day?”, “Her mother doesn’t mind? Well, okay...”. And Amàlia and I were thrilled. We used to shower together and meanwhile we sang and acted silly and she explained that those shampoos didn’t foam up because they were natural. Then we danced with our towels and played around in the bathroom until her mother called us for dinner. And we laughed so much because it had been almost two hours since we had gone to shower and her mother didn’t understand.

The dinners and lunches at Amàlia’s house lasted much longer than the ones at home and we never started eating until everyone was there: her father, her mother, her brother and the two of us. And they lasted a long time because they talked about a lot of things and sometimes even cooked together. And they always cooked strange things that I’d never eaten before. One day they taught me how to make homemade burgers and then I showed it to my mother. But actually my mother wasn’t a very good cook.

My father was the real cook of the family, although he rarely ever cooked. When he did, I was happy just to see him make an omelet and let me taste it first to see if it needed more salt. He always told me that I had a very fine palate and that I could be a good cook when I grew up. At Amàlia’s we also spent many hours in the pool, sunbathing or playing Marco Polo with the downstairs neighbors. Often we swam naked and pretended to be mermaids, because in the water our hair looked soft and silky and long, like Medusa’s. She tried in vain to teach me to dive without holding my nose—I still don’t know how to even now.

Amàlia’s house was two minutes’ walk from Aina’s, who was also a friend of ours. But I liked Amàlia’s better because

I liked her parents more than Aina's. I remember that once at Aina's we had chicken with onions for lunch and I hate eating with my hands, so I tried to eat everything with a knife and fork but that forced me to eat more slowly than everyone else. When her father noticed, he laughed and said: «Ariadna, don't worry, you can eat with your hands, we do too». I don't know if it was his arrogance when he said that or what, but from that day on I started to hate him even more. Needless to say, Aina's family was loaded.

My father and brother also always ate with their hands. Ferran was a chubby ball who put ketchup on things, didn't matter what they were: potatoes, rice, macaroni, stew. He would have put it in the soup too, if we'd let him. It made me so angry that they let him do whatever he wanted and I thought he needed to eat more fruit and vegetables.

Once, at a pizzeria, he and my father shared a tiramisu, which has always been Ferran's favorite dessert. I remember it because I had a terrible time, because they started playing with the tiramisu and putting it all over their faces and laughing and throwing it around the table. A teacher of mine was having lunch at a nearby table and I was dying of embarrassment, but there was no point in asking them to stop. I think that was the same day when my father taught us that how to not to burn our tongues, we had to make a hole with a fork or spoon in the middle of the plate and blow and blow and then when we put all the food back together it wouldn't burn anymore.

I think Simó was our second favorite cousin. Ferran loved him very much, you can't even imagine. He knew his home phone number by heart. He still didn't have our own number memorized because he really was still just a little chubster. When he was older, sure, in fact he became the best one in the family for numbers and math. Well, maybe. The point is that every day

he stood in front of the phone in the living room and recited the number with the same melody the phone's speaker made when he pressed the buttons. "Simó, are you coming over to play on the PlayStation?" And Simó came to our house to play on the PlayStation.

My father had bought the PlayStation at a work fair he'd gone to, I think somewhere in Spain, and gave it to Ferran. Whenever he went on a trip he would buy gifts for all of us. The first few times I was excited, what will he bring me, what can it be?; but after three or four trips when he'd brought me a Barbie every time, I got fed up. "With girls it's simple, a doll and that's that", he would say as I unwrapped it and my brother always got something different, —«on the other hand, boys are more complicated, I always have to think hard for Ferran»—: a toy plane, a remote-controlled car, a book, and even the fucking PlayStation.

Anyway, they must've been crazy, to buy a PlayStation for a five-year-old, but it so happens that my father was not very normal. We always told him he was nuts, "you're daft," and he would say it was more fun that way. "If you didn't have a daft Papa, we wouldn't be here," he once told us. I think we were in Port Aventura or Terra Mitica or Disneyland, I don't know, some amusement park. We'd been to every amusement park in Spain and the Paris Disneyland, but we never saw anything more than the park. I hated it. I was afraid of rollercoasters and such things, so I ended up on only the most boring attractions.

In fact, I was never a typical little girl. To give you an example: when I went to my friends' birthday parties everyone always played in the pool or jumped in bouncy castles and all the things little kids do, but I didn't like those things in the slightest. I guess that's why Amàlia was my best friend. We would always stay in a corner and talk or invent a game that didn't require much movement. I remember one time, on the sixth-grade school trip,

she and I read all the signs we saw from the bus and made up stories from the words on them. It was fun, really.

Luckily, my mother felt the same way I did about amusement parks, and so we would always stick together. Except for that one time, once my father told me to go on a ride with him, that it was no big deal, “you’ll see, don’t worry, we’ll go together.” I wasn’t sure because from the outside it seemed like a kind of roller coaster, but I decided to go with him because I guess I loved him that much. Ferran was more of a momma’s boy and I was with my father, I stuck to him like glue.

When we were at the very front of an hour-long line, I saw that it was indeed a roller coaster. “Come on, come here, sit right in front of me, and I’ll hold onto you and I won’t let you go for even a second.” I had no choice, despite the insistence of the park employee, who demanded «sir, the girl has to sit behind you. If she sits in front, it’s more dangerous.” Anyway, I sat in front of him, because my father always won every argument with everyone and he had no fear of the rules or the authorities. “They won’t lock me up in prison for this,” was one of his catchphrases. I was shitting myself with fear but in the end it was even fun. Still I said “I’ll NEVER trust you again,” I made it very clear to him.

That winter was the coldest winter of my life. It was cold, confusing, and blurry, like the memory I have of it. The days passed and I didn't care, I didn't care about anything. I just wanted to go out and get drunk and at the end of the night I'd grab Amàlia or Carlota or Gemma or whoever and I cried a lot and I would think about Joan and my dad and my mom and cry all the time. But my girlfriends didn't understand me... They were all like, "Ariadna, it's been a month " and "Ariadna, you need to eat more".

I had gone from seeing Joan every day to seeing him only when I happened to bump into him, once every two or three weeks, and when I did see him I acted like I hadn't. I heard a lot of talk about him and occasionally someone would mention him in connection with some girl. Sometimes, when I had to go somewhere that was near his house, I would take the long way and pass by his street and slow down to watch the closed blinds of his bedroom. I felt like I was doing it because, somewhere inside me, there was a suicidal hope of seeing the light on someday. As if I were expecting to discover a female figure smoking, in her underwear, leaning against the railing of his balcony. As if I were hoping to see with my own eyes that I could replace me. As for me, I couldn't even undress in front of anyone but him—and anyway no one wanted to see me naked because I was too skinny and "all bones".

Things with my father were more tense than usual and his smoking repulsed me more and more, it even gave me a hea-

dache and made me want to vomit when he smoked in front of me. I got nauseous when I was in the car with him, just like when I was little. Now that I really knew everything, I saw a lot more than I used to before: I saw that he didn't mind lying to my face, just like he'd done with my mother all my life, and I saw that he knew that we no longer believed a word of what he said, but that he didn't care. And I saw that my mother and I were cowards, because we kept quiet, we kept acting like nothing was going on, despite everything.

However, now my mother and I hugged each other tightly and told each other everything. She would say «Ariadna, eat a little» and I would tell her I wasn't hungry, that everything was tasteless, that I couldn't swallow anything. Anyway, everything I ate was taken away from me: if I drank a cup of water, in less than two minutes I was in the toilet. I spent a lot of time doing nothing, thinking about nothing, locked inside my house. On days when I didn't feel like living, I used to lie in bed looking at a photograph I had hanging. It was me as a child, I had a bouquet of flowers in my hands and a laugh the same colors as the flowers. Oh, little girl, you had no idea what was coming.

On the night table was an ID photo of my mother and one of my father, each framed in their own frame, ones I'd had forever. I couldn't even remember when I'd placed them there. And actually I should have changed them years ago, because they were both broken. My mother's had cracked glass that covered half her face, and my father's frame was lame and couldn't stand. And no matter how many times I leaned it on my mother's photo frame or the wall or wherever, it always ended up falling. But there they were, since forever, and broken since forever too.

My birthday and my mother's birthday came. They prepared a surprise party for us at the bar and everyone was there. I was as stuck as ever, but I tried to pretend that I was super happy

about everything. And in fact, when we were eating dessert and they showed a video of photos of us, from when I was little and sleeping in my mother's arms, from when my father could carry me on his shoulders, I felt glad to be there. And to have spent years surrounded by those people who, sometimes, didn't even know who they were.

After dinner the young folk decided we were going out for a while. I had already had a couple of beers and a glass of champagne, but before we left for the bar we had all had rum and cokes together. Now that I was eighteen, I could drink in front of my father and mother. We went to Porxo to start the party and we all danced and laughed, and I was happy and drank one rum and coke after the other. On the way to Porxo we ran into Joan and I went over to say hi to him, trying not to break down.

"Happy birthday, sweetie," "thanks. How are you?", "fantastic, truth be told. I'm very happy. What about you?", "Can't complain." We talked for a while longer and then I went back to my friends. Inside Porxo, I ran into Miki, who I hadn't seen in a long time. "Hey, let me buy you a shot, to old friendships" and we sat down on bar stools and talked about life. "And how's it going with Joan?", "ah, we're not together anymore" and all that typical stuff. The thing is, somehow I ended up in bed with him and it was the first time I'd made love with someone other than Joan.

The next weekend I convinced Gemma and Carlota to go out for a while. Carlota always got tired real early and Gemma would always disappear with some guy or because she was too drunk, so I ended up alone. I wasn't one of those people who go out partying on my own, but I still didn't feel like going to bed. I'll find someone. "Hey, you're the waitress from the other day!" and I started talking to him. He introduced me to his friends,

they invited me to drink and dance and one of them suddenly started kissing me. I don't remember what his name was, but I know I liked how he kissed.

The evening was going better than I'd expected, until I started feeling sick. I'd drank too much. I went to the bathroom and vomited, a lot. When I finished puking I sat down on the toilet and I think I fell asleep there in the bathroom in Porxo. After a while—a pretty long while—I woke up, because someone was banging on the door, and best I could, swaying from side to side, I stood up and managed to go back to my new friends. And with the one who was such a good kisser, “where were you? I was already missing you.” It was six in the morning and I didn't even know where I was.

The next thing I remember is that I woke up naked in a bedroom that wasn't mine. It turns out that doesn't only happen in the movies. Shit, goddamn fucking shit, it was eleven in the morning and I had five missed calls from my mom. I searched for my clothes among the unknown sheets trying not to wake up my host and then tried to figure out where we were.

Seeing that I was really far from my house, and that I was so hungover I could barely walk, I called my mother and she came to pick me up. She didn't say anything to me, she was just silent and very serious. She went three days without speaking to me, which she'd never done before. When we got to our house, my father welcomed me with a smile that almost seemed proud, «this has to happen to everybody at least once, the strange part is that it never happened to you before now!»

That day was just the first of many. I would tell my mother that I was only going out for a few beers and that I would be back at our house before two in the morning. But I couldn't keep my promise, no matter how much I had set my mind to it. I wouldn't realize it was time to come back until the sun came up. The first

few times my mother scolded me a lot: «you told me you would come back earlier», «I'm sorry mama, it won't happen again».

The next day she would try to get me to listen to reason. And she'd fail, because deep down I knew she couldn't stay angry with me. "I'm not like that, mami, I'm not like that," I cried. I wasn't like that, it was true, but I was for a while, because we are all things that we'll stop being and that we weren't before, and we are all nothing and everything at once. And, at the time, I was someone who didn't know how to control herself. Someone who started with a beer and ended up doing things she really regretted the next day—"Kids and drunks tell the truth", that's bullshit!—or things I couldn't even remember.

In the end I stopped telling her what time to expect me home, "I'm going out to dinner, I don't know if I'll be back early or late" and she didn't lecture me anymore. All her life she'd kept her worries and sorrows silent: one more sorrow, in the silence of her agony, she no longer noticed—or at least nobody did. My father, on the other hand, seemed to rejoice when I did these things. "You were drunk when you came home yesterday, huh?" and he laughed, making fun of me.

I usually went out with my friends, but I always ended up on my own, befriending any group of strangers I met in a bar. Usually these strangers were all men, and by the end of the night it was rare that I hadn't ended up in bed with one of them. Normally that was the last I heard from those fleeting lovers, and that was how I wanted it. It was pleasure, but an empty, short-lived pleasure that, once it was over, I wanted to forget as quickly as possible. We would almost always go to his house or a car or wherever, but once I took one to the flat I shared while studying in Palma.

In the morning I woke him up so he would leave but he wasn't leaving. "It's really early... Let me sleep a little longer." I insisted and then he grabbed me and tried to kiss me and touch

me under my pajamas, “when did you get so dressed?”, “while you were sleeping. But that’s not the point. Go, I want to study.” I had to struggle to get him off me, and I was sick of having him at my place, and I said out loud what I was thinking “usually the first thing guys want to do is run away the morning after.” He burst into laughter, “That’s what you’re used to, huh? Wonder how many men have been here before me. You’ll think twice the next time before letting anybody into your house,” and he laughed some more. And his laughter made me disgusted and angry, very angry. I don’t know how but I got him to get dressed and over to the door. I pushed him out, and before finally slamming the door in his face, I heard him still saying, with that irritating smile and a mocking look, “Should we do this again?”

That day I wondered if the pleasure of the previous day had been worth it. And I began to wonder if all those nights of fleeting pleasures had been worth it, all the rides in cars driven by drunk people, all the morning-after pills, all the repulsive comments I’d ignored, all the pain I knew I was causing my mother. And I remembered my mother always telling me that I had to find a man who treated me right. That I shouldn’t stick with the first one, but try a few. I spent many months that way, lost in nights of disappointment, one hundred percent devoted to the carnal delights and lasciviousness of the men who got me drunk and offered me their dirty sheets and their marijuana and their naked, sweaty, smelly penises.

I seemed desperate, falling into the arms of anyone who said a few nice words to me, begging for a kiss on the forehead, a hug, a caress or some small display of affection that went beyond what my friends and family could offer me. And when I found someone, we played at being soulmates and dreaming of fairy tale endings, we pretended we’d found the love of our lives in a bar even though both of us knew the story wouldn’t last beyond that one night.

And if the euphoria of the sweet liquor got the best of me and I gave out my phone number, the next day there was panic and regret over that one drink over the line. Because it scared me when those fantasy approached my reality. When fiction became emboldened and tried to cross the boundaries that separated it from rationality. I simply wanted to believe in that fantasy for one night, forget it afterwards, not have my idealization turn into disappointment. And so on, one weekend after the next, successively, until... until what?

Perhaps the only thing I was seeking with that absurd game was to recover everything I'd once really felt, despite the fact that the illusion only lasted a few hours and that it was surrounded by the smell of tobacco and even though I didn't remember much of those nights, so little that in the end I didn't know if they had been sweet or squalid, just blurred and muddled by alcohol. And when I met a decent man, who made me breakfast and wished me well, who wore a condom and cared whether I reached orgasm, I would run away.

During the day I went on with my life, but I was always sleepy, I was always tired, my legs were always shaky. I went from hangover to hangover, my life was a constant hangover, mentally, emotionally and physically.

In the meantime, my father was getting worse and worse. Any day of the week he was apt to disappear without a word, and not even go to work. Or to decide he had the flu and couldn't go, like that time he came from who knows where, sweaty and shivering, and said "I think I have a fever, I won't be able to go to work, you'll have to go." Naïvely, I believed him and went to work. But when I came home at half past midnight, he wasn't there. And he still hadn't showed up the next day, and I had to go back to work in his stead. And when clients asked me, "Where's your father? Is he sick? Or does he have the day off?"

I answered, holding back tears, wearing a mask with a weary, forced smile, that “yes, he’s sick,” “oh, poor thing, take care of him. I hope he gets better soon.”

On those days I found out that stifling tears hurts. And that pain makes your legs unsteady. There, behind the bar, lying to people and hiding the fact that something was eating me up inside, I felt like I could faint at any time or that, from one moment to the next, my breathing would stop and I would fall onto the floor, with a loud thud that would scare everyone. But no, I couldn’t fall, I had to hold out and put on a good face and “thank you for coming” and “enjoy your meal” and “for dessert we have cheesecake” and “this is a Mallorcan beer”. And my head was spinning and vapidity took hold of me, and I went back and forth on the subject but, really, I didn’t even want to think about it.

Vapidity. That is the exact word, the one that describes my moments of vulnerability with absolute precision. When life spun around me. When my legs went weak and I barely noticed, remaining apathetic, unfazed. When hope camouflaged itself amid the rain dripping outside the window on gray days: then everything became vapid. And thanks to vapidity I learned to live with anger and uncertainty, to the point where they became apathy, until I resigned myself to bearing the weight of frustration and helplessness.

Every day could be bad, I didn’t know when pain would take over me again, I didn’t know when I would have to endure another lie from the man who once created me out of love. From the man who brought me into the world, a world I would sometimes prefer not to be in. It was a full calendar of disappointments: on Tuesday he’ll stand me up for the movies, on Wednesday we won’t cook that paella together that we were so excited about, on Friday he’ll forget about my important exam.

The days just went by and I felt like I didn't have a father; that, hard as it was for me to admit, I'd never had one. Someday I would be far from all that, someday it would all end. I didn't know how, but it would end.

My mother, on the other hand, seemed to still have hopes that my father would change: every time he started going to a psychiatrist she naively trusted that this time it would work. And the same thing always happened: on the third or fourth visit, Dad got tired of pretending was trying and just kept spending our money on family suicide.

I didn't understand how he was still alive and looking like that. I mean, if you saw him he looked normal, even healthy, you couldn't imagine him copping drugs in an alley from some random character, jamming a needle into himself or snorting white powder. Really, it didn't look like anything like the junkies we'd been shown all our lives at school lectures or at photo exhibitions by documentary photographers. In fact, anyone looking in from the outside would've imagined he was a good father. And I had no idea what a good father even was.

Sometimes, when I showered I would turn the water really hot, burning, boiling. It hurt, my skin was on fire and my head, spinning. I would breathe in the hot steam and start feeling dizzy and I couldn't think. Every once in a while, a few tears hid camouflaged in the water that was blistering me, but I tried not to pay much attention to them, maybe ignoring them would make them stop. Then, when I felt like I was about to faint, I would turn the water as cold as possible, and the contrast, which sometimes took my breath away and dulled my senses for a few seconds, was delightfully hellish, it was tempestuously relaxing, a kind of therapeutic torture. I would come out shaking, my fingers so wrinkled it seemed like they were about to crack open.

That's how I started thinking about suicide. Not about

hanging myself with a rope or slitting my veins, but about just letting my life go by without living it. Eating without tasting anything, or not eating, of sleeping when I wasn't tired, of always being tired and never sleeping. Because apathy is also a form of death. Not talking to anyone or seeing anyone because sometimes isolation is a synonym for death. And not fighting to recover, just living in nothingness. I started entertaining the idea of that state of not-me, as a kind of suicide, and I nearly fell into it.

The weeks I worked the night shift were the worst because in the mornings my friends were sleeping and the truth is I was too. So basically all I did was go to work. But I do have to admit that evenings at the bar were more fun than mornings, especially since my social life had been reduced to the relationships I forged with customers, many of whom were the same ones I met up with partying on weekends.

I also bumped into Joan a lot, always up to his eyeballs in coke and occasionally asking me if I wanted to fuck. It seemed like the last time we'd fucked had been four lives ago. And wouldn't you know it, in one of those lives, he'd become the type of person I hated most in the world. Kinda like Amàlia. I remember the day she told me she'd taken ecstasy for the first time. I had just discovered my father was a drug addict and she was the first person I told everything to. And she still had the ovaries to tell me, just a couple of weeks later, how much fun she'd had with that harmless little pill. "Do whatever you want, but I don't want to hear about it," I said.

Our relationship as BFFs had been hanging by a thread for a while, I think that was the final straw. Well, not quite the final one. We were more or less in touch on social media and that stuff and we were always there for each other when one of us needed to escape their circle or talk about something very specific. We also showed up at most of each other's important life events.

Once I went to see her sing, in Barcelona. Her first concert with an audience and all that. I felt both proud and offended,

because I had always told her she had to do something with that voice of hers, let the world hear it and that whole thing, but she didn't do anything about it until her friends in Barcelona told her the same thing. Now that I think about it, maybe it was my fault because I'd hadn't ever put in the effort for her, not as much as her friends in Barcelona did, they were the ones who'd organized the concert.

I met up with her and all those friends of hers, to go to the small town where the concert was being held, because it wasn't in Barcelona, Barcelona. Since it was outside the city, after the concert we slept at the house of one of the friends who'd organized it. Needless to say, I felt very out of place with those people, who somehow managed to be beautiful, elegant hippies, who talked about books and music you don't hear on the radio and movies that had always seemed like they were probably boring to me. But in the end I had a good time. They hung up one of those balls with colorful lights like in discotheques and they brought out beers and joints and we danced and sang along to songs the kind they'd been talking about but also the kind they pail in the bars I went to with my friends in Mallorca.

At one point I found myself in the middle of the room talking to two guys, I don't remember their names and I never saw them again. By the time I realized it they were already telling me about all the kinds of drugs they'd tried and the experiences they'd had and I was listening attentively, all interested, as if my life depended on it.

One of them was some Argentine, I didn't know where he came from or if he even knew Amàlia and he was talking about very strange names, including ayahuasca. I don't know if it was that one or some other drug, that "they say you can die from just trying it once". Then he went into great detail about some of the trips he'd been on with those drugs and about how one

had traumatized him so much that after that went a whole year without even smoking a joint, «I thought that was it, that I was gonna stay like that forever, I told my friend: dude, I'm gonna stay like this forever. A whole year without even smoking, and you know I love drugs.»

I couldn't understand all that and with all those names and extrasensory experiences I was already having trouble following him, but honestly I found it super entertaining. They told me everything with an envious enthusiasm, you could see that glow on their faces, the glow of adrenaline rising in your brain and in the hairs all over your whole body and even invading your sex. I wanted them to tell me more, all night long, just so I could get a clearer idea of the sensations they must've felt.

Afterwards, some friends of the Argentine guy gave me a puff of something I thought was marijuana but in the end I'm not sure what it was. When I inhaled, they all stared at me with wide eyes and said I should slow down. And they were right, because with that one puff I was high all night. I also remember a feeling I'd never felt before.

Despite the mid-winter cold in that small mountain village, isolated from the warming pollution, I went outside and climbed onto an exercise bike that no one had used for years. I don't know if I thought the bike was some little airplane or what, but I wanted to fly. I started pedaling as hard as I could and I discovered I had much more strength than I'd ever imagined, because I was going super fast. I just wanted to speed up, I just wanted to go faster. I gave thanks that the bike was stationary and I could keep pedaling that fast forever, with no street or road ever coming to an end. I was sweating and my heart was racing a mile a minute, as was my breathing.

On my days off, I would sometimes go to Palma to see my friends. We would walk around, go have beers and eat pizza and

stuff like that, you know, the things young people do on their days off. One day I went with Andreu to buy something and in the middle of Carrer de Sant Miquel, we came across some guy about twenty-five years old on a bicycle and with holes in his arms, like my father's, "hello, excuse me, can you spare fifty cents?" We didn't give him anything, we looked down at the ground and when he was gone we looked at each other as if to say "what a shame".

The truth is I don't think my father ever reached that point, or at least not since I was born. He had always managed to get by somehow, he'd always known how to find his way, and if not, there'd always been someone to save his ass at the last minute. He had always seemed more clever, more... normal. I often wondered how far he might've gone in life, if he hadn't been a drug addict. He'd had plenty of opportunities to fall just as far as that guy, and plenty of accidents too. He'd crashed my mother's car, when they were still together, and then crashed his—he always walked away without a scratch. That's why he was tooled around on my brother's old scooter, from when he was fifteen. What happened next won't surprise you much.

One day I came home and found my mother and Ferran chatting in the kitchen. When you chat in the kitchen and there is no food in sight, it means something serious is happening, "what's going on?", "Papa had an accident with his bike and he's been in the hospital for two days. The young man who found the scooter came here to tell us." Why hadn't he told us? What do I know. Whatever the reason, we had to go see him; after all, he was still our father.

We went to the hospital that same evening and found the door to his room locked and a national policeman guarding it. "Hello. Can we go in?", "no. You'll have to wait until my colleagues finish working," but "what's going on? We're his chil-

dren,” who “he’s being questioned. As I said before, you have to wait.” And okay, okay, we would wait out there. It’s just ten minutes anyway.

At some point, either because the corridor was very quiet or because the cops’ tone of voice went up, we heard words such as “cocaine cigarette”, “positive” and “various drugs”. When the authorities got tired of the whole song and dance, they left, and we went in to see him. He told us he’d lost control of the motorcycle on the road leading to his house, and he’d fallen. “I think I was unconscious for a couple of minutes,” but suddenly he had gotten back up and, “since the bike was trashed,” he decided to walk the rest of the way home. But obviously someone had seen him crash and he hadn’t gotten very far walking before the police and ambulance arrived and forced him to go to the hospital.

He had seven broken ribs and a shattered collarbone and, according to the doctor, “he was very lucky because it could have been worse.” When he’d arrived at the hospital, a psychiatrist had interviewed him and given a medical report because “they thought I was high”. Because of that and because they had found some kind of drugs beside his motorcycle, the national police came in to question him.

When he got out of the hospital he found work in an electric vehicle store and started cycling everywhere, basically because he had no other choice. One day he called us up and showed us the medical report he’d been given. It was the first time he talked about drugs with us and, even though we knew he wasn’t telling us the whole truth, that was a very important step.

“I started going to a psychologist and once a week I go for a urinalysis. This helps me take it seriously. I have nothing left but the two of you. Kids... We’re talking about thirty-nine years of addictions. This peeing in a cup thing, for me, is another reinforcement. Because even though I’ve been clean for a

few weeks, I'm very weak. Incredibly weak. But this is really it this time. I talk to the psychologist every three days and try to be honest. If I relapsed, it would look really bad. Now I see everything in perspective. My whole life. You don't know what it was like. Now I'm fifty-two years old and I see myself when I was thirteen and all I've been through... I can't say I'll never touch the stuff again, but I'm going to give it my best. And I think I finally scared myself. I've had such a hard time lately, so alone... Nobody came to see me in the hospital, I don't know if the friends I thought were my friends actually are... Anyway, I don't want to go through this again. I want to be with you, see you succeed, get married... Outlive my father. Stuff like that."

I went home afterwards, not really believing most of the things that had come out of his mouth, or at least not wanting to believe them. But that was when the idea came to me. My father had never been so honest with us and I didn't know how long it would last. Two days later I called him up to go for coffee. He wanted to treat, "we'll go to a place I'm sure you'll love, they have real Arabian teas, because it's run by Arabs." My father, the most racist person in the world, sitting in an Arab bar and drinking Arabian tea? "I come here because they don't have any alcohol. Look around, look at the bar shelves, not a bottle. But they're nice, they're very good people."

It was the perfect story. It had been inside me all my life. When I told him about the idea for the book, he hesitated: it would stir up a lot of things, a lot of shit. I was scared too. But it wasn't that hard to convince him and he finally agreed.

That was the happiest time in my relationship with my father. Every time I went with him to the Arab bar and we sat down to chat, I felt like I was sitting down to talk to a friend and there was something about that, so incredibly tender, it melted my heart. For the first time in my life I was getting to

know my father. I had never seen him like that, not drunk, not angry with the world, not raging against everything I said or thought, not vomiting out more and more lies.

But I couldn't trust it, I couldn't get my hopes up. That's why I didn't trust him or my own instincts every time I saw him with a wound—are there veins there?—or when he said hi to some young man my age smoking in the square, or when he went out “to make a call”. I also didn't know whether to believe him on days that he couldn't meet up with me because “I'm having a little domestic problem” or “I've got a cold, flu, fever. I'm dying. I'm sorry, honey, I really wanted to see you.”

All I know is that you've recently started making money, that the winter cold is here and I can't see your arms anymore and that lately you've been drinking wine when you eat lunch at the shop. All I want is for you to finish telling me everything I need to finish writing the book, that's it. You don't need to promise me that you'll always be okay and you'll always be as good a father as you've been over these last few months. You don't need to hug and kiss me again like you did the last time we saw each other. You don't even need to listen to my obsessive worries and the things I can't tell mama about because she doesn't understand. It doesn't matter, you don't have to act like you do understand and that you like when I tell you things, about my dreams and about how life sucks. You don't have to tell me, without words, that for as much as life sucks, having you as a father was the best thing that could have happened to me, in this life.

“Well, we can stop here, if you want. I already have a lot of information.” I was eager to start writing based on everything I had, but deep down I didn't want those long afternoons over tea to ever end. “Alright. Are you okay?”, “yes. Are you?”, “I'm good.” I went home and dropped onto the couch, looking at the ceiling, and feeling exhausted but satisfied.

My hands trembled and I looked at them. My veins were more obvious than ever. Normally they were almost invisible but not now, now they were perfectly visible. I could touch them and I could feel their bumpy river shape, with its blue-green tributaries. They started at my wrists and from there spread over the entire back of my hands on their way, after dodging the knuckles, into the grooves between each finger, where they began to fade until they disappeared in some part of the fingers themselves.

My hands had always been thin and clean, healthy and smooth, so now all that stood out were those blue threads that seemed about to explode and stain everything with very thick maroon blood, or purple or black. And it seemed like everything would smell of wine and that I, with no hands and no veins in my hands and no fingers or rivers or threads, wouldn't have to cry or scream or feel pain. I would just sit, as I was, on a couch stained with wine and blood and a dull noise going down to my eardrums and making me deaf and unable to think. My mind wouldn't exist, there would only be that maroon couch and my missing hands and my missing veins. My hands were smooth and clean and my veins didn't usually show or stick out so I could feel them. That's why I'd never realized, until that very moment, how easy it would be to stick a needle into them.