

A WORLD WITHOUT COLOR



You curl up in your new hideout, and the soft light of the April afternoon washes your worn-out body. You are aware of my closeness. You confirm that with a gentle sigh while my palm tenderly slides down your fur. You still like my touch, although pain is what you now mostly feel. And uncertainty—but for how long?

Against the tracksuit pants I wipe a lock of your hair which is stuck to my palm. I try to take a better position, crawling next to you under the table. I hate the sentimentality of people who want to capture with photos the beautiful moments in life because they believe that's the only way they can remain part of their memories. Ironic, because I myself resort to this now. Nothing else is left for me. Another day, week, month at best is the most optimistic prognosis.

Only this time. I will make an exception.

Your chest is rising and falling, fighting for every breath. It's not easy for you, I know, and I would love most if I could breathe for you. But I can't. Even if I start to breathe a new life into you, it probably wouldn't help. You wouldn't even let me. Because you are a fighter. Besides, it seems to me you don't like people taking pity on you, as you didn't like it when they laughed in your face. This is why I control myself when I'm around you, poorly disguising the true nature of my feelings in a lame attempt to preserve your dignity. Panic hits me because of what is about to come!

A tidal wave rushes from within, forcing tears to my eyes, which stream silently down my face and drip-drop onto your colorful blanket. Jolly green, purple and beige squares support your long, thin and distorted body like a gentle cloud. The shadow of what you used to be.

I support myself on my elbows, taking the first snapshot with my cell phone in my left hand. You hear a click and crack open your eyes. Your gaze rests on me, warming me with the heat of the hearth fire that slowly fades away. I take another picture, producing another click, and then my hand trembles; I have to dry the tears that, undecided, pause for a moment in the corners of my eyes.

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You raise your head, not ceasing to look at me. Your good eye caresses my soul, while the other, sick from cataracts and inflammation unsuccessfully treated with ointments and drops, looks into the unknown. I'm stroking your hair, matted around it, waiting for you to be ready to continue our little photo session.

Again you accept me and indulge my whim. Gently as a newborn, you push your head along my hand, responding to my caress. First you rub your little nose into my fingers, and then you push your left ear against my hand, wanting me to scratch and massage it. When you become bored or you think it is enough, with amazing vigor you start to wash yourself. You surprise me a little because I don't remember when was the last time I saw you wash yourself. (It was a long time ago, just as eons have gone by since the days when you would happily nestle in the most comfortable seat in the apartment, after successfully sponging an abundant meal, and start to clean yourself. An invisible clock, or timer in you—as we used to joke—woke you up and led you, with your tail raised, to your bowls, where you patiently waited until—mostly Mom—capitulated before your determination and persistence of the winner.) I smile, encouraged by a false hope and strong mental images awakened from the past. How little it takes for the Phoenix to resurrect in me and clatter the wings of joy. How dishonest I am with myself (and you) and subject to self-deception!

I leave you for a moment and hurry into the kitchen to show the photos to Mom. You continue sprucing up, as you know it's time for Saša's arrival. As always, you want to show yourself to him in the best light. You care about what Saša thinks of you. I don't think you do this so he can pet you and lavish words of praise on you, calling you *Viola, Love*. No, you accept Saša because you know you will be better each time you see him and you want to give something back to him. You want to *show* him that his visits really make you feel better. And so you do that. I don't know with which words I can express more clearly what I feel for you, so I will repeat: *Viola, my love*.

My thoughts come rushing back like raging currents of mountain rivers that do not stop for anything or anyone. Hurrying with a roar to their finish line, completely self-sufficient. Each word I make immortal here must be engraved with the dedication of a blind stonemason who, just by sense of touch and guided by indestructible faith, creates from the shapeless mass a

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work which present generations, but also those who come after, will admire. Those who are alive today, and their children who are just born, setting the foundation for new generations. This is our written monument and I snuggle up against it, blinded by the pain inflicted upon me by every minute that takes us into the future. The future is what I want to avoid at any cost, selfishly keeping the present so these moments last as long as possible. Not thinking about you and the relief it will bring you. We are both on the road of no return. Do you think so too? Do you also feel at least a fraction of regret we will part soon, with no guarantee and no promise that, in the blink of an eye or the distant future, we might meet each other again? Tell me, dearest . . .