



# CURTAIN REMOVED

*An adventure out of  
homosexuality*

SINISHA BALEN

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To Mom and Maya.

And all others whose unconditional love helped me to overcome.

But their minds were blinded; for until this day the same veil remaineth untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ.

But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts.

Nevertheless when they shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

But we all, with uncovered face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:14-18

## FOREWORD

You out of homosexuality and homosexuality out of you!

This book reflects significant moments of my life and how my freedom from homosexuality came about. It is for you, so that you may know that this freedom is available to you too.

If you are looking for a way to receive the life that you really want, I hope that my story will give you that extra push that we all need when dealing with big problems in our lives.

As you read this book, my innermost thoughts and feelings will lay open in front of you — strong lusts, weak hopes, persistent fears and tough struggles, as well as the wonderful victories and how they happened by the Word and power of Christ.

I pray that, with God, you will receive the power for your own breakthrough. We have the One with whom and because of whom we can surmount the insurmountable and conquer the unconquerable! May we all delight in Him, in victory and good life of freedom and love.

Sinisha

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## 1. A PERFECT GUY?

ON OUR PLANET there are many cities and towns. In them there are many schools; many high schools too. Mine was in a downtown area. It was an old Victorian building with huge windows and even taller ceilings. The entrance into it was from one of the many narrow streets, built in a time when no one could imagine that cars would be so numerous that they would occupy not only the roads but the sidewalks as well. The street was packed with honking vehicles and many passer byes. Brushing a white Passat's bumper, I entered the school.

A cool air preserved by thick walls hit me at the right time; I was sweating profusely from the last minute run from home. Almost late, I was jumping three stairs at once. Upon climbing onto the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor where my first class for the day was, I stopped abruptly. There he was, leaned on the wide, square, dull-green pole. He seemed shy, a bit more than someone who would show up among a new group of people for the first time. To the right of him was the washroom. Regardless of the sign indicating it was for men, we students made it 'for all sexes', since many of us, male and female, were cramming in it on a regular basis, to smoke. Now the muffled voices could be heard coming from it and a distant scent of a cigarette smoke was in the air. This daily activity made us feel a little bit more grown up.

In that moment though, none of that counted. If someone had asked me later who was around me, I wouldn't have remembered. The only thing that mattered was him; and his smile. Not just the smile, but the smile that was sent to me. It made me feel like melting on the inside. He had a wavy brown hair, hazel eyes and beautiful, sparkling white teeth. He wore a cool sweater and jeans, nice brown shoes. The thunder bolt just hit me.

*Perfect! What a gorgeous guy. Wow, he is smiling at me. Oh my god, he is beautiful. Let's get to know him.*

His name was Allen. He showed up now, in the 11th grade. His last place of living was in Japan where his dad was representing a company he worked for, he told me while we waited for a teacher who was late, as usual.

Few minutes later we were in the classroom and the head teacher introduced him. By this time we already became friends. Yes, my life became beautiful. Within days I kicked out my old class mate from the school bench. I did it smoothly, not to offend him, and then Allen moved in. The best time ever was sitting at the desk with him, our legs "accidentally" touching and leaning at one another. I felt thrilled every time our knees touched each other and stayed in that position for minutes, obviously deliberately not being moved apart. I anticipated even better future. Soon we started to share most of our days together and spent virtually all school and free time together, on the phone or just hanging out.

*This is amazing! Finally there is a man who genuinely likes me. Finally someone I can talk to just about everything. And he listens to me and pays attention to me.*

"Hey Sinisha, how about coming to my place tomorrow? Let's finish that geography homework together. I definitely don't have a clue what that guy wants from us," Allen asked on the phone.

*Wow, this is going to be great. I have a feeling that this visit to his place won't be about the homework only. I will get my hands on him and hopefully even start the relationship; finally.*

I paced fast from room to room, not noticing anything around. I envisioned us being together. I beamed.

Allen lived in suburbs, so it took me a good 45 minute bus ride to come to his little town. The bus was flying left and right over the old, narrow streets that were designed for one lane only, but as with everything in a new-born country of Croatia, improvisation was the norm and rules were there to be bent in an always original way.

After stepping off the bus, I walked another five minutes through the town. "Town" would be actually exaggerating. This was a village, plain and simple. A dog started at me as if on a paid mission to detach my body into parts, only to be violently stopped by the chain that wouldn't give in. I growled back and moved on towards Allen's house. The newly opened shop was there. After the fall of communism and Yugoslavia, little shops filled with every possible home product were popping up everywhere. The country was hungry for so many things. So far we were buying them in Italy on a regular basis.

*His house, finally. My heart jumped.*

"Hey, there you are," he welcomed me with a broad smile. "C'mon up," he waived his hand from a second floor veranda.

His house was a typical Mediterranean, with many long balconies on both floors. In front of the house were a garage and a yard. Behind the house there was a big estate, with a vegetable garden, lots of rose bushes and oleander trees scattered everywhere and the long orchard that spread further down the valley. I noticed the abundantly pink oleander flowers.

*Maybe the two of us will make love in the orchard.*

I entered the apartment. The long brown-walled hallway was broken up with few white doors leading to the kitchen and the living room, the bathroom and the master bedroom. At the far end of the hall was his room, he pointed out. I stepped into the kitchen area. Long curtains hung from top to bottom of the window and the balcony door. He was alone. He told me his parents went somewhere.

*I hope they won't come back too soon.* I crossed my fingers. Outside was cloudy and the living room was cosy.

"You want a drink?"

"Sure, what have you got?" *We are adults, after all.*

"Gin, rum, whiskey, beer, you name it," Allen was scanning the inside of a bar. His dad was rather rich and travelled all over the world and they got a good collection of booze.

"Give me a whiskey," I said in a high pitched voice. *And c'mon, would you finally come over here, man?* I was on the edge; I glanced at him. He wore a set of green sports pants and a sweater.

The conversation started and then he brought some photo albums from Japan and invited me into a living room, adjacent to the kitchen. It was rather small for a living room, I reckoned. A dark grey couch and two sofas took up most of the space. He pointed to where I should sit. He sat close to me and started to show me photos. I could not care less about them. I was too ecstatic about our physical closeness.

*Ok, this is too much of the photo showing business. Some action needs to start and it must start now.* I moved my hand, that was on my leg, slightly toward his leg, like trying to hold the album better. Nothing. I started to move the fingers more decisively and slightly caress his leg over the green pants. Nothing again; no reaction from him. He kept yapping about some cities I have never heard of. Pondering more on the whole situation, my mind wandered away into the recent past situations and observations of him.

*This does not make sense. Most guys in the class think he's gay. Also he has those gay movements and manners; he must be gay. This cannot be yet another disappointment.* Something ached in me.

“Ok, that's it. I wanted to show you something in my room.”

His words jerked me back into reality. This sounded hopeful and good. When I entered his room my eyes went onto his messy bed. *Yes, here I want to lie down, with you.* My hopes were up and I felt sweet all over.

*Is this it? Will we finally start to kiss?* He handed me a small piece of paper instead.

“What's this?” I asked.

“It's Mariya's phone number. She likes me and wants me to be her boyfriend. I think I'm going to go for it. She is hot and has great boobs,” Allen was beaming.

The sweetness was gone and I felt like someone shot me dead. *No, this can't be happening. Allen, why? So he likes girls. But what about our closeness, what about our legs touching, what about spending all the time together, what about...Shit, total shit.*

I barely had a strength to look up and responded, “Lucky you.”

While he went for the drawer to put the piece of paper back to a secure spot, I realized the cruel truth: I was in love with Allen. He wasn't in love with me. With sad eyes I looked outside. The clouds were thicker and darker; and it rained. While walking back to the living room we decided not to bother with geography, but to watch the movie instead.

On my way back home I was killing myself with the over analysis.

*Sure, he was talking about girls before, yes, he had a girlfriend already, but I thought that was some phase until he would start to love me. Why is this happening?* I was drained.

The illusion was shaking me badly and I didn't even know it. I refused to accept the fact that Allen was my friend and that he wanted me to be his friend too. Nothing less, nothing more. But I was fully preoccupied with satisfying my long cherished need to be special to a man, to share a

secret with him, and be loved in a special way. I wanted to satisfy my wild body, groaning with sexual hunger, which I called love.

## 2. NOT LIKE LA LAW

MY NEED TO be with a man and to be pleasing to him went a long way back and it got more intense about two years ago, around the time when the major change in my life happened. Now, lying in my bed I switched my thoughts from Allen to that fateful, early fall day, and recounted every little detail of what had happened:



My mom and I were to leave. Secretly, in the morning, when my dad was probably sipping his first or second shot of some hard liquor.

In that life changing morning, I woke up in the spare bed in my room. I scanned the walls that were painted in a mild shade of yellow, and saw through the windows a sky filled with massive gray clouds, hovering above the city. Scratching my head I turned toward the desk which was covered in textbooks, notebooks, little trivial things and little memories, like eighth—grade pencils that haven't been used for a while but were too important to be thrown out. I opened my mouth and spoke to the person who was lying in my bed, not looking at her,

“Mom, I'm leaving. You stay if you want to, but I won't. I can't take it anymore. I'm going to live at grandma's.”

Another anxious night was behind me, one too many; another night when my mom slept in my room because my dad stank so strongly of alcohol that it was impossible for her to share a bed with him. Impossible because of the smell and impossible because of the sorrow that filled her; their marriage had failed. All her attempts to save it, failed. I could feel her pain and agony. Her eyes became wet but then, as if jolted by a fresh desire for a meaningful life, she declared,

“Then let's go.”

She stood up. I was taken aback by how easily she had come to the decision. Her words made both of us nervous - the words of an unknown future. I didn't have a clue what was coming down the road and I didn't care. All I wanted was the security of my grandma's place, where I knew I could go to sleep and wake up in peace, come home in peace and live in peace, hour after hour. I wanted peace.

Since the door to enter into a new life suddenly opened, dragging the bags and suitcases to the car was not a heavy task to do. Our apartment was on the ground floor of a two-storey house that belonged to my dad and his sister. While carrying one yellow and one red suitcase I glanced at our well-trimmed lawn and the little bush that stood to the side.

*I won't be seeing this every day, any more.* An empty feeling, like all my internal organs were pulled out, came over me, but I dismissed it. I opened the car door and shoved the luggage inside.

My mom was surveying the inside of the car.

“We will need to do several trips with this car. Not everything will fit at once.”

Like most Yugoslavian cars at the time, ours was uncomfortable. The passenger door wouldn't shut unless it was slammed, which agitated my mom, every time. As a kid, I spent countless hours in that car, imagining that I was driving a bus around the city and greeting passengers.

“What if he shows up in the middle of the move? You know how he is — he gets slightly drunk, and right away finds a reason to leave the work, come home and sleep.”

She was trying to squeeze the black garbage bag, filled with sheets, into the back of the car. She looked up at me and her eyes gave me reassurance.

“He has some court meetings today. We should be fine.”

My dad was a lawyer. I couldn't identify him as such, because his work looked nothing like the “LA Law” show that was always on TV. But nevertheless, he was a lawyer, and some days he spent hours defending his company in legal disputes. In the courtroom, I was told, he displayed profound knowledge, eloquence and expertise. But I didn't care about that at all. I wanted a dad who was loving, gentle and who would spend time with me. But he wasn't that kind of dad.

The car was now full and we left. I sat in the front seat, covered with plastic bags of all colours. I wanted to make a joke about the bags, which my mom collected from who knows which stores and cities, but I felt it was best to remain silent. I worried that my dad would somehow appear if I laughed about anything. *It's best not to jinx it.*

The minutes ticked by, dragging the hands on the clock closer to the moment when dad would stagger through the door. As we drove back and forth to collect the rest of our belongings, my nerves grew tighter and tighter and I wanted to yell at my mom to hurry.

After we took the last of our clothes, I turned a resolute face away from the place that had been my home. A few minutes later, we parked the car in front of our new home and shut the engine. I looked up. The house was tall. A flight of 70 stairs led to the doorway, and the house's three floors stretched high above the sidewalk. My grandma's apartment was on the top floor and it was easily recognizable because it was the only apartment to have a balcony, on which sat a large rabbit-ear antenna to catch Yugoslavian and Italian TV signals.

When we opened the front door, we breathed in and out. I relaxed. The move was over. In the apartment I could smell the stale air that consumed the house. My grandma had moved out a couple of years ago to live with her sister.

With some hesitation, I picked up an old, gray rotary phone that had been in the house forever. While dialing my best friend Ana's phone number, I began to dread telling her about what had happened. *I don't want her to tell me how sorry she is.*

In order to avoid emotion, I took the tone of a newscaster.

“My mom and I have left my dad. From now on, you can reach me at this number.”

“Aha, I see. Ok, I hope it works out,” she replied.

At the age of 16, I was concerned about what people thought of me. But her response showed no judgement.

She was cool. Why wouldn't she be? But I wanted to look good in everyone's eyes. I wanted others to be pleased with everything that I did. When I was passing by the older neighbours I always made sure that I said 'Hi' to all of them because that was expected and polite.

*That is so stupid. Doing things that seem appropriate but not caring about them at all.*

I looked around the apartment. *Ok, so we are here. No more of my father's yelling for absolutely no reason at all. No more seeing him drunk and out of control.* I relaxed.

I wasn't aware at that time that the fears and insecurities had not stayed in the old home, but they had come to this new life with me. I dragged them along, not aware of their presence.

I looked over at the kitchen sofa and smiled. My cat and friend Tom was there. This has been the final touch of the move. With the cat on the sofa, I had a sense of the full family again.

"Everything is good."

I touched his tail. He didn't move. I looked up. The east kitchen wall had a big window which occasionally leaked when it rained heavily. It also gave a spectacular view of the rising sun. I was very often fascinated by the space and planets and how enormous these objects were, floating in the middle of nothing, so the window gave me the opportunity to enjoy the show of a slow and unstoppable rise of the sun on a blue horizon. In the kitchen, beside the wooden table with four matching wooden chairs, in the corner there was a big Ariston fridge and an even bigger freezer. The freezer standing there was the result of one of those Yugoslavian habits from the communist era, when families collected as much meat as possible and that was usually too much. People used to drag the whole lamb home and then cut it with sharp knives. The bloody, skinned head and the eyes of a dead animal always made me look away.

*So all of us used to pack that poor freezer to the top, just in case. In case of what? Another war, maybe?* I shrugged my shoulders and laughed. The cat opened one eye and was not pleased with his sleep being interrupted.

Now both the fridge and the freezer stood open, empty and warm. But there was some food on the counter and that was all we had for that day.

*I don't even recall her grabbing the food. When did she manage to get that? Typical mom.* I looked at her plump face and admired her care for me.

"What?" she noticed it.

"Nothing." I looked back at the plate.

We sat in silence and ate, exhausted from the mental pressure that we needed to endure for so long. With our bellies filled, we got up and continued unpacking. The evening time came. I entered my room, crashed on the bed and was fast asleep within seconds.

The next morning I analyzed the new situation.

*We are alone, the two of us, now, to take care of each other. She is very sensitive at this stage, I cannot tell her. My mind raced and my eyes wandered around. Not a thing; it would be too much for her to bear. Look, I cannot even say that I drank a beer with my friends, without her making a big fuss about it. That look of fear on her face...if that scares her, how awful would it be for her if I told her what's really shaking me?*

I was jerked from this mental torture by the loud steps coming from the apartment below. It was Mrs. Zezelich, grandma's first neighbour. I knew her only as an old woman. I couldn't even imagine her young because since the time I could remember anything, I knew her silver hair combed backwards carefully; thin twisted legs, slightly bent, she was as cheerful and caring as a mother, continually of good humor and making jokes about herself.

"Look how beautiful I am, a real model. You know why I sit in the sun? To get some tan and to be on the cover of a magazine".

This was her common joke when I was passing by her terrace. This made me laugh now, as I remembered her words. She was telling me other things.

"You are one handsome young man with good manners. Girls must be crazy about you."

If only I had truly heard and grasped what she was saying. She was telling the truth. The truth that I could not hear. It felt impossible for those words to be the truth.



Back in the present moment, now couple of years older, my mind was filled with even more questions. All questions and no answers. If only I stopped to try to find some answers. But, as it was, I have never checked what the reality was and what was at the bottom of my confusion. I didn't know that I could actually stop and think. No one told me. I was convinced that my feelings were to be followed. I never questioned them.

On top of that I had more questions about Allen and his behaviour, but no answers to be found. I wanted to feel better. But I felt like I might burst every moment, instead. To relieve the pressing feeling, I undressed myself and immersed in self—pleasure.

### 3. HOT SUMMERS AND A LOSER

CROATIA'S SUMMERS WERE hot. Dry and hot. I woke up at 1pm, one hour too late to go and buy the bread. The bakery closed at noon and the only way to get it after hours was to bang on the baker's home window. This also meant enduring the preaching lesson and the judgmental look from her, showing me what she thought about teens waking up late and not getting the bread at its' peak freshness time.

But opening my eyes, I was happy nevertheless. I was at Unije, a small Island in the Adriatic Sea. One could probably walk around it in less than a day. The only village on the island had some 100 permanent inhabitants. The small town spread from the harbour up the hill. There was a church, a shop, a bakery, two restaurants and one bar, one ice cream parlour and the post office. And the cemetery, of course. I was staying at Igor's house. He was my best male friend. The house was on the top of the village, and one could reach it by following one of the only two village roads. On the ground floor there was only one bigger room that served as a living room and a kitchen, with the washroom separated aside. We slept on the mattresses that laid beside one another on the second floor. Up there the ceiling was inclined and there was always a danger of hitting my head while getting up, especially now, with a bad hang over. I climbed down the stairs onto the main floor. The grey tiles were pleasantly cool to my feet.

*My God, what a mess.*

I saw three ashtrays filled with butts and ash. The forth one was a plate and being filled with the same stuff, it served the purpose. Another party went by. I dared not open the wooden blinds. I might have been blinded by the midday sun. I sat on the couch to consider what comes next: cleaning, eating, or maybe vomiting? I needed to decide but thoughts were very slow. So I just stared at the dot on the ground. What a relief that was. After a minute or so I blinked a few times and my attention was back. On the table there were a dozen empty beer bottles. On the floor two empty wine bottles as well as the bottles of rum and vodka. Not a drop of liquor left in them. On the sofa, turned on one of its sides, laid the cd player.

I got up from the sofa to drink water. I heard that replenishing the liquid in my body would help.

*Yeah, right. Whatever.* There was really nothing to do but walk through that near death hang over experience and hope it would go away in the coming hours.

*How do we even survive these parties?* The last night's one was especially nasty for me.

It all went well until the time to play the soft music and dance came, probably around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. Since during the summer time the island was full of teens from all over Croatia and Slovenia, there were parties all over. And since Igor and I were alone at his place, his house was naturally one of the first party options. Last night, a couple of Slovenian girls, Diana and Petra came by and brought more people with them and the little house was packed. When the soft music started, few guys grabbed girls for dance. Few of them remained seated and continued conversation, not in the least interested in getting up. Since other girls went for a dance, Diana was left alone for a moment.

*I'm going to ask her for dance. She is cute and I can't just sit here like a loser when the girl is free.* Few moments later our bodies were gently pressing each other. I liked the closeness. I felt her wobbly breast pressed on my chest. Slowly, as if hoping she wouldn't notice, I lowered my hand towards her bottom and gently squeezed it. The approving look from other guys made me feel like a part of the herd. I squeezed it more. I did it with some apprehension, though, thinking that maybe the slap on the face was coming. What came was worse than that though.

"Sinisha, tonight I'm going to be with you but only because Igor asked me to," Diana said quickly, bringing our dance to an abrupt stop.

"Aha, ok," was all I managed to say. I looked into her bitter eyes, and let go of her body. The words started to sink in. I was struck by a horrendous meaning of what she had just told me.

*I must be really ugly and some super jerk since she said what she just said. Did she really say it?* My head was spinning. I wanted to disappear. I have never felt such a humiliation in my life. Slightly shaking, I managed to get back to the sofa and slumped down like a bag of potatoes.

"Is everything alright?" Igor asked while caressing Petra's neck.

I didn't answer. I just looked at him and with the last ounce of strength I suppressed the tears. Quickly, not to give in, I grabbed the glass and gulped the wine down.

*So, Sinisha, that's it. You are so unattractive to girls that they need to be told to be with you or to love you. Wow.* I lit a cigarette. *Tonight I'm going to get drunk like never before.*

I blamed Diana for everything, and thus conveniently avoided the main issue I had: I was not really interested in her. Her body and all, fine, but my sweet feeling was for men. I wanted men. I dreamed men. I cherished men. They were hot. Women weren't. I looked underneath the table. Marko's hairy leg was in sight. I indulged observing his sexy ankle and this gave me some comfort.

The light dizziness brought me back from recollecting the last nights' events. Pondering on them was painful. I shoved my feet into sandals and walked to the baker's home. *Hopefully she won't throw the loaf of bread at me.*

Slowly, one by one, the sizzling hot days were gone. As the end of August approached, the island was getting emptier. Then, just a couple of days before the new school year was to begin, we left too and the island was given back into the hands of its' few inhabitants. Standing on the ship's deck, I watched the little port becoming ever smaller with the ship's engine taking us further away. I felt sadness but peace.

*Another summer is gone. Too many things happened. School time will be good. But Allen is gone.* He was with us for one year only and then moved to the United States to complete the high school there.

A gentle rocking of the boat and a sea breeze lulled me into my usual analyzing mode.

*At least Viviana will be free. She and Allen were a couple for a while. Allen is gone and now is my chance to maybe become her boyfriend.* Viviana was my classmate. She was short and plump, had a golden hair and was cute to die for. The angelic smile and character, one could not

do anything but love her. When she dared to light a cigarette, it was obvious that she would never be a smoker. When she drank, it was obvious she would never be a drinker. She was a friend and I loved her. And that was my trouble. I wanted her to be more than a friend.

*When will I ask her out? I am such a loser and a wimp. The other guys have no trouble asking girls out and getting all crazy around them. But I can't. How could I? I can't be with the girl. I don't feel anything hot for her, so how could I be with her in bed? I would embarrass myself. I don't know what's wrong with me. I totally wanted Allen physically; I loved his body and his smile. I liked so many things about him. Then, on the other hand, I like Viviana, as a friend. I like so many things about her and I even like her boobs and ass, but I can't picture the two of us having sex. When I try to do that, I don't feel anything down there. But when I picture guys, oh my, whoa, it's a totally different story.*

I glanced around the ship. There were so many great looking hot guys there. I salivated looking at their legs and biceps and how sexy the shorts and sandals fit their bodies.

*Anyway...I like men and I am happy thinking about them. I must have been made for them and that's it for me; because, well, I can't be with the woman.*

I was desperately trying to draw the conclusion on the matter, but I could not. Every time I told myself that I am to be with the man and that this was good for me, I felt bad and I somehow felt that the decision could not be right. But then also I saw the impossibility of being with the woman.

*I don't think that I ever got an erection looking at a girl. The more I thought about it, the more pressure I felt. I thought that I needed to make a decision, like I just had to know, or else I could never live in peace.*

#### 4. SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL

SATURDAY EVENING IN the bathroom; I was fresh from under the hot, long shower. Stepping out onto the pink tiles I dried my hands and turned the stereo on. Listening to the music while getting ready for the night-life was a must. I looked at myself in a mirror. 5 foot 10, blue eyes, dark blonde hair, cut short, slim and horny, that was me. “Dolce e Gabbana” Eau d’ Toilette was oozing from my skin.

Marin and Viviana were already downstairs. Anna and couple of other guys were to meet us downtown, from where we would take a bus to carry us to Opatija. Opatija was a nearby town, some 15 minute drive from Rijeka, my home town. It was a prime tourist destination on the sea coast. My class mates loved to go there to watch hot chicks, as they called them, from other parts of Europe. To score the German or Italian girl was the dream of many of them.

The bus was packed, teens drinking and throwing words at each other. I didn’t particularly like that atmosphere; it made me feel like everything was out of control. Little did I know that this night was all about losing control.

We stepped out of the bus just a few meters from the beach. Even though I could not see it because of the darkness, I knew the calm sea was there. In the distance one could see the many ships’ lights, dragging themselves on the invisible surface. Between the sandy beaches and the asphalt streets there were palms and oleander trees. People were everywhere. Disco entrances, glittering and shining welcome signs dragged the undecided to them. Teens and adults stumbling in and out of cafes, restaurants and clubs were all around. The roads were filled with expensive, shining cars, where ever one looked. The place was alive. So were we.

The club which we entered was crowded and filled with smoke. The light show was in a full swing, every now and then hitting my eyes with a laser beam. It annoyed me. Surprisingly, we found an empty spot just beside the dance floor.

“I like this cozy sofa. Let’s park here,” I suggested. No one complained. The drinks came. People were dancing on and around the dance floor and in between the tables too. Dazzled by the rhythm, I joined the dancing crowd. Couple of other friends joined me, while the rest stayed at the table to keep our belongings safe.

After a few minutes of casual rocking, someone jerked my shoulder. I turned. Some guy was there, shouting over the music and getting into my face.

“What have you done to my sister? Why did you hit her?” He shouted into my ear, his grip on my shoulder tightened.

“I don’t understand, what are you talking about?” Everything was happening too fast.

“It happened there, just a minute ago,” one arm still holding my shoulder, the other pointing to the place few feet away. “That’s my sister over there,” he pointed to a young woman, sitting in a high bar chair, drinking something that looked like a cocktail of some sort. I didn’t like her.

“I have no idea what you are talking about. I don’t know her and I didn’t hit anyone.” Seeing his angry eyes, the fear started to creep up in me. A weird, but familiar fear. With some reasoning still in me, I continued, “I am sorry if I bumped into her or maybe pushed her while I was dancing, but it was not on purpose.”

“Go there and apologize to her,” he commanded sternly.

*I better do it if I didn’t want to get beaten up*, I reasoned while he dragged me towards her.

“Here she is. Apologize.”

“Look, I am sorry if I bumped into you or something but it was not on purpose.” I became like a little kid.

Her hands were on the tall cocktail glass, the red straw in her mouth. She didn’t even look at me for a few seconds. Then she raised her eyes and said nothing. Her look told me, ‘You are nobody, you are scum.’ I was terrified. I stepped back looking at both of them, not knowing what was coming next. Then I turned away and like a student who was told to go sit in the corner because he was behaving badly, with stooped shoulders I walked back to our table where everything was the same as when I left them, and their laughter and easy—going mood indicated that they didn’t know what had happened. Only Marin asked,

“What was that over there? You know that girl?”

I explained what bad luck had befallen me. He waived his hand carelessly and said,

“Forget them man, just some idiots.”

I wish I could have done that. I wish that I could forget it then and there. *She made all that up. I didn’t hit her. Look at her, looking like some dance diva, a whore. That’s what she is, a whore.* I was angry and scared.

Anna and others left to meet some other friends in a nearby café, so it was only Marin, Viviana and I who stayed. *What if he comes again and tries to start another fight and hits me?* The thought was too much.

“Guys, can we please go, like right now? I can’t sit here, I feel uncomfortable.” Actually I was panicking on the inside, the fear welling up my stomach and chest.

“Sinisha, what happened was nothing. Really, like, forget it. But ok, if you want so, let’s leave,” Marin decided.

“Yeah, let’s leave,” I confirmed so that there could be no room for the possibility of staying.

That night my life changed. For worse. All the insecurities that I thought I left with my dad, came back. It became clear to me that the fears were never gone. The fear of dying, of getting beaten up, of being rejected and unloved — all of them crept right back up to the surface. They were dormant for few years, waiting for the right moment to get fed again, to get strong

again. This was their moment. Like demons coming out of the pits of darkness and growling with the pointy teeth, my fears were up and about.

Buried in a deep worry, I was oblivious of the three of us being on the bus again, this time taking us back home. I almost forgot to say bye to Viviana and Marin. I found myself on the empty street in front of my house. The air was still, as it can only be around 5am, minutes before the first rays of light would pierce the night shadows. I looked towards the house. On both sides of it the tall pine trees grew. They were about 50 years old now. 70 stairs and some walk around the front yard waited for me. I started slowly climbing up the stairs and my usual analysis started.

*I can't trust anyone. How could that girl make that up? She absolutely didn't care if I got hit by her brother or whatever. Probably she would have liked seeing me lying on the floor, covered in blood or something. See, women can't be trusted. They are tricky and unpredictable. With men I know what to expect. Women are something else, I tell you.*

I stepped in. All was quiet. I tiptoed into my mom's room.

"Mom, I am home," I whispered in her warm ear, smelled the sleepy aura around her and kissed her warm, soft cheek.

"Good. Baby, was it good?" she mumbled.

"Yes, it was good," I lied. "Good night."

"Ok, good night honey." She said and fell right back into the deep sleep. Closing the door behind me, I went to my room.

In my bed I tried to find some sense in everything that had happened. But there was none to be found. The stomach smashing fear was back. Turning aside to sleep, I didn't know that it would be my constant companion for the years to come.

## 5. ANGER AND BALM

I LOVED TO observe. I could sit for endless minutes in a bar, or at the table with my friends, observing them and the people around me. Here I was, at Trsat. Trsat was the heart of the city, the real heart and center of Rijeka, where everyone flocked to sit on many of the patios and wide open terraces to enjoy hot espresso while delighting in the smells and sounds of the old part of the town, which also was a religious center. Trsat was located on the hill where I lived. The core of the old town was about five minute walk from my house. There, on the edge of the cliff, was a tall and proud Castle of Frankopan. It was built many centuries ago and it had a rich history of knights and noble men who lived there. At the northern side of the castle, there was a stable. Behind it there was a deep cliff and beyond that one could see higher hills and the bases of high mountains. The main part of the castle was a court yard, looking at the mountain far to the west and the blue, crystal clear sea, only couple of kilometers to the south. The courtyard was dominated by the statues of dragons and knights on the horses. The statues were of copper, now worn out and oxidized into a shade of green, but still mighty. Around the courtyard there were balconies and the rooms and mansions of the noble people from the past.

These days the court yard was transformed into a café. All of us Croatians loved to sit outside, drink coffee and find new ways on how to have money by preferably doing nothing. I sat in a white plastic chair, getting sun tanned and enjoying the talk with my friends.

Igor and Anna were there. Anna was slightly taller than me. She had a long, blonde, wavy hair. Her eyes were alive and always looking in all directions, not to miss anything of importance to her. She was mentally strong and alert. We attended the same class in the elementary school since grade one, but we became the best friends in grade seven, when we were told to sit together in the same bench. Very soon our spot in the classroom became the spot of laughter for us and the spot of irritation for teachers.

Igor ordered another round of coffee and orange juice for all three of us. He had a short black hair, a bony face and was slim. He was strong; strong in will. And he was hot. By this time of my life, my mind didn't know the difference between friendship and sexual feelings for men. To me it all became one and the same. This was painful as much as it was exciting. My friends were important to me and I knew I was important to them, but in me there was this constant, never ending yearning to be accepted, to be held in their arms and to have sex with them. All of my male friends, at that time, were straight people, though.

20 minutes later, Igor stood up.

"Folks, I got to go." He walked away to the waiter to settle the bill and then he was gone.

Anna and I were left alone. The sun warmed my back and shone in her eyes, as she was sitting opposite of me. Behind her, the copper dragon held its wings spread. For the next few minutes we sat in silence.

"Anna, I wanted to tell you something." She leaned closer to me. "I think that sometimes I don't like women only, but men as well." I looked straight into her eyes. She was a friend.

“I think I noticed that. Sinisha, it is better for you to be undefined than to be gay. I mean, since you are not sure about that, I think that it is better for you not to go any direction, than gay direction. For now.”

This I didn't quite understand but it made sense. I could not tell her any more details. What I told her was the maximum that I could confess without having the fear of sudden death coming on me or perhaps falling through the ground. My friendship with Anna was a deep one; the one where the superficial daily happenings did not matter. We spoke about some other things for few more minutes and then we parted.

As I walked towards my home, the anger and disappointment came. I clenched my fist.

*She does not approve of homosexuality. Fine. But I like men, the feeling is so ever strong and hot and good. That's how I am. But what she had said made sense to me. How can it make sense up here, in my mind, but it does not make sense down there?*

My steps became more brisk and marching. *What does she know anyway?* The thought of being naked with a naked guy suddenly came into my mind. I felt sweet. *She can't tell me what to do! I have the right to be with whoever I want to. And all this talk gay or straight, what's all that? Isn't it cool to be like bisexual, so I could have sex with anyone I wanted and always have fun? Yes, that is cool. I can be with a woman and with a man.* I lied to myself. I could not see myself with a woman at all. But since it was easier to complain about Anna, I continued, *She doesn't know anything. She was never with a man sexually anyway. Hey, maybe she is a lesbian. Maybe that's why she has no boyfriend.* Again I knew I was making it up to make it easier on myself. It felt better.

*No one can tell me what is right or wrong. Everything is allowed and if I want something, I will have it, be it guy or a girl. There are no limits.* Now I was getting real angry — a couple, a guy and a girl, went by, giggling and holding hands.

*How lucky they are. They must have a great sex. Probably many times a day. I want sex too. I want a lot of sex and I will have it.* I really felt miserable every time when I saw a happy couple. And I was alone.

*Everyone is gay actually. I think that guy looked at me in a gay way. I bet he is gay too, just pretending with the girl. Everyone is gay and who can tell me what to do?* For the moment my reasoning was soothing, like a balm on a burning skin. But it didn't last. I was too confused and unhappy to stick to any conclusion. I didn't have any. All I had were fantasies, wishes and continual inner turmoil that were growing stronger. I was afraid.

Anna, my friend who I respected and who had both strong, loving, functional parents and two siblings, whose home was a picture of harmony and stability, told me not to go down the road of homosexuality. No matter what my momentary feelings were, I respected that. She respected me and I respected her.

Upon arriving home, I sat in our side garden and began to think more about Anna and so many things we had done together. My mind took me back to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and our Bible studies:



“C’mon, c’mon in, my dear youth! Let me see all of your happy faces!” Father Emmanuel was waiving at us and few other people who were walking in the church front yard. He wore a brown tunic with a rope around his waist. He was noticeably enchanted by life. I loved coming to our Church of the Mother of God at Trsat. Sometimes I liked to go for a mass, but mostly because once the mass was over, my friends and I went for a coffee. Now I saw Borka and Maryann coming too. Igor was already there. There were several others, but they were just acquaintances; I didn’t know them too well and I felt somewhat uneasy around them.

The weekly Bible study was held in one of the slightly damp and small rooms in the cloister. The heavy wooden door guarded the scores of books, some of them thrown carelessly on the shelves; some, on the other hand, neatly stacked. I reckoned that those neatly stacked have not been opened for years, maybe centuries. In the middle of the room there were few benches with chairs, where we sat. There was only one window, small and clean and it was facing the cloister back yard.

The Bible studies were fun. Rarely would we go into deep Bible analysis. Most often we used to play with words or played some board games. But for all of us, the greatest reason we loved to come here by far, was the loving Father Emanuel. He was the Church Guardian, the most significant position that one could hold at our church. He was a short, plump guy in his 50-es, with a messy dark hair and sparkly eyes. He was something else: vibrant, easy going, always cheerful and singing along while walking the halls of the church, one could not do anything but love him. His easy going style was our delight in the Bible studies because with him we laughed, made jokes and overall, during those lessons, we got what the Bible was all about: good life with no worries. I liked father Emanuel a lot. We all did.

I bought myself the “Little Prayer Book”. It was a white, soft rubber cover book that could fit into the palm of my hand. I explored it with delight.

*Wow, this is cool. It has many prayers, some for the morning, some for the evening time. I will use them all the time.* I used to watch that prayer book cover as if it were sacred and flip its pages and read. Also this was my favorite activity to excuse myself from homework without feeling guilty about it.

To me one of the best and most mysterious verses was the one where Nicodemus, the Jewish leader, came to Jesus. After talking to him for a while, Jesus said, “I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

*What does this mean? What does it feel like, what’s it like to be born again?* No answer came. *How would I be, what would I think and do if I were born again?* The thoughts puzzled me.

Anna and I were the only ones who, for some time, liked to go for the early morning mass. The early dawns in May were something special with flowery gardens all around. The air was warm but thin and it allowed for the ease of the movement. It was unusual to wake up at 6:45 in the morning. I didn’t like the heavy feeling on my eyelids. I used to quickly put the yesterday’s clothes on and rush out, yawning. The cacophony of the birds was overwhelming and heaven—like. 10 minutes later I used to be in front of the church. Although one could see the

church tower by standing in her front yard, she was usually late and because of that we frequently missed the mass opening.

Nevertheless, the mass was beautiful. We were the only people below the age of 60. My favorite part of the mass was commenting old people with Anna and silently laughing from the bottom of my lungs and belly with such intensity that could be felt only when one knew he was not supposed or allowed to laugh. The priests got their fair share as well, as we would go red with maniacal laughter, observing their lazy walk in sandals being dragged over the worn out stone floor dating back to many centuries ago.

For two older teenagers, I had to admit that both of us must have been a bit weird, getting up so early and rushing to the church. What I didn't know then, was that this was the time when the good seed was continually planted in me, by someone who was praying for me.

The routine of going to church gave me an inner peace and assurance of good which I could not find anywhere else, certainly not inside of me. Most of my days I walked with a knot in my stomach, expecting to be hit by some form of punishment, not deserving anything good.



## 6. MISERY

UNIVERSITY DAYS WERE on. Viviana enrolled to the University of Veterinary Sciences, in Zagreb, Croatia's capital. Since it was quite usual that there were other students there, soon she befriended Daniela and soon, the two of us got introduced. She was a bit shorter than me, had a long brown hair and a wider type of face with wide mouth and thin lips. She was slim and liked everything "Vichy Laboratories". The weekend we met she came with Viviana to Rijeka, to her parents' home and stayed over the weekend.

"We will all go to Valentino. Bozena will drive. We can pick you up at 10pm. Then, as usual we can go to Opatija first, get a drink or a cake, and then we'll go to the Valentino club," Viviana told me on the phone. I was in my room, chatting with her while lying on the bed.

"Sure, sounds like a good plan to me," I lied. We hung up.

*Typical Viviana; it is Saturday night and she thinks that people will eat cakes when all the money must be secured for drinks and cigarettes. Of course, since she does neither, she can have a cake. What a pure girl she is.*

No plan for any night life sounded good to me anymore. After the night club incident of few years ago, I became like paralyzed with fear. I was afraid someone will beat me up for no reason at all. To me everything felt out of control. I was a victim of my imagination. Now, sitting on my bed, I felt my stomach churn and my chest became heavy. It was hard to breathe.

*Sinisha, you know this isn't real. Nothing bad will happen and certainly nothing bad is happening now, so you know this is an illusion. You have gone to the clubs and crowded areas so many hundreds of times before in your life and nothing bad ever happened. Nothing. Even that night when you were accused of hitting that girl, everything was solved without the fight, and you were not guilty anyway. You have not done anything bad. Tonight will be cool, you can talk to people, dance if you want to, drink, whatever.*

I didn't feel better. I went to the kitchen. On the way there I peeked through the living room door to check on my mom. She was watching TV. The news anchor was reporting of new victims in Sarajevo. Someone was shooting at them left and right while they were at market squares, trying to find some groceries to fill their empty stomachs and probably find some meaning in life by doing a normal activity, like going shopping with their families, in their otherwise totally chaotic world and lives torn by the war.

*Good, I should not be noticed.* Tiptoeing to the kitchen cabinets, I opened one. I dug my hand towards the familiar secret spot. *Ah, here they are.* I touched a small rectangular box. I pulled it out. I opened it, took one pill and swallowed it. As silently as possible I pressed the box back, underneath the other drugs.

*This one is strong. I can't get them without prescription, so once they are gone I will have to find some other way to tranquilize myself. There are some herbal natural pills that they sold without prescription these days. I'll check that later.* Those particular pills were there for few years. I didn't dare to check the expiration date. I didn't even care. I needed to be calmed by something.

Feeling the effects of the pill, I showered in peace. After getting ready, I kissed mom and went out. Walking down the stairs I made sure that on every new flight of stairs I stepped with my right foot on the first stair. It could not be with my left foot, because then something bad would happen to me or my mom, I reckoned. Also the total number of my steps on each flight of stairs could end with five, seven, or nine. If there were eight stairs to step on, I would step on six and then take a double step so that the total number was seven, otherwise I feared that something awful would happen or I would probably die.

My life was a torture, a self-inflicted misery. I knew it, but I could not help myself. My hands were tied.

The disco club atmosphere was, well, the disco club atmosphere: cigarette smoke everywhere, people pushing and shoving to and from the dance floor, light show and moving disco balls on the ceilings. There were a few smaller separated areas, where the noise was not overwhelming. We saw a spot from the distance. I pushed through sweaty bodies. I wanted that separate area.

*Good, it looks isolated, it is open from one side only.* Even to myself I sounded weird. I sounded like a soldier assessing the battle situation and how to stand his ground. That was my life now. Fighting the fear to survive another minute and another day. Finally we sat in comfy, fluffy chairs and ordered drinks.

*I better start drinking, otherwise I will have to leave. Ok, no one around us looks too drunk or out of control, so I should be fine.* I concluded as the waitress was smiling and absentmindedly lowered the glasses onto our table. All around me I saw young men flirting with girls, girls giggling and using the moment to drink at the guy's expense.

*Man, I don't like these women. I can see the dirtiness in their eyes. All they want is to take advantage of men. Why can't I go like that and seduce a guy? Or why am I not the girl to be seduced by men like that? I wish I had a vagina. I could have sex with whoever guy I wanted to, I would not need to pretend. It would not be abnormal since I would be the girl and he would be the guy.*

"Ok we are going to dance," Ivan said, interrupting my self-pity. He and a couple of other girls stood up and disappeared, swallowed by the smoky crowd and the shining silver walls.

*Ok, only Ivan went to dance. Igor is still here in case the fight breaks out. He can defend me.* I anxiously looked around like a security guard to check on the situation and possible suspicious faces that could become the trouble makers. I was on my third drink, feeling less anxious. In this artificially peaceful state of mind, I found enough courage to do what I truly wanted: I went to dance too.

I blended well into a moving crowd and managed to loosen up a bit more. I loved the music. I didn't know if I was a good dancer or not, but I liked dancing and I wasn't sparing any moves. I let my arms fly everywhere; I let my legs go with the rhythm. *I am cool. I am ok. No danger, no one is after me. Only an illusion.* I was happy.

Walking back to our seat I felt more like a real man than earlier that night. I even dared to look into other people's eyes.

*Hmm, what's going on here?* I observed something I noticed even earlier tonight. Actually I observed someone. Daniela was eyeing me.

*And she is looking at me, like, like that!* I couldn't help but look back at her. Our eyes locked. I felt a surge inside of me. It was a mixture of fear, excitement and adventure.

*Where is my glass? Oh good, here it is.* I gulped it all down. I could not tell who was sitting with us, what song was thumping through the air or who was passing by. All of that went out of my scope of attention. All that I saw were her eyes on me. And I didn't know what will happen next.

The answer came very quickly. Whether it was a lot of alcohol in me or her move was too fast to catch it, I couldn't tell, but suddenly she was in my lap.

*My God! What is she doing? This is crazy! I am not ready for this!* At the same time I examined my body and feelings from the inside. Nothing was happening down there. She was pressing me there with her bottom, but I was in sheer confusion and didn't know how to respond. She replied to that unspoken question: She pressed her lips on mine. Now my eyes were wide opened and hers were so close to mine that for a few moments I stared directly into her eye pupils. I saw the eye—liner and mascara on her eye brows, all from close up. Then I closed my eyes. It was easier. I gave in to a girl and I allowed her to lead. Her tongue felt funny and it was all wet. Then she started to moan.

*God, she must be on drugs or something. I must break free of this situation.* Then I switched my observation to my lower body parts again.

*Still nothing down there. Shouldn't I be having an erection by now? At least that's what was happening in porn. Once the girl started to touch the guy, he was already hard and ready. This is ridiculous. For sure I am gay. What normal man wouldn't get a hard on in a moment like this?*

At that time of my life I didn't know that alcohol makes you less potent. I didn't know that in our human nature it would not be unusual not to get an erection in a loud disco room filled with people. I didn't know that it was totally ok not to feel anything for a girl that one has never met before. I didn't know that for healthy sexual stuff love was needed too, knowing each other was needed too. I didn't know that it wasn't about penis or vagina. I didn't know that it was ok to have one's own taste and that not every girl was good for me or I for her. I just didn't know.

*From what I saw, when things like this happen to others my age, they are happy, cool, hot, they want more. And what am I doing here? I am waiting when she will stop kissing me so that I can relax. Shit, who knows what will happen next? Will she grab me there? What am I supposed to do now? What to say?* I became stiff as a plank.

Finally the kissing stopped. She removed her face away from mine and looked at me blissfully. Without looking at the table, I grabbed the first glass that I could lay my hand on and took a good sip. Another one. And another one. She finally unlocked her gaze and I started to breathe again. *No erection, no love feeling, totally nothing. I am a loser and I am gay.*

I looked around. Igor was smirking and his eyes told me something like: ‘Dude, this is cool. She is yours.’ I looked at Vivana. Her eyes told me something like: ‘Mmm that is so beautiful.’ I looked at Marin. His eyes were telling: ‘Where’s the waitress? My glass is empty.’ After couple of hours, the night was finally coming to an end.

As I sat in the back of Fiat Punto, I leaned my head on the window. As we were passing the power poles and intersections, the dawn appeared. The sea was calm and it seemed that the only sounds were the car engine and our breathing. I was calm. I was always calm when the time to go home came, because home was where I pretended the least. There was too much living as I thought others wanted me to live. I was in the vicious cycle of fighting many wars in my mind. I could not stop them or silence them. I didn’t even think that there was something to be silenced, I simply took my mind and life condition as the facts of life, as normal. Little did I know about real life.

Coming back to present, I glanced at Daniela. I didn’t care. I was home. Getting out of the car in the early morning light, I told her,

“Bye, we had a great time. Hopefully we’ll see each other soon.” I knew that in the afternoon she would go back to Zagreb.

“Yes, call me,” she said warmly. I forced a smile. I started to climb the stairs, making sure that I avoided all the cracks in the stone. Stepping on them would bring bad luck to me.

The spirit of illusion was on me. I thought and lived illusion on all sides. It was slowly but surely taking over my life and soon it presented me with an opportunity that would change the course of my life for many years to come.

## 7. FULL BLOWN GAY

ALLEN WAS BACK. And with him came Patrick. Patrick was a 20-year old American guy with short brown hair, green eyes, slim and good looking body.

*Hmm, cool guy. Yes! Sexy guy.* I scanned him from top to bottom. *Typical cute American head with narrow face and impressive body, built up but not too much; just the right size of muscles and all.* The view of him made me feel quirky and seductive.

He was Allen's friend. Since Allen left for the US few years back, he was still in the University there and now he brought his friend along. Allen's girlfriend stayed in the States.

"I love your country, Sinisha. It is beautiful," Patrick said. I rolled my eyes but he couldn't see that. All foreigners were telling us how beautiful our country was.

"Yeah, it's really something. So, tell me, how is life in the States, how is the University going?" I enjoyed meeting foreign people, as they always brought with them that fresh, western civilization feeling with different views of the world.

"It's cool," he was brief. His white teeth and moving lips captured me.

"Hey, Sinisha! Me, Patrick and my folks are going to the cabin this weekend. Do you want to come along? C'mon, let's go, it's going to be fun!" Allen tried hard. I was persuaded the moment he mentioned the cabin, his pushing for me to come was totally unnecessary.

"Sure I will go." I loved the nature and I knew Allen's parents' cabin was in the middle of the woods, right beside the lake, in the hill region, about one hour drive from the city.

I woke up early, just in case. Allen and his family picked me up. About 20 minutes away from my home, the scenery began to change. We started to go uphill, the city was left behind and even the villages became scattered. Now the green woods with rocky patches prevailed. The fresh air could be sensed even in a car.

"Ok guys, now it will get bumpy," Allen's dad was enthusiastic about leaving the asphalt road behind. The path was narrow and winding, and the car was occasionally hitting the tree twigs that hanged above the gravel road.

After about 10 minutes of the rocky ride, a brown cabin appeared; true wooden, two storey cabin. The front yard was a clearance, a lawn of a sort. Right in front of the house was a big rectangular wooden table and no chairs. No one permanently lived there.

"Guys, why don't we take a walk down to the lake, while mom and dad get the cabin ready?" Allen said.

"Sure, I am ready to go. You, Patrick?" I radiated excitement.

"I am ready as ready can be."

After a few hours of exploring the woods and enjoying the lake, it was time to go back.

“Guys, you are just in time for delicious chicken wings and drumsticks.” Allen’s dad was beaming while flipping the pieces of meat on the terrace barbeque.

The dinner was marvelous. As the sun was setting over the nearby mountain tops, Allen’s mom got up and after a minute came back to the table with playing cards in her hand.

*Oh no, I am not good at cards. I suck. Do we really have to play?* I didn’t like being a loser.

“Oh cool, let’s play.” Patrick suddenly got awake from the after—meal slumber.

“You know how to play Croatian card games?” I was astonished.

“Sure. Me and Allen played many times before.”

The game started. And then another one. All the while Allen’s mom was refilling our glasses with a fine, first class domestic red wine.

*This wine is good, and I am kind of drunk. Maybe I should stop. Maybe...* My thoughts got interrupted. Something was going on.

*Hey, what was that? Did I see that well?* I kept playing and pretended I was focused on cards, all the while observing people at the table. My heart jumped.

*I think I saw it well, now it happened again. And now again.* I got goose bumps.

“Guys, what’s this? I am winning one game after another,” Allen’s mom was content.

*Who cares who is winning? Let me check it again, let me see. Oh wow! This is deep. I don’t think it’s a coincidence. There is something going on.* Abruptly I stood up and walked to the washroom to empty my bladder and to recollect my drunken thoughts.

When I came back and sat down, I checked it again. There was no mistake: Patrick was eyeing me. Actually he was devouring me with his eyes. I almost choked. I returned the stare and within seconds our eyes were fixed on each other. I barely glanced at the cards any more.

*Shocks, I hope no one can see this. I can’t stop myself. This is intense.* I still wasn’t sure what to expect from this staring, what was behind, but my body got goose bumps and being drunk only made me more free and open to anything; everything.

Within few minutes we started to consume each other with our eyes and I felt like his glare penetrated my bones. My breathing became heavy. In order to break the nervousness and the surge of sexuality, I looked away. The surroundings were pitch black. The cabin lights spread some 20 feet out towards the lawn and the thicket and that was it. I couldn’t see any further. Night crickets were filling the air that even in mid—summer was getting cooler by the hour.

Couple of minutes later Patrick stretched and announced,

“I am going to bed. No more wine, no more cards.” Everyone chuckled. Everyone but me, that is.

*Where is he going to sleep? Where am I going to sleep? Which room will I be in? The same as Patrick? No idea what Allen's mom prepared.* I wanted to jump and run after him right away. But I controlled myself thinking that everyone would know what was happening and that my intentions were going to be obvious. So I stayed for another glass of wine. Then I got up too. Allen's mom looked at me.

"Sinisha, you will be in the same room with Patrick, up the stairs and then first to the right."

"Ah, ok," I barely muttered, with my heart in my throat, after hearing the best news ever. I wished good night to everyone and went in.

*Wow, too much wine for the night.* While I was climbing up the stairs I held the hand rail ever tighter. I opened the door. The room was kind of small, with the ceiling lowering towards the window opposite the door. There he was, lying on the bed, the night lamp lit. He was in his white t-shirt and black underwear. I pretended I wasn't paying attention and sat on my bed.

*I just can't go to sleep now.* I reckoned. So I told him in an easy going, wine influenced way,

"Why were you looking at me like that?"

He froze. Then he sat up and looked at me, silence breaking my ears. He didn't say a single word but just kept staring directly into my eyes.

"May I kiss you?" I asked and I wanted to throw my arm ahead of the words and take them back before they reached his ears. My mouth got dry.

"Yes." Patrick answered, laid back on the bed and surrendered.

I walked over and sat beside him on the bed. Our lips touched. *He tastes like wine.* I didn't like that too much, but I didn't care. So we continued, intensified. Then we started to touch each other. First gently, then harder and deeper, more and longer. I let myself go and pressed my body on his. We both wanted it badly.

*Shoot, the door is unlocked. Allen can come in any moment to check on us.* I liked this, it made the night wilder and more dangerous. After few minutes of intense encounter it became clear that we could not go on without being too loud. I gently left him on his bed; I got up and went to lie down in mine. My heart beat slowed down.

I stared at the ceiling.

*Hmm, this was weird. He is a good looking guy. I mean, I got so attracted to his eyes and how he was piercing me with that deep, wanting look. His is a cute, great looking guy. His body looks cool, his legs and feet are perfect. He is intelligent and I could talk to him ok, but this is not as I imagined. This is not even close to as I imagined hot wild gay encounter. What is wrong with me? In porn those men have hard on before they even start anything and they get hotter and hotter as they touch each other. It was like that but not quite like that. Hmm.*

It must have been that I fell asleep wrapped up in those thoughts and effects of the alcohol, because the next time I opened my eyes the room was flooded with daylight and I could hear the footsteps and muffled talk down on the ground floor of the cabin. Reluctantly I turned toward Patrick and looked him in his eyes, across the room. He did the same. His gaze went off somewhere beyond me.

*He looks confused. I am confused.* Quickly both of us broke the gaze and turned our eyes toward the ceiling. We didn't say anything.

"I am going down stairs," I said as I got up and put my jeans on.

"I'll be there in a sec," he replied, still looking at the ceiling.

While climbing down and holding the handrail because I felt dizzy from the wine, the thought occurred, *I am not happy. This is something new, it is cool, but, I don't know, I just don't know. Or maybe it's just a bad hangover.* I realized my face and lips were tight, probably from worry.

"He-hey! Look who is awake. Good morning Sinisha, how are you? How did you sleep? Did we wake you up with our chatter and clanging pots?" Allen's dad was cheerful and on the move, as usual. I glanced at Allen and by his look I reckoned he had some post drinking problem too. Allen's mom was reading the morning newspaper. She must have gone to the town and bought it, probably at the crack of dawn. Pretending that I wanted to enjoy the late morning sun, I stepped outside into the heat and instantaneous blindness. It took me good 10 seconds to adjust to the outside light, just by the time I started to panic that there was something wrong with my eyes.

*I am weird. This is all weird. What is my life? I liked kissing and touching him but somehow I didn't receive back what I expected. Not from him but from me. Like inside of me I expected some fulfillment, some special feeling of being exhilarated and filled up with happiness. I don't know, maybe it's wine.* One thing was for sure: my life changed. I could not pinpoint anything but there was a switch in me, like someone came and pulled the power bar from "off" to "on". Or was it from "on" to "off"? I couldn't tell.

One day later we were back in Rijeka. Patrick and I arranged the meeting without Allen. I came up with some lie, with the made up scenario where I was certain that we would be alone. And it worked. After a long walk we came to my place. We sat on the secluded terrace. The neighbourhood and my mom were at a short distance, but the sexual desire made me free—spirited. All I wanted was him. I wanted to taste him more. After I made sure that mom was inside the house, we immediately grabbed each other down there and started the wild kissing.

*This is great. This is cool. Wow, what a moment.* I was lustful. With the corner of my eye I was checking the house entrance door, just in case if my mom walked through it, even though that was useless.

*If she comes out that door, we are busted. There would be no time to get apart from each other.* Thrilled by a possibility of being exposed, I pressed my lips harder onto his. The moment

was too hot to care about anything else. That afternoon turned into evening and in my car I got to relish Patrick even more.

Now I was definitely different. The animal in me was awake. By some strange shift in me, some weird change that I felt in my whole being, I quickly became oblivious to anything else but my desire for sexual pleasure. I didn't even think about Patrick as a person any more. All that mattered was what he could give me and what I could take for my own satisfaction. At the same time I noticed another unexpected fact: While with him I was not ready to sexually express myself. I was all set to please him only. With him I wanted to please him and then alone in my room, I was pleasing myself. All that was puzzling but I decided that I wouldn't make any analysis.

*Sinisha, the time for endless thoughts and mind—torture reasoning is gone. No more. I know what I want. I want a man and I have a man,* I commanded myself because every time I started to think, it hurt. It hurt me to try to connect the dots when I didn't know where to connect from and where to connect to.

A week later Patrick was gone. He went back to the United States. We promised to stay in touch and e-mail each other. He was gone and I was in pain. I picked up the phone.

“Hey, it's me,” I told Daniela.

“Hey, how have you been over the past few days? You didn't call much. Did you have fun with Allen and Patrick?”

I told her that Allen's friend was visiting and that we needed to entertain him while he was there. *He got some entertainment, that's for sure.*

“Yeah, it was cool. Usual stuff, you know. Going around, drinking and doing nothing.” I became a marvelous liar. After I hung up the phone, I looked outside. The sun was setting over the mountain and the evening serenity was taking over the hustle and bustle of the city.

Right before meeting Patrick, Daniela and I went for a trip together. It was marked by my total failure in bed. I was afraid that I wouldn't get an erection. And it happened. I felt like a miserable piece of dirt, useless and weak. No one has ever told me that sexual issues were quite usual when a person lived in constant state of fear and confusion, like I did. Not being able to look into her eyes any more, few weeks later I broke up with her.

Another thing unknown to me at the time was that I was in the hands and chains of the spirit of perversion. It took me by deceit. It played me by feelings and as the time went by I became a slave to them. I became a menial servant to it — a deceitful spirit. I was satisfied, not knowing that yet.

## 8. WEIRD MEN

*I'VE GOT AN idea! In that magazine that I checked the other day there were so many ads of men seeking men. I could do that too, but how to do it so no one can see me and connect me with that? Man, this town, this country, this is crazy. Everybody knows everyone, especially my mom. I don't think there is a living person in this city that she doesn't know. It's either her friend, or son of a friend or mom of a friend.* I let out a desperate laugh.

I bought few magazines. *Ok, what do we have here? My my, you look good, man. Even though I don't see your face, your lower parts are...well...all hot. Hmm, what about this ad here?* I started to read aloud,

“Good looking, hot man seeking another 20-30 year old man for friendship. Yeah, right, like you care about friendship when all I see is your penis and legs and like I care about friendship with you.”

After a few more weeks of internal torture on what to do, my sexual desire overcame fears.

I parked in front of the ugly cement building, built in the 60-es of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with unmistakable communist look of repulsive coldness and practicality, with some wires of never finished wall protruding out of the cement block. My stomach was churning and I wanted to go to the washroom, but since this nervousness became the norm I decided not to pay any attention to it.

*Ok, first the check out. The person at the counter, do I know her? No, she looks like a kind that we don't associate with. Ok.* I stepped in.

“Hi, I want to respond to an advertisement. Here is the ad number.”

With my hand slightly shaking I gave her a piece of paper and pretended I was admiring the reception so as to avoid looking at her. She didn't say a word. After about the minute she said,

“Ok, it is done, the owner of the ad will contact you,” she looked down and continued her paper work. For her I didn't exist anymore.

“Err, aha, ok.” I quietly walked away.

Days went by. *Who will he be? How will he look like? What if he butchers me? What if they find me dead floating in the sea? What if he tells everyone what we're doing?* I became an expert in scaring my socks off, and after just a minute of thinking like this I had a paranoid anxiety attack that lasted for few minutes. My vision became blurry and I needed to slow down the breathing. *You know what? If anything, I will not respond to any communication and I will never go for any meeting. Yeah, that's it. Forget the whole thing, I simply won't answer any request to meet.*

Few days later I met the first guy. He looked old. He was 27, he said. He was a school teacher, stocky and already bold. We sat in a small bistro covered in burgundy walls with the soft music playing in the back ground. Thick carpets made the voices and the sounds hushed.

“So, Sinisha, do you have much experience, in...this? What do you like?”

He got me there.

“Err, yeah, I’ve met some guys. It’s cool to meet like this,” I looked away not wanting the lie to be seen in my eyes. *Why is he asking me this? I don’t know what I like.* The guy was becoming utterly boring.

“So, why don’t we walk to my place and then you can come in for a drink?” He smiled victoriously. It was clear that he planned it all ahead.

“Sure, let’s go,” I answered. *I must find a way to get rid of him.*

“Where do you live?”

“Oh, I am not from here so I am renting a place in Trsat.”

“Where, in Trsat?” My eyes grew a grade wider and I froze in my step.

“Well, you know that steep little hill where the road bends sharply?”

I nodded.

“Well, there in that house with two balconies that go all the way around the house. I live in their basement.”

The feeling of dread whooshed through my body.

“That is the home of one of my school mates. I can’t go there.” Not that I wanted it anyway, but I even became angry at this man, thinking how could he go and live there where the part of my childhood was.

*I played and rode the bicycle there in the area since the time I was seven. Later on in that place we got drunk so many times. People puked in the rooms and in the washroom of that basement. We smoked more than a million cigarettes there and told too many made up stories. And he lives there? And I am supposed to go there with him? No way!*

“Look, sorry, but I can’t go there. I can’t be seen going down to the basement with you.”

“But who cares? It’s the night time.” I felt despair in his voice. *He wants me there alone with him. Not happening. I don’t like him.*

He was becoming more disgusting and slimy to me by the minute. I didn’t like that moment of catching the animal inside of him, visible in his look. *Ok, no way, this guy is becoming too wild now*

“Look, we’ll talk on the phone, I’ll call you. I have to go now. Bye.” I didn’t leave any room for objections. Politely I waited and stood there for couple of seconds and then I walked hurriedly away.

We never saw each other again. At home I was thinking about the look in his eyes. *I didn't like that. I felt like I was his food. Ah, never mind, I'll find a cool, sexy guy.*

In the days that followed, I was thinking and overthinking, as usual. *Those eyes; they were hollow. Man, this is what I noticed with that other guy.* I remembered one more failed hook up. *Their eyes are like glossy and shiny, like there is something covering them and at the same time they are hollow, like there is some dark pit or something, behind those eyes. Anyway, who cares? I know what I'll do; I will be the one placing the ad this time, and see what's going to happen. This way I will choose who to see. Ok, that's it, I will...*

"Where are you honey? Where did your mind wander?" Mom interrupted my plotting and planning, while putting the soup into our plates. The delicious smell of the homemade chicken soup felt so good that it invoked instantaneous peace in me.

"Oh no no, I am here, present and ready to devour it all!"

She laughed.

"Mom, you remember how I used to eat the whole roast chicken? The only thing left for you was one leg," I grinned.

"Yes, that was just a few years back, when you were still a teen. Wow, every time you sat at the table you ate like you have never eaten before. You remember that time we were in a restaurant in a downtown and we met that old woman, what was her name? Oh, I think she died some time ago. Anyway, yeah, she came to our table and when she saw how much food you had in front of you she said with a little bit of concern: "Dear Davorka, don't you feed you son better? Dear boy, are you going to eat all that?" Now mom stopped eating; her face crinkled in laughter and I followed suit.

"Hahaha of course I remember and I looked at her offended, like what are you talking about?"

"And then she asked where my husband was," mom laughed again. "What could I have told her? Maybe: "Oh my husband? He is currently at home, vomiting and looking weird after a week of heavy drinking. But no worries, we are one cool family."

After she said that, I spat the soup out onto my plate, my belly hurting with laugh spasms.

"When was the last time you spoke to your dad?" She was serious now.

"About a week ago." I looked at the still steaming soup.

"Ok, so it's time to call and check on him."

I rolled my eyes.

"I know mom, but I don't like it when you tell me to do it. I can do it when I feel like it."

"Yes, but it would never happen like that. So, respect him; no matter what, he is your father after all."

“Ok, I’ll call today.”

After the meal was over I got up.

“I need to go meet Tanya. She will give me a book that I need about Accounting, for the exam. I’ll be back soon,” I kissed her.

“No problem, see you later,” she said while putting dishes into the sink.

With the mix of eagerness and jitters I jumped into my little orange car with worn out tires and non-working wipers and off I went to place another ad.

## 9. LOVE FINALLY?

THE PAPER WAS yellowish with light pink flowers drawn on the outer edges. I sat on my bed. Mom was out. His name was Theo, he wrote in the letter. He was 22 years old, neat, caring, desiring male's company and intimate relationship.

*This sounds ok. This guy sounds different from others that I had met. All the others were weirdoes. I feel ok reading this, like he is not an oddball or anything.* I looked inside the envelope. *No photo, hmm. What if he's ugly?*

"Enough of that!" I jumped off the bed; "Like why would I get all the worst, every time?" I looked around as if expecting someone to answer. "I'm going to call him and I'm going to call him right now." I moved towards the phone as if pinched by a needle, as if knowing that if the call was not done that very second, it would never be done.

*I am doing this. Stop worrying, you already did it before. Maybe I should not call. I am doing this.* I dialed the number. My heart was in my throat.

"Hello?" said somewhat weak and definitely gay voice.

"Oh, hi, is it Theo?"

"Yes, speaking."

"Hi, I am Sinisha, I received your letter," I paused. No reaction. I continued carefully, "In regards to the meeting." Being overly suspicious I stressed the word 'meeting', just in case it was some other Theo, so that it sounded like the topic was a business, and not some other type of a meeting.

"Oh yes, how are you?" he became cheerful and so did I.

I chose the meeting place. The seaside bar, very well—known but not visited by my type of crowd. More on the local side, outside of town. We shook hands. He was my height and he was slim, with a hair dyed blonde. His body moves were gay.

*He is ok. Yes he is.* We sat down at the terrace table and ordered drinks. We observed each other. His eyes were hazel brown and just a bit glassy. *I don't know what's with gay folks, those weird eyes, like a curtain is on them, or something. But ok, his look is normal, just a bit on that glassy, drugged side.*

He was smiling. I was smiling. The evening went on. When I finally managed to take my eyes off of him and looked around, I realized that we were alone on the patio.

"Oh, it's late. Let's leave." I waived my head towards my car. I knew he came by bus.

Once we were in the car he jumped at me, no pardon and no subtlety; I instantly became hot.

*Wow, boy, easy!* The thought came but it quickly went away. I starved for the man's touch and heartily I let him be all over me. After a minute or so he leaned back on his seat, looked at me with gleeful brown eyes and said,

“Sorry, I needed to taste you a bit, to see what to expect. You are hot.”

And I was. I grinned. I was alive, finally.

After a short drive I was a bit shocked to find out his place was just three minute walk from where my father lived. Theo rented the ground floor apartment.

*This is ridiculous, I mean, oh destiny! Can I go anywhere and not being known by somebody? Is there a place in this city, no, in this world, where there are people I didn't know? I doubted that.*

The next day we met at his place. He opened the white wooden entrance door for me. The apartment had a small kitchen to the left. Right across the entrance there was a bathroom, covered in semi darkness. Then the dark hallway led to the only other room — his living room and bedroom, all in one. It looked decent, from where I stood. In the hall way I noticed an old laundry machine, probably not used for years, but just standing there. I chuckled silently, *Our people, always keeping the old and useless stuff.* Theo was carelessly wearing an old but cool yellowish t-shirt, blue jeans and was bare foot. *Mmm, you look good.* I felt a tingling around my private parts. I welcomed it.

“So, how was your day, Sinisha?” he smiled and placed a brown tea cup in my hand. “Careful, it’s hot.”

“And so are you,” I added. “It was ok, usual. How are you doing?” He took the cup out of my hand and wrapped his hands around mine. He leaned closer. The kissing was a blast.

“Let’s go to the bedroom,” he muttered with his lips on mine and then led me along.

Naked, in bed we were.

Our dating became comfortable and couple of more rendezvous made me more at rest with him. Now I was in my home, anticipating yet another date with him. *7pm. Ok, time to get ready.*

“Mom, I’m going out, I don’t know when I’ll come back.”

“Ok, no problem. Remember to take the key,” she yelled from the living room, while watching her favorite history documentary.

*Great, I look pretty hot in this new shirt. Sinisha, you are cool. And now you will see Theo.*

10 minutes later I parked the car in front of his place. *Here he is, waiting for me and longing for me at the door step. He is standing there like an abandoned teddy-bear.* A weird feeling that I was not supposed to be here rushed so fast through my body that I barely noticed it and chose to ignore it. *Oh no, no more fears. I am here and this is good.* I exited the car and casually walked in.

“Hello boy,” he said seductively and kissed me on the cheek.

I hugged him softly and returned the kiss. He smelled nice.

He made a coffee for me, sat down, took my hand into his, looked at me from top to bottom and said,

“So, how is my Sinisha today? How was work?” He had a weirdly blissful face.

*What on earth is this? Am I some kind of a husband here and he is the wife? Or maybe the other way around? My Sinisha? What’s that? Shoot, there is something so wrong here.*

“My day? It was ok, nothing special, usual sale stuff and then I helped mom with some house chores. You?”

“Oh, I worked all day as I told you I would, and I came back an hour ago.”

We got closer to each other and after a kiss or two went to his room. The soft music was on and a couple of night lamps were on, making the atmosphere intimate and cozy. He took my hands and looking at my eyes he started to dance. I followed his moves. There we were, two young men, lovers; intimate; dancing.

*My gosh, is this who I am? Is this my life and destiny, to be with a man and dance with him and live with him? In my imagination I detached me from myself and pretended I was looking upon us from the room corner. What I saw was pity, fake life, and something utterly disgusting, something so disgusting that I dared not to put it into words. Despair came over me and it became so overwhelming that I did the only thing which I knew would make me feel a bit better. I undressed him and let myself go. This is better.*

Later on that evening, I was lying in his bed. He dozed off. While looking at the ceiling my mind wandered off to our first meeting.

*That time in the car, when he was all over me, that was a strange moment. Yes, it was hot, but that whole thing, those two minutes in the car....Oh yes, now I remember, it slipped my mind, it was like I was an animal on the market place and he was checking me out, to decide whether he would purchase me or not. I didn’t know what to make of it, but I didn’t like the idea of being viewed like a piece of meat.*

Few days later I came to the point of no return with Theo. He asked me to meet him in front of the supermarket. We took a walk down the street. It was about 5pm.

*This is the worst time to walk around with him. Mom can pass this way, any moment, going back from work. And many others are on the streets.*

“Can we hurry to your home because later I have something to do?” I insisted.

“Sure, I’m done here.” He observed me carefully. I knew he noticed the urgency in my step and my voice.

Later in his apartment, the phone rang. We both were in his room, naked. He was sitting on the bed while I sat on the chair.

“Oh hi. Yes, I’ve been good. Haha. How about you?” He paused. “Oh ok, I see... And I am here with mine...Yup, he is here, my boyfriend...He? He is hot, blonde hair, a bit older than

me, cool guy,” Theo went on with whoever was on the phone. After about five minutes he hung up, smiling.

“Who was that?” I leaned forward.

“That? Oh, a guy that I met few weeks before I met you. We hooked up. He also had his friend so we were fooling around, the three of us.”

I looked at him, sitting on sheets where I was lying before and in my mind I saw two other men rolling there and having sex, on those same sheets.

“What? You were with two guys just a short time before we met?” I felt the blood rushing to my mind. My muscles became tense.

“Yeah, so what? It doesn’t matter. That was before.”

He was relaxed, like I shouldn’t worry about a thing. But he didn’t know that in front of him was a hypochondriac.

“You crazy? Who are these people? Did you know them from before? Are they from here? Where do they live? How old are they?” the panic was shaking me now.

“Relax! I don’t know, ok! Who gives a damn?” he shouted.

“Who gives a damn?” I felt the veins on my neck popping out. “Theo, what’s wrong with you? There are so many sicknesses around; there is Aids too. And you didn’t tell me anything?”

He looked at me like he never heard anything about Aids. By this time I already saw my body and internal organs dissipating and melting into liquid, attacked and killed by a disease. I stood up and put the clothes on. He was looking at me sheepishly.

“Theo, this is no joke, ok? Tomorrow you and I will go to downtown clinic and get ourselves tested for Aids.” I myself couldn’t even believe that I said these words, but I could not stand another day not knowing if I was about to die.

“Ah, oh, ok.” He said.

“Bye, see you tomorrow.” I left without looking back.

I knew that this relationship was to end very soon. *How on Earth could he be that dirty, exchanging guys just like that? What am I doing with my life? Is this life? Is this me? Sinisha, 26 year old, thinking about Aids? No, actually not thinking about aids only but putting myself into position to go around with men who don’t give a shit about anything but just how to have a good time in bed?*

I felt dirty, as if I rolled in the mud that was now stuck in every pore of my skin. I cried.

“God, help me.”

Two weeks later the test results came: Negative.

*Whoa! I will live!* All of a sudden my life got brighter. Theo was with me, happy as well.

“Theo, I need to do something down town. I will call you later,” I said sternly, knowing exactly what to tell him later.

“Oh, ok, talk to you later.” He left.

Later that day I broke up with him over the phone. We were together for five months.  
*This chapter is closed. What will I do next?*

## 10. OH CANADA

FOR YEARS I have been wishing to leave Croatia behind.

*People don't think. And they are the lucky ones. All of my friends, their families, people from work and all, I have never heard any one of them wanting the change. Sure they are complaining every single day. Day in and day out they don't like this, they don't like that. Always the same boring, stupid conversations that end up drunk, singing local songs and concluding that we are the best and screw the rest. And then the next day all over again, how brainless nation we are and how we are no good and how other countries are taking advantage of us.*

*Everything here is slow. People, jobs, this crazy mentality of staying the same all the time is freaking me out. I want out.*

After a long search for options, Canada came up as the only solution. And now, my screaming desire to leave became real. In my hands I held a Canadian Permanent Visa, with my name on it. I felt dizzy and sat down.

*This is unreal. I, Sinisha, got it? I have a visa, to work and live in Canada, the best country in the world? By this time I did a lot of internet research and I was amazed at the country and people living there. Canada surely didn't feel distant and cold any more.*

Mom supported me. But now, when it became clear that I would leave, she became concerned.

“How will you live there? How will you find a job there?”

We were alone at the moment. Krsto, her partner, was out on a shopping errand. They got along pretty well. I was happy for her. She truly deserved happiness and peace after all the gloom and heartache that happened with my dad, who years ago openly declared to both of us that even though he loved us both enormously, he loved drinking as well and that he had no intention to stop.

“It's going to be ok. C'mon you know I know how to work and I will be fine.” I tried to calm her down by reason. *This must be really tough for her.*

“But I mean, who will give you a job to do? Why would they hire you with so many other people there?”

“Mom, there are thousands of new immigrants coming to Canada every year. I am sure that they are not homeless, sleeping under the bridge. Canada has some programs for new immigrants as well, so I will be well taken care of. Don't worry.”

“How can you be so sure?” she stared into my eyes.

“I don't know, but I am sure.” I really had no clue where this confidence came from. I was certain, despite my fears, that I would be completely ok. I felt peaceful and confident in my whole being.

I held her hand and she squeezed mine.

Few days later the plane ticket was bought. I packed and left three days after celebrating my birthday. To the officer at Trieste Airport I proudly presented the Canadian Permanent Visa. No questions asked. Quick eye movement from the passport photo to my face and the hand movement to move on and get lost, was the only response I got from him. Then I looked back. My mom's face was red and full of tears. Krsto was holding her in his arms. My heart was breaking but I knew I had to go. I tightened my jaw and suppressed the tears. I waved them goodbye.

With sedatives in my blood I somewhat enjoyed the flight. My predicament that one of the engines would fall off or that one of the wings would break did not happen.

Canada welcomed me with the arms wide open. I saw the CN Tower for the first time in my life. Then a strange and deeply assuring and comforting feeling engulfed me.

*I am home.*

The black airport limo drove me to my new downtown home. The Victorian building was in a mint condition. I was to stay with Maya. I have not seen her before. We got connected through a mutual friend and she agreed to extend the hospitality until I settled in my new life. She and her son Daniel lived there, on the second floor of the small building, in a two bedroom apartment. Maya opened the door and we shook hands. The living room was spacious. Across the table on which I ate my first supper in Canada, on the opposite side of the room was a TV set, surrounded with all the video and audio add-ons. The books were neatly stacked on the shelves beside the TV. In the middle of the room, in between the Ikea wooden dining set and the TV, there was a large coffee table and a futon.

*This place is so cozy, so welcoming. And Maya is so normal. This is great!* Maya was a tall woman with the eyes piercing all the way down to my soul. Looking around with interest, I caught something out of the corner of my left eye. I looked toward the dark hallway. The half of a boy's face was visible, the other half hidden by the washroom door. He was grinning. He was observing me and gave me the sign to stay silent about him. But even though he could not be seen, the trained ears of his mother caught something and she said:

“Daniel, go back to bed, now. Don't let me repeat myself the second time.” He was gone in an instant.

Within minutes, filled with warm food and welcoming place, I began to fade away into oblivion.

“Ok, I need to sleep.” I muttered. Maya showed me my room, closed the door behind her and the next time I opened my eyes, it was morning. My first morning in Canada. *I am home.*

## 11. A DAMN GAY TROUBLE

“SINISHA, WE ARE going to see the gay parade. Do you want to come with us?” Maya asked me while I was preparing breakfast for myself. I looked at her, puzzled.

“You probably haven’t heard of it in Croatia, but here once a year gay people, their supporters and others who want to watch the show, come out on the main street and watch the happening. We will go.”

“Ah, ok, sure, why not?”

Couple of hours later we found a good observation spot on Yonge Street in downtown Toronto. The heat was on and my water bottle was emptied in no time. The parade began.

*These people look totally ridiculous. Look at those pierced nipples; look at those ugly asses wrapped up in chains. What is this? It is so hot and I have been standing in the sun for more than an hour now. What if I get dizzy and collapse? Where would I fall? Would someone take care of me?* The usual hypochondria and anxiety started.

*Never mind. Relax now Sinisha. Breathe in and out. Again, in and out.* I used a technique learned in Yoga classes. It helped a bit. *Do not worry, if you end up in a hospital, you have the Canadian health insurance and it is all free. This is one great country.*

Then something caught my eye. There, on the opposite side of the street, in the crowds of spectators. There they were, a couple. Two young guys; one a bit taller than the other, standing behind the shorter guy, holding him tight with one arm on his shoulder and another around his belly. I felt butterflies in my stomach. *I want that. I want to be hugged by a guy.* I wanted to be exactly like that shorter guy, hugged and protected by a tall, handsome guy. I deeply yearned for security and protection.

Until that day I have never heard of such thing as a gay parade. I didn’t feel anything for that crowd and I could not feel any excitement coming from any of them. The truth be told, I have not felt anything deep for anyone for the longest time. Except body lust that was unquenchable, I have somehow managed to put my feelings aside, somewhere where they would not bother me. They were painful and confusing. I could not handle them. I was totally wrapped up in myself, how to get more money and how to live successful life. But truth be told, I didn’t have life. I had my past, painful and not solved and I did the best I could to keep moving, to not stop and face the brokenness of me. Whatever I was doing, I was doing for myself and if it involved others, again it was for my own benefit and profit. I thought I was smart and open-minded. I thought I was smarter and better than others. I thought I was ahead of the crowd and the leader of all.

How empty and sad I was. Prior to coming to Toronto, I had few more failed attempts of being happy with a man. I dated a friend, and more strangers. It all boiled down to body and sexual pleasure. No matter how high I wanted to jump after those encounters, no matter how happy and fulfilled I wanted to be, to the extent that I pretended how great it was, just to keep the feeling alive, it never worked. No matter what I imagined and held dear to me as the pictures of my perfect life, it was not happening. There was no man who could give me what I truly wanted. What did I want?

Peace. I wanted peace.

And the One of whom I forgot, the One who did not forget me, was already at work, at all times, despite my total blindness and preoccupation with myself. For a long time I haven't paid any attention to Him. I was not aware that He was in the middle of that desire for peace.

For the following two years I was going about my business and in my free time checking out gay bars and meeting other gays in Toronto and Montreal. Once I spent a night in a gay quick-sex meeting place, in the middle of the Church Street in Toronto. This experience only deepened the conviction that my life was going nowhere. The quick-sex place was a building with dozens of tiny rooms with no windows. With my boyfriend for the night I walked through the dimly lit hallways toward our room. Few naked men walked by. I felt like we all were just a pieces of meat walking aimlessly around.

We entered the room. It was so small that between the bed and the opposite wall you could barely turn around and stretch your arms to put a coat off. There were few hangers for clothes, but we didn't have any need for them. We hurriedly let our clothes drop onto the cold floor and with a couple of brisk movements we were in bed.

After some 20 minutes or so, I observed a man I was with. His name was George and he looked a bit older than me. I eyeballed his body from top to bottom. Then I looked inside of me. I was not happy. Here I was, feeding the animal in me. That was all. The thoughts became overwhelming and I got up, wrapped the thick white cotton towel around my hips and went for the door.

"I need to go to the washroom. Give me few minutes."

"Sure," he smiled.

I walked out, closed the door and did not bother to check the room number. After a few turns, I found the washroom. It was also covered in semi—darkness and some nude men were walking in and out. After I was done I went back.

"Man, where is our room?" my heart started pounding. There I was, in the middle of a strange place, almost fully naked, with no wallet and no keys to come back home. I looked around: dozens of identical narrow white doors on both sides of the hall. I paced nervously up and down a few corridors, frantically trying to remember the room where the guy was waiting for me. I lost it.

"George, George, where are you? Can you hear me?" I shouted.

A young man with naked chest peeked through one of the door and looked surprised. Seeing me, he quickly shut the door, as if he were an old man afraid of the burglars.

*Thanks for helping, idiot! Ok, I must calm down and think. Think, Sinisha, think, which turn did you take, how did the walls around look like? Think think think!!* Now the nervousness turned into a sheer panic. I started to run around. After a few seconds I stopped, relieved.

"That's it, yes, this is the door," I whispered and gently knocked and open the door ajar.

“Oh, there you are! You were gone for so long, I was worried,” George feigned it and I sat on the bed, relieved but angry.

*Yeah right! Worried, my eye. So worried that you stayed in the room and didn't bother looking for me.*

After another half an hour or so, we dressed, went out and kissed goodbye.

“Ok, you have my number. Call me!” George waived his arm goodbye.

“Sure! Talk to you later.”

We parted our ways and never heard from each other again.

## 12. THE OLD FLAME

“Hey Patrick, it’s Sinisha.” My heart thumped. We spoke only once after I came to Canada. He lived in Kansas, and by now he had also finished the university and lived on his own. “Listen, I was wondering if you wanted to come to Toronto; it’s about two hour flight from where you live and you know, we can go around and spend time together.” *Why even bother saying that we could go around, when all I want is him?*

“Wow Sinisha, that sounds cool, yeah let’s do it, I’ll book a hotel room and come over. We can relive our Croatian time spent together” he smirked.

I smiled. *Eight years; eight years it has been...Patrick, handsome, sexy. Mmm, this is great.*

Three weeks later I was at the Pearson International, terminal one. My stomach churned. *Will we recognize each other? What if he’s weird and I didn’t want to see him at all? What to do for the next few days with him if I didn’t like him?*

My fears were set aside few moments later. My eyes widened. *Oh there he is, as handsome as before.* I waived at him, our eyes firmly set on each other. I gulped. *Fool, look at the cars when you are crossing this street, not at me!* Thankfully there were no vehicles for just enough time for him to carelessly walk across, towards me.

“Sinisha, good to see you,” he said joyfully. We hugged.

*Where is the damn car? I want to grab and fondle him.* I walked faster.

Finally we were inside and I put my hand onto his leg. We kissed.

Two hours later, our clothes were on the floor; we were in bed. I wanted him greatly.

Later on I reflected upon him and my perception of how things were between us. *This is Patrick and not just anybody. He is as hot as ever and he likes me too. And this should have been like an explosion. But it wasn’t, to me. I didn’t have such a great erection. I feel hotter when I am doing it to myself, than now.*

Over the next couple of days we spent more time together and my first enthusiasm was gone. Looking at my toes, I contemplated,

*Maybe it will be better tonight. I should be more relaxed.* But it was the same. *Well, I did feel totally hot for a few minutes, that’s true, but that was it. Nothing special, no wild hours to remember.*

I watched him while he was nonchalantly walking towards the bathroom, naked, his buttocks moving from left to right and back. I was lying on the bed, right arm underneath my head so that I could see him better.

*This is no longer a young man from eight years ago. His body changed, matured. He has those muscles and somehow firm walk and he is all...I don’t know...older? Not fun anymore? No*

*more youth sparkle in his eyes. This is a man. And his penis is no longer cute. It is threatening, big, weird. I don't know... Can't think now.*

Patrick was not too talkative either. I had a feeling that he too was observing the whole situation but was not bringing it up. Driving him back to the airport few days later, I felt a relief.

“Bye, friend. Take care.” We kissed, and as soon as he disappeared from the view, a dread of being lonely came over me.

Walking back to my car, I bowed my head. *You know what, Sinisha? You are alone again, but you were alone even when he was here with you. You were alone walking with him on the street and you were alone with him in the bed. All the time you are alone.*

The empty Pepsi can was on the airport garage floor. It lied there at the right time. I kicked it with all might and it smashed into a low cement wall. I didn't feel any better. I clenched my teeth.

*Now my leg is hurting because I jerked it too sudden and too hard.* I let out the desperate laugh. *Ok, so I am going to torture myself repeatedly with useless thoughts, going in circles.*

Again it was me. I felt bad and I thought that it was me who is bad somehow.

It never occurred to me that... Well, it never occurred to me.

### 13. CONFUSED IDENTITY

THE NEXT DAY I spent in bed. Lying under the blue sheets, I had to switch my attention away from Patrick, to something soothing. So I remembered the recent Montreal trip and I let my mind go back, in the heat of those nights.



My right hand was in his back pocket, gently touching his ass. His name was Matt. We stood close to each other in one of the crowded Montreal's gay bars located on the main gay street in the city. I met him the night before. Upon arriving to Montreal I first went to a church.

*I like it in here; so peaceful.* I looked around and enjoyed statues of angels and the way of the cross, explained in steps, each step in a different picture frame. I kneeled on the step in front of the bench.

*What will I pray for? I don't know. I'm just going to kneel for some time.* For a while I had my eyes closed and later on I was staring at the gray stony ground, my head bowed.

*Jeans is still ok, not wet, but this funny jacket smells like an animal. It always does when some rain or snow falls on it.* I wrinkled my nose and stood up. Since nothing special happened, I left.

For two hours I wandered around the city, looking for a room to stay. I have never been there before and I was getting tired. My legs hurt. Soon the street outlook changed.

*Oh, what is this? Gay clubs, sex toys shops, hmm, I'm in a gay area. Ok, definitely time to get a room.* I pretended like it didn't matter where I was, but knowing that I was in gay area gave me thrills and I felt the familiar animal in me awakened. I entered a coffee shop. Most guys checked me from top to bottom and never took their drooling look off of me. On the wall opposite the entrance, there was a sign, "Rooms available, inquire upstairs, around the corner."

Soon after I was in a hot shower and I let the soothing water take the tiredness away. *That's it. I am going out to find a man.* Putting the clothes on, I looked around. The room was spacious with a king size bed in the middle. Outside the room there was a common area with a big living room and a small kitchen. The empty kitchen cupboards and low room lights made me feel miserable. There was no one else around.

Few minutes later I was strolling down the streets. I entered into a first gay strip bar, took a seat and ordered a scotch on the rocks. The show started and in the next 30 minutes or so there was a parade of strippers, one by one first coming out on the stage fully clothed, only to be naked and gently masturbating in front of the audience.

*I feel so hot! This is amazing.* Suddenly another thought came. *I am dirty. Look at me; and look at these people...that guy over there, this is horrible. For sure the man is about 40 years old and look at that crazy look in his eyes, how he stars at those younger men and their dicks. Am I a part of this? I feel so weird. I want to disappear.* I ordered another drink.

Later on that evening I was in a gay disco bar. This is where I met Matt. At the time we first started to kiss, sitting on a bar chairs, I still didn't know his name. After a night spent together, here we were, another evening, me touching his bum. People around were good looking and...and nothing more.

"Can we spend another evening in your room?" Matt looked at me with his lustful dark brown eyes. He was a bit taller than me. His look sent shivers of pleasure down my spine. He must have noticed it because he smirked as a mischievous boy.

"Sure, I can't wait," I smiled seductively and squeezed his bum a bit more.

"Matt, are you the only child?"

"No, I have a sister and both of us are gay. Our parents know and they are ok with that." He stopped for a moment, and then continued, "Do your parents know that you are gay?"

"No. They don't. But you know what, I am not really sure that I am gay. Maybe I'm not."

My eyes wandered away from his. The confusion about my identity was growing deeper by the day.

That was our last night together. The next day, in the afternoon, with herbal sedative in my blood, I flew back to Toronto.

*What will I tell Maya, when she asks me how it was and what I did?*

"So, how was it, Mr. Traveller?" She asked, smiling. We were in the living room, the weather forecast on TV calling for an early spring.

"It was great! It was good." I looked away. She lit a cigarette and didn't ask anything else.



## 14. MAYA'S GIFT

“WHAT IS THIS?” I stopped in the middle of the movement. Instead of continuing with the sequence of exercises, I kept sitting on the thick carpet floor in Maya’s apartment. The all familiar despair was brewing in me.

“What am I doing? What is all this crap?” I continued whispering, but to me it felt like screaming from the top of my lungs. The anguish was at the all-time high and the thoughts were heavy. I went back to the exercising routine, in a futile attempt to evade them. Daniel and Maya were still asleep.

“Time for sun salutation,” I transitioned smoothly from one pose to another, my body and movements subtle and proficient, after years of practice.

And then it hit me.

“What’s the purpose in doing this?” I stopped and sat down. “What idiotic sun salutation, Sinisha? What are you doing? Who and what are you saluting? What crazy earth greeting, what earth and what sun?”

*Ok, stop now and relax. Let me do some shoulder stand and some leg twists and they said that as long as I focused and breathed well, I would feel better.*

So I sat on the floor again, then lied down and went into the shoulder stand pose.

“No! This is fake; I am fake! Enough of this hogwash! I have been fooling myself for too long. I don’t know what I want and yoga is not helping me. I am sick and tired of looking for something. What am I looking for?” I said aloud and slammed my body back onto the floor. My vision became blurry but the tears stayed in my eyes.

*What is all this, why have I been doing the same things over and over again, fooling myself that I was ok?* I frantically started to look around, to get some sense of life back into me. I felt like my whole world was crumbling. Through the window I looked to the street and people passing by, to remind myself that I was not alone in the world.

“Why do I feel so phony, why do I do this? I don’t know what’s going on and I don’t know anything.” Pessimism flooded my mind and I wanted to run away.

“You were talking to yourself. Haha, like an old man.”

I jerked my head, startled.

“Good morning, Daniel,” I smiled.

“Give me milk and cereal,” he said briefly while yawning and mechanically grabbing his blue school bag and checking what’s inside.

*Good, there is still life around me.*

Later on in the morning I picked up Og Mandino’s “The greatest salesman in the world” and continued where I left off a few days ago.

*As long as I repeat this stuff and as long as I follow the instruction, reading every morning and evening, I will grow into the best salesman and finally I will have money.* I liked the idea; I erected my posture proudly and continued reading. I came to the part where Og was telling me that I was unique.

*So true. I am not like those other people around me. Look at them, stupid, going to work every day, never having enough, always living in debt, getting new credit cards and sinking ever deeper in debt. How can they be so dumb?* I continued reading and then analyzed myself a bit more.

*I am like a chameleon, changing the colour based on his surroundings. I can adapt to any role based on people around me and based on the situation. I am good and smart.*

Maya walked in. Her jet black hair was messy from sleeping. She sat on the futon and we drank the coffee together.

“What is going on? You are not well. I can feel it. It is oozing out of you.”

She looked at me with her soul piercing eyes. It was pointless to defend myself. I just stared back and allowed the silence to speak.

Then she stood up, walked into her room and came back a few moments later, with a thick book in her hand. She sat down and handed it to me.

“Here.” she stretched her hand out and gave the book to me.

I took it in my hands.

“The Holy Bible” I read the title aloud. Something stirred in my gut.

“Take a look into it, since I can tell you are searching for something. You may find interesting things inside.” She gently smiled.

Looking at her face and the firm and forgiving look in her eyes, I knew that even though the words she just said sounded ordinary, they were not. Her smile was mysterious and so was the book that I held in my hands; the book that I have forgotten about for the past 12 years.

Maya knew me better than I dared to admit. She was one very observant and deep woman. She lived in peace and joy of everyday life. She was strong and firm, confident in all she said and did. She never contradicted herself. She was raising her son in a loving way in which was clear who was the child, and who was the parent. She had the authority within her. She knew how to live in harmony with herself and the entire world around her. Her home was always filled with laughter and there was this aura of common sense and clear direction about her.

Going about my door—to—door sales business I started to take that red—cover Bible with me and kept it at the back seat of my rusty Honda Civic. After the hustle and bustle of the day, I would find a minute or two to simply relax. And then I would open it.

*I can read one or two lines, not more. But I like all the verses. The words are soothing and uplifting. I don't get it how come I can't read more.* Then my mind used to wander into its' usual self—deceiving pattern.

*See, Sinisha, in today's world who reads the Bible? You are not like others, aimlessly walking through life. You are better. And I have a feeling that the Bible will help me get more money as well.* That thought felt good. But the reading was difficult. Nevertheless, even after reading a few words only, a kind of a perfect and peaceful moment would envelop me.

“I don't understand it but it feels good.”

Since these short, peaceful moments spent with the Bible were the only peaceful moments I had in years, I started to read it in the morning as well.

Oftentimes, especially on Sundays, Maya used to turn the Christian TV channels on and I, having nowhere else to go, started to watch, with her.

“I like Charles Stanley the most,” I told her one evening. “He points things out in a simple and logical order.”

“I agree with everything that he says.” She said firmly.

I liked the justice that was pouring out of the preacher's words. I loved the sense of righteousness and boldness. Also, again there was that something in Stanley's words and voice that I recognized with Maya as well. I could not pinpoint what that something was, but it was good, peaceful and encouraging. I wanted it. Badly.

## 15. ACCEPTANCE

The time for me to go live on my own approached. I found out that there was one vacant apartment in our building. I signed the papers.

I announced that I would be moving out. It was the lunch time for me. The early fall day was still hot and bright and the windows were open. Daniel was playing Gameboy and Maya was in the washroom, combing her hair.

“That will be good for you,” she said serenely. Then she got excited, “Great, then I will come to your place for a drink.”

Then it happened. I could not swallow the piece of chicken meat in my mouth. I spat it out and just stared at the plate, unable to move.

“Maya, I can’t breathe.”

“Of course you can,” she answered from the washroom. “It’s all good, don’t worry.”

“No, it’s not, I feel heaviness in my chest.” A slight panic was rising in me. *Am I dying?*

She came out of the washroom and calmly said, “Here, just raise your arms, breathe in, lower them down, and breathe out.” She raised her arms; I followed her moves.

“Yeah, that’s good.” She was watching me. “The change! Sinisha, the change is coming. The change, it is scary for many people. But you will be ok, you will love it!”

I stared at her and forgot that I could not breathe.

“Man, you will have your home; you can do anything, anytime. You can walk around in your underwear; you can watch TV when you want to, whatever.” She waived her arms and raised her voice in excitement.

The following month I moved out only one floor above Maya’s place. The anxiety of that day only grew worse. I was alone.

“Maya, yesterday in the evening I could not relax. Then I took the Bible and just put it there, beside my pillow and at first I got even more scared that something bad would happen. Then I finally fell asleep.” I went over the happenings of the previous day. I spoke to her many times every day. That way I stayed with both feet on the ground. Now we were walking towards the one of the nearby bars, to sit on the patio and relish in beer and cigarettes.

“Yeah, typical devil, throwing fears and scary pictures in your mind. He would like the best to convince you that reading the Bible will make things worse and that you should just stop and forget the whole thing. If it were up to him, you would just throw the Bible away. But you stick to it, no matter what, and you will see what will happen later, as the result of that.” She put a mysterious smile on her face. We both noticed a free corner table and rushed before anyone else had a chance to occupy it.

On the surface, my life was like a surface of the Earth viewed from the space — peaceful and quiet. But as on the inside of the planet, so it was on the inside of me, full of hot lava and fierce temperatures, only waiting to erupt. People usually see the eruption as a sign of destruction and death. But they forget that the mountain top destroyed by a volcano and forests ruined by the lava also meant that the new life was about to begin there. And eventually all is good, again. As we were enjoying the second round of beers, the first eruption happened.

I leaned forward, cleared my throat and said,

“You know, Maya, I used to be with men. I was involved with them intimately.”

*Did I just say that? And am I not getting nervous? No, I am not.* I quickly observed myself.

“Ok, I understand that. So what happened that you decided to talk about that now?” she responded like a professional.

*Wow, she didn't even flinch!* Knowing Maya it was not like I expected to be hit by a baseball bat, but this was unexpected as well.

“You remember that day in a restaurant, at the party, there was that guy? I don't know; that evening, seeing him, stirred all kinds of feelings in me.”

“Ok, and how do you feel about that now?”

“I don't know. I don't want to be with men. That is disgusting.” I wrinkled my face. The last part of my statement was a lie. I didn't want to be with men but I loved the lustful feeling when I looked at them.

By this time the second beer was producing its' effect so I felt more relaxed and didn't feel scared of what may come up next in our conversation.

I looked around. Happy couples were walking down the street, the trees were still green and the life was all around.

“Will you call him?” She asked and her composure startled me.

“I don't know.” I bowed my head and stared at a couple of ants walking beside my shoe.

Few days later the phone rang. The call display showed “Marko”. I gave him my phone number at the party. Now I was at Maya's place.

“It's him!” I exclaimed and looked at her with my eyes wide open. “What shall I do?”

“Pick it up! What are you waiting for? The voice mail to pick it up?” she stretched her arms wide and pointed to the ringing phone.

*This is so strange. She is not angry or disappointed in me.* I stared at her for a split second.

“Hey Marko, how are you?” I picked up the phone and pretended I was cool.

Then I wanted Maya to hear the conversation and put him on the speaker phone. We spoke for few minutes, talked about nothing and I felt bored. We ended the call by agreeing that we will talk in the future and meet for a drink, but I somehow I knew it would not happen. After hanging up, I kept looking at Maya and asked her:

“So, what do you think?”

“Well, what does it matter what I think? What do you think?” She emphasized the word ‘you’.

“I don’t know.” I bit on my lip and looked outside the window, as if the answer would come from the white building across the street.

I wanted to know if it was ok to be gay. I wanted to know if Maya agreed with me being gay or not. I wanted to know if she thought whether I was really gay or not. I wanted to know if what I felt in my body was really who I was. I wanted to hear her opinion and I wanted her to tell me who I was.

I sighed. In any case, sharing my secrets with her felt good. It felt weird but good. Like the burden was suddenly lighter.

Without saying anything else at the moment, she stood up and went to the kitchen, to prepare lunch for Daniel. I kept sitting, my mind blank.

The eruption was about to continue.

## 16. LOOK AT ME!

I WOKE UP on a Saturday morning. While yawning and just stepping out of the bed, I noticed the sky was grey and it felt cold. I put my feet on the ground and wanted them to be another man's legs and feet, to touch them.

*It's hard to keep my eyes open. Let me go to the washroom.*

I stopped in the middle of the hallway. The coldness, the tiredness, the desires, all was gone.

“What am I doing? Why did I stop?”

Without time or will to find the answer, I reached out, grabbed the jeans and put it on. I did the same with the shirt and sweater. By this time my usual anxiety came up, and feeling that I could not breathe, I gasped for the air.

*Sinisha, stop! Where are you going? I didn't plan to go anywhere but I am ready. I must go. Go where? Where, Sinisha?* I was brushing my teeth.

“To church,” I said aloud and looked at myself in the mirror. “Sinisha, you are going to church.”

I walked to the Catholic Church. Inside there was a short lineup for confessions. I joined it.

*I have no idea what I'm doing, but I must say it. It must come out. What must? The garbage, things that I have been hiding. I must tell them or I will vomit until all is out, or until I die. I don't care.* I felt this was it. I was boiling and the lid was about to be blown off.

Cautiously I entered the small room, as if the loud steps could harm the sanctity of the place. The room was full of light and serenity. Then, just a second later, thick water started to pour. Not down the walls but down my cheeks. I could not control the crying but somehow I regained the composure. The priest was patiently sitting and gently looking at me.

“Do you want me to raise the shade between us?” He asked politely.

“No!” I almost yelled. “I want to look at you and your eyes while I am talking, I cannot hide anymore.”

And then I sat down opposite of him; and started. For 20 minutes I talked about my past and the things I did. After I was done, I thought that I would faint.

*Oh my God, I feel so drained. Is this normal?* The priest interrupted my thoughts and led me to a prayer. After we finished the prayer we had a nice conversation about God and His love. Few minutes later I walked out of that confession room, feeling light and hopeful.

Upon opening the apartment door, I stopped in the middle of the hallway and with the jacket on and keys in my hand, I proudly concluded,

*I have just confessed my sins. How did this happen? Who led me there? How did I wake up with absolutely no wish or idea to do that, and then I just put the clothes on and went there, as if someone took the charge of me? I marveled at what had happened over the past hour and later elaborated it in detail, with Maya on the phone.*

Living in my own apartment was hard for me. The only time that I wasn't feeling the fear was few minutes after waking up and half an hour before going to bed in the evening. And then many times after going to bed, I was afraid again.

*I guess that in the morning my mind is still for the first 15 minutes, and in the evening as well. And then when I go to bed I get those crazy feelings because my mind starts going 200 miles per hour again. God, please help me. I cannot quiet myself.*

As soon as my usual thinking began, the fear that I would get anxious also began and from that conclusion, the feeling of not being able to breathe also began. Then the feeling would lessen, and then come again, sometimes accompanied with a sheer panic. And on and on it went, many times a day, every single day.

I spent most of my energy on self-analysis, in the effort to change my feelings.

*Mostly I am afraid of dying. Also I see that I continually care what people think and say of me. Also I do not have money and that is bogging me down. I mean, I have some now, but I can't think like that. What if I lose my job, what if I get sick and get some serious disease, what would happen then? Also I have those imaginary dialogues with my family members and people from work, where I constantly try to show them how smart I am. Well, of course, I have to have something to say and something to know about. I don't know.*

Through those months of an ongoing disturbance and tumult, my only comfort was the Bible and spending time with Maya. She always had a word of comfort for me. She always saw things from a different perspective that was not only uplifting, but reasonable as well.

*Will I ever be able to reason and see things clearly like she does?*

## 17. MOM'S SAVING HUG

THE VOLCANIC ERUPTION that started some time ago was about to continue. God was about to answer some of my prayers. Not in the way I thought He would, though. He was spinning the wheel, all according to my needs.

Mom was coming for a visit.

*I am so nervous about her coming. I don't know why, but I am. I am nervous about everything, anyway. But this nervousness is different. I feel like something big may happen when she comes. I don't know.*

The first time she came to Toronto, I was like a dead man, devoid of feelings, incapable to think. It was so hard for me to cry, to laugh or to do anything but go through life like walking on eggs. For this visit I was already more alive. I cried a lot and feared a lot. It wasn't really pleasant, but at least I did not feel like a block of wood any more, dead and empty.

The moment I hugged her at the airport, I knew it. I just knew what this visit was to bring. Inside of me the emotions were boiling. I felt that soon, very soon, I would burst open like an orange squished underneath the truck tire.

*I want to tell her everything! So much I want to share with her, but how? How to start, what to say?* I was in a thinking frenzy while driving her to my home.

That evening we visited Maya and Daniel. I first thought mom would be tired, but she didn't seem to be bothered with a jet lag in the slightest.

"Hi Missis Davorka. I am Maya, I have heard so much about you. C'mon in, take a seat." Maya was really happy to meet my mom.

"It's great to finally meet you too, Maya," mom said and refused to sit on the futon. "I'll take this wooden chair, because of my back pain; it's easier to sit on it."

After a few minutes of small talk, Maya became her real self, the one that solves the problem, the one that is for harmony and peace, the one that can't stand any pretense. She turned to me and said with authority in her voice,

"Did you talk to your mom about anything?"

*Why did she have to say that now? Couldn't that wait for some time later?*

"Errr, no, we didn't have time," I responded sheepishly.

"About what?" Mom jerked her head towards me, in alarm. "Are you alright? What's going on?"

"Nothing terrible," Maya answered, "But Sinisha wants to share many things with you, some fears and troubles that he is going through." Her voice was calm and reassuring. Then she lit a cigarette and leaned back on her futon, as if giving the space to me and mom to start communicating in the way we had never done before.

Mom looked at me and I had nowhere to go, so I took a deep breath and started.

“Nothing much. It’s just that for the most of my life I have been living in fear. I am afraid of all kinds of stuff.” I shuffled on the futon, trying to ease the weird feeling — the feeling of being naked — inside of me.

“But how is that possible? You were always a happy and content child, normal young man who is loved by everyone.” Her eyes grew wide and she erected her posture.

“Well, that was the outside, but inside of me there were so many things going on.” I looked at the floor.

“I see. I don’t understand. I know all the horror that we went through with dad and all...” she stopped. Then continued with hope in her eyes: “Well, do you feel at least a bit better now?”

“Oh yes, yes, I am better now.” I lied. I didn’t want her to worry too much.

The evening continued on a lighter note, except the few mild anxiety attacks that I had every time when I started to worry of what may happen next. I would get that feeling that I was not able to breathe deeply. Then in order to breathe deeply I forced myself to do so, which made things worse. But I quickly managed to regain the control over my fear by focusing on Maya’s and mom’s voices.

At the end of the evening I was too tired; too tired to think. All I knew was that something different was happening and I didn’t know whether to be happy or afraid. And so I did what I knew to do quite well: I feared. By now it became the habit that was the easiest to do.

The next morning I woke up with one million watts of light protruding through my eyelids.

*My God, This sun is so annoyingly bright and strong. Idiot me, not shutting the blinds before going to bed. Not a surprise, knowing that the last night was all but ordinary. I looked around. My light blue shorts were on a chair. The wardrobe door was a mirror and it was now reflecting and spreading even more sunlight into the room. Oftentimes I stood naked in front of that mirror, exploring and marveling certain parts of my body.*

*Why is it like that? I love to see the body; I love to be naked in bed just to have as much of a sensual feeling as possible; just to feel the sheets touching me. Sometimes I feel like all my views on life and everything in and around me revolve around the body and that deep sexual feeling. I don’t know. Again I am thinking too much.*

I jerked myself out of bed, got dressed and walked into the living room.

“Hey mom, good morning,” I got a bit scared when I saw her eyes staring into a ceiling. I knew that she was thinking about the last night and the news about me and my past.

“Hey, how are you?” she was scratching her head.

“I’m ok. It’s bright and sunny, how about we go outside?” I didn’t want to go but I knew she was the outdoor person and there was no way she would want to stay inside. What I didn’t

know was that the new volcano, unseen in the history of my life, was about to erupt. As usual with volcanos, we people don't notice them until they happen.

"Sure, son, let's get ready and go. Maybe we can check some stores to get you more furniture." She sat on the bed.

I barely heard her last sentence. The eruption was there. I sat and I just opened my mouth, not feeling anything.

"Mom, there are some things about me that I have never told you before." I stared somewhere beyond her.

"Aha, ok. What things?" she leaned on her back.

"For many years I have been confused about many things. One of the things I am still confused about is my sexuality. I am attracted to men and women. And I want you to know that I kissed both men and women. This has been going on for a long time."

"Ok, we all go through many things, you know. And I understand you." She was full of compassion.

I stared at the wall, not knowing what to expect. Then, within few seconds, I felt paralyzed. My chest hurt, my head was not clear any more. I abruptly stood up. I recognized it: Panic! But this time it was of an unimaginable intensity, such as I have never felt in my life before.

*What is going on? Am I dying? Wow, I just told my mom that I liked men. It is out. Oh my God, what is happening, I am trembling.*

Mom was looking at me with her usual expression and I knew that she was not aware of what was happening to me.

*Maya, I must run to Maya!*

"Mom, I need to see Maya. I will be back soon." I went for the door.

"Wait, what happened?" her voice faded as the door closed behind me. I ran down the stairs, shaking and with a blurry vision.

"Maya, Mayaaa! Open up, it's me!" I knocked hard. *If she is not home, I will die this instant.*

Saved! The clicking of the lock and a moment later her face appeared.

"What's going on?"

"Maya! I told my mom! I told her I was with men!" Even I had enough reason left to recognize that I must have looked like a little boy, terrified but thrilled at the same time. For a moment I was wondering if some punishment would now come along.

"Excellent! Now call your mom to come here," she said, happily.

Some 20 seconds later, mom appeared, puzzled expression on her face. I simply flew into her arms. The moment our cheeks touched, the tears started uncontrollably trickling down my face. I was shaking. I wasn't sure if my crying was sobbing or moaning. It was deep. I loved every bit of it.

"I am sorry, mom. I am so sorry, I cannot hold it anymore." My eyes were shut tight and I felt my mom's hug getting tighter and warmer. Then I felt her tears on my cheek as well.

"It's alright. Don't worry, everything will be alright," she petted me on the back and then held me tight again.

"Please forgive me." I was wailing and the voice coming out of me was no longer the voice of the man, but of a little kid. I was astonished at the sound of it.

*What kind of voice is this? What are these shrieks coming out of me? But it didn't really matter.*

With one eye opened, I saw sleepy Daniel coming out of his room. With a quick arm movement Maya sent him back to his room and told him not to worry. He disappeared. Her eyes were filled with tears too. Her face was happy and calm. She stood close to mom and me, in the middle of the living room that was bright and inviting.

I felt certain that the layers of anguish, fear and shame, accumulated through the years were magically transformed into tears and with every tear that fell from my eyes onto my mom's shoulder, they were melted away, out of my body.

She stood firmly and courageously, like a soldier. My mom was a strong woman and this moment showed me her real, so far unseen strength. She held me tight, until the spasms and cries subsided, few minutes later.

It was good.

*I feel so weak. I think I'm going to faint.* I was no longer in mom's embrace and I quickly sat down, not wanting to worry her more if I began to be dizzy. Maya and mom started to talk about something, but I could not focus on them.

*Wow, this is real. Or is it? Yes it is real. The three of us are here and I just told my shit to my mom. It really happened. And my mom loves me. This isn't a dream. Mom heard it all and she still loves me.* I looked around the room as if still not totally believing that it happened. Maya interrupted my thoughts.

"So, what's the plan now for mom and her son? What will you guys do today?" she first looked at her, then at me, smiling with an angelic smile.

"We thought of doing some shopping. He has to buy many things, and later while I am still here we will check some furniture as well," mom told her, then looked at me "Is it ok, we'll have lunch and then go, anyway it's a great, hot day, no way that I'm going to stay inside."

"Sure, we'll go." I said even though I felt like not moving from the sofa and Maya's place ever again. It felt good just to sit there and do nothing.

My mind wandered away again. *My life will never be the same. Today something big happened and something new is here. What is that new, I have no clue, but new life is about to begin.* The certainty of that statement enveloped me thoroughly. For a moment I closed my eyes and smiled inside. I knew it was true:

I was loved.

## 18. APOSTLE PAUL'S VISIT

WITH THE BLAZING sun and early summer days following us, the time with mom was good. And the weeks went by, one by one.

Soon, too soon, she left and I felt godforsaken. The time was there; the time to face the internal turmoil. I guessed it was time, because my new, carefree life flew away on the wings of the aircraft which took my mom back to Europe. As soon as I was on my own again, the fears came back. The lust came back. The confusion came back, as it was before she was here.

“Ok, so far, by reading the Bible, by listening to Maya and checking what’s going on inside of me, I learned that I have this body. I also have the thoughts and the feelings,” I was pacing up and down the rooms and hallway of my apartment; back and forth, talking to myself. This was the part of my self-analysis habit.

“So what now? I have all the thoughts and feelings and what is all that? How to live now, knowing that I have emotions and mind and habits?” I laughed because my mind was getting numb.

After another anxiety attack when I was at the verge of calling Maya and telling her that she must call the ambulance, and seeing myself being resuscitated by defibrillator, I was on the futon and I thought clearly again.

*Why do I feel the longing to have a man, to be with him and feel this urge all over my body? Why, God, why? I don't want that. It's like I'm possessed or something.*

The evening was setting on the downtown and that calmness of the setting sun and final bird chirping cacophony coming from the outside gave me some peace.

The following day confusion was at the high point, though. The conclusions about me were changing literally every hour.

“You know, Maya, I think I am not gay. I mean, I am like a new person and I am telling you that I don't need man for sex,” I spoke to her over the phone and was waiving the other arm as if she were there.

“Ok, let's see. Keep walking and learning,” was all that she said.

I never liked when she was kind of vague. I loved it when she said that this is this, that is that, clear and precise. I felt weak and uncertain when I didn't feel any solid confirmation from her.

*Why is she saying it like that? I know that she supports me. Also I know she is against homosexual life-style and two men being together. The Bible is against that too. But I am not against that. No, actually I am, but then I go wild when I see a cute guy. There was too much of thinking.*

Two hours later I called her again, “Maya, this is too much. I don't know, you see, the feeling in my mind, the pictures that I see in my head, I don't know, I just can't see myself being

with a woman. I can't see how that could ever function," I wrinkled my face in despair and helplessness. Maya was a patient listener.

The culmination happened on a Saturday morning. Nescafe aroma was filling the air. I sat, legs stretched over the coffee table. I opened the Epistle to Romans, chapter seven. The words of it got me focused more than at any point before.

*Wow, this is powerful. Paul is saying that he, like me, has the struggle with his body. Who knows what his struggle was? Maybe he liked men too.* My eyes became totally fixed on the words and the coffee aroma disappeared from my awareness. I started to read aloud.

"For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate." I shuffled my feet. This was no longer just the book in my hands. This was a living being.

"So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh," I continued the reading.

*Oh no, I am nervous again; this heavy chest feeling is here. I hate that. Will it ever stop?* I stood up but kept the Bible in my hands and continued,

"For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God's law. But I see a different law in the parts of my body..." Paul continued in the letter written to me, 2000 years ago. My eyes filled with tears. "God, please God, how to deal with this mess? It's hard, I don't get it." I said it in a flat, even voice, somewhere between hope and despair.

"What a wretched man I am." Paul exclaimed and I with him. I called Maya immediately and went right into it.

"You see, this is what it is, this is what I feel," I struggled to describe the heaviness in me. "Look, here it says 'What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me of this body of death?'"

My reading became irregular, as the words were silenced with a gush of tears and sobs.

"Do you see, this is how it is with me! I want a woman, I want to be healthy, but this obstacle keeps coming back all the time! I want the good, but the evil keeps coming back. Evil wants to keep hold on me, and..." my voice trailed off in the new stream of tears and I held my forehead in the palm of my hand, looking down. "...And I can't fight it. How to fight it?"

"This is all good. Now you understand more, now you understand what is going on, keep going. Go slow and the answers will come," she pointed out calmly and I got what I needed to hear. She always encouraged me somehow. I felt bad but hopeful, a bit. Little did I know that I was exactly where I needed to be, in order to be able to overcome. In my mind and with my intellect I believed that God was with me and for me, but no feeling confirmed that. I didn't feel His presence and I definitely didn't live the life that He was promising. Virtually all the feelings I had were totally opposite of the nature of God, how I imagined Him at the time.

Then, as if Paul knew what struggle I was in, the answer how to fight, came. What he wrote next I read to Maya with the voice broken by tears,

“What a wretched man I am! Who will...” I blew my nose into a toilet paper. Then I pulled myself together, “...Who will rescue me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” I blew the nose again.

“Yes! That’s it, Maya, that’s it! It is God who is helping me.” I jumped off the chair and it crashed on the floor behind me.

“Yes, He is, He is helping you. Alright, just continue reading, day by day.”

After hanging the phone up, I started pacing up and down again and talked to myself.

“Aha, it is Jesus who saves me from the dominion of the body. I can’t do it myself. I am not supposed to do it myself. It is all in God’s hands, not in mine. This all is too big for me.” Then I stopped walking. *Ok, so what now? What am I to do?*

“Believe!” I finished the coffee.

Couple of hours later Maya came up to my place. She knew precisely when to show up. One more eruption was imminent.

Just as she opened her mouth to say something and sooner than she had a chance to sit down, I gave her a sign to be quiet.

“Maya, there is more. There is more that I need to tell you and confess.”

“Excellent, go ahead, I was waiting for it to happen.”

“When I was 13 years old...” I commenced and it went on for about 10 minutes.

She took my hand into hers. I needed that. I needed to know that I was still alive. I needed to know that no matter what happened that I will be ok. I looked up and in her eyes I saw the eyes of Jesus, forgiving me and loving me.

Then I stopped. I was done. I inspected her face expression and eyes. There was only love.

“Good, now you are a free man. Now go and live your life!” she smiled.

“What do you mean?” I was puzzled and I tried to imagine myself standing up from that futon a new man, but I couldn’t.

She repeated, “Go, live your life. You are a free man. The past is gone, it has no power over you. Your life just started now.” She lit a cigarette.

She was right. Everything was exposed to light. No corner left in darkness. That day the sin died. God finished the sin in me. But I didn’t know that yet. I still continued to live as if the sin was in me. I still could not grasp what “Go live your life” really meant. But I was happy that there were no more secrets. I learned along the way that there was something special in telling my shame to a person who I could trust with all my life. No matter the feeling of dying, once that shame was out, it always lost control over me, slowly but surely. So I was happy because I knew that the big thing just took place.

I looked at the TV screen that was on since I came home earlier. The Weather Network was on.

## 19. I DON'T BELIEVE?

OVER THE NEXT few months little had changed. I could not stop myself from thinking about naked men, what I would do with them and even more what I would want them do to me. The difference between now and before was that I hated myself for not being able to stop. I hated myself every time when I succumbed to a need to masturbate or watch the porn online.

*Oh no, the feeling is here, again. No, I will not turn the computer on.* Then I would turn it on.

*There is no point in going to that website.* I typed in the well known address.

*I will turn that off, right now.* I didn't.

This daily defeat left me miserable and powerless. It was as if the more I tried to live properly, the more impossible it became. I was focused on every mistake and weakness of mine.

Maya knew it and didn't want to let it be. She came to my place. I opened two Stella's and the talk began. She was explaining me how I still had the problem and how I was actually practicing unbelief.

"Living with God is not in words only. It is the action as well. You are continually reading the Bible, every day, which is good, and you talk about it but you pretend that you know and understand. But my dear Sinisha, it's not like that. You don't do in action what the Bible tells you to do. Then of course, you get defeated."

I had no strength to fight and I knew she saw it well, as always. So true, I was reading and playing smart but I never really applied anything that I read.

"Why is that?" I asked with the tears in my eyes.

"Because you don't believe." She was firm.

"Really?" This was a useless question, she was totally right.

"Really," she said. Both of us were facing each other on the futon. This was one of the moments when I knew that the talk was dead serious and that it will somehow impact me for the future. She continued.

"You are continually doubting and fearing. That, I am sorry, has nothing to do with faith." She shrugged her shoulders while looking at me with love.

"Since you are in that state of doubt, there is no way that faith can work. How could it work, when you don't allow anything good to be in your mind and feelings? You are pumping the doubts, day in and day out. That is not what God does and that is not what God tells you to do. You are the one doing it."

At that moment I realized that I was still the prisoner of my past and this fact hurt me, because it showed that I was still the same me.

*Something must be done.* I looked out the window. The night fell.

## 20. A LOST WORLD

FIVE MONTHS WENT by. Finally, the phone rang.

“We have the spot open on July 20, at 11am. Is that alright with you?” The female’s voice was pleasant.

“Yes, yes, that’s great.” My heart started racing.

A week later, after forcing myself to proceed, I walked in.

“Please follow me in here and you can start filling out these.” A short nurse gave me a bunch of papers that needed to be completed and pointed me to a small desk. Then she left and I was alone, wearing brown shorts and a dark green t-shirt in a super cold room. *The air conditioner manufacturer would be proud now.* I chuckled but only for a moment. I stared at a wall.

*What if there is a hole in that wall and a doctor and the nurse are now observing me, watching my every move? Oh c’mon, stop the paranoia.*

I filled out the papers. More than one hour went by. My toes were frozen.

*What will he ask me? What will he tell me? What if he finds out something horrible about me that I can’t see? What if he tells me that I am gay?*

Thankfully the train of thought was interrupted by footsteps coming from the hallway. *Is that a nurse or a doctor? Maybe she is just going to the washroom.*

Then the footsteps became louder. *Oh no, this is it, someone is coming for me.* The door was abruptly opened. I stopped breathing.

“The doctor is ready for you, Sinisha,” the nurse smiled. I did not. I was as nervous as ever.

I stepped into a cozy-looking office. The thick, neutral-color carpet hushed the atmosphere. The walls were filled with neatly stacked books. In front of some of the books there were family photos of a woman and children. And there, in the middle of the room, behind the common looking office desk, sat the psychiatrist. A man in the late 50-es, I reckoned. He smiled and pointed to a sofa. I sat.

*This time I will tell the truth.* I remembered the Croatian shrink to who I never said things as they truly were, but only what I thought would sound good. And the decision paid off. After one hour or so, I stood up and exit the building, feeling as light as a feather.

“Maya, I am telling you, everyone should go to a shrink. Everyone!” I was nearly jumping, going back home, talking to her on my cell phone, completely overtaken by the feeling of good hope and bright future.

“Ok, so the first impression is good.”

“Not good, great! I am telling you, great! This is all good.” I felt like flying.

Two weeks later another session came. This time the doctor led me to an adjacent room, also hushed and cozy, but this one had a big TV and some sofas around.

“Lie down over there,” he pointed to a brown couch facing the TV screen. “I would like you to watch the documentary about attraction. It has some interesting points. Then later on we will discuss those points.”

I felt uncomfortable lying down while he managed the TV, as if lying down was a private thing, not to be done in front of an older man in the room. Then he left. The show started. For the first ten minutes the relaxing music was on, accompanied with tranquilizing scenery on the TV screen. I felt like cuddling up and sleeping. Then the show started. This routine was practiced over the course of few months. I watched many documentaries on physiology, genes, attraction, sexuality, human needs, scientific research, anatomy of the body, deviant behaviors, mental disorders and so on. After the show ended, the doctor used to walk in quietly enough to scare me and then the two of us would talk about what impressed me and what my opinion was on many things. After that he would stir the subject in the direction he wanted, we would talk more, he was taking notes and that was pretty much it.

After a few months the great feeling of getting somewhere in life subsided and more questions came.

*This is stupid.* I just finished watching the program about facial characteristics and how some scientists believed that people get attracted to each other because of the shape of eyes, lips, facial bones, nose and so on.

*The producers of these shows spent so much money and time to try to explain the human body, mind and behavior and then at the end they unanimously concluded that they didn't really know anything with 100% certainty.* Soon this fact of them not really knowing anything for sure started to irate me more and more.

“Maya, I am telling you, this is so laughable and foolish. Every time those one hour shows try to educate you about something; then, listen to this, then, after the whole hour, all that the experts and the narrator could conclude was how they don't really know and how this is all nothing but a theory. So can someone please tell me why am I watching something that is not even remotely confirmed? Why am I given the material that proves nothing? Because it really proves absolutely nothing,” I was upset now.

“Aha, so that does not make sense to you, does it?” she led the conversation.

“No, it doesn't. All I hear is maybe this, maybe that.”

The strange feeling came upon me at this moment. Even though the doctor didn't teach me anything that was beneficial, now I felt stronger, as if I learned something, after all. As if I did learn that there were things I did not agree with and that somehow I had the right not to agree with them. It felt as if I was shown that I can think for myself. It was a remarkable feeling indeed.

Later on I joined the group sessions. The doctor used to walk out of his office and with a theatrical arm movement send us all into the room where I used to lie down and watch the tv

when I was alone. Now the scenery changed. The thick drapes were still drawn over the wide window, as usual, but now thin mats were on the floor, neatly stacked one beside another, in several rows. The soft relaxation music was on, the lights got dimmed and I managed to slow down the breathing and pull myself together. The relaxation part lasted for about an hour and I could not stop thanking God once it was over. Couple of times I dozed off.

Then we formed the improvised circle around the room, sitting on sofas, mats and pillows. The doctor was also the part of the circle, with the notebook and a pen in his hands, as usual.

*Now I understand why so many mats and pillows.*

“Ok folks, we will continue the group session now. The rule is that there can be no judging of any kind. We will all listen to what another has to say,” he said with authority while circling his head around, to make sure we all got it. The first person started. She was in her mid—thirties or so, thin and a bit pale.

“My name is Nancy. I am very depressed all the time. I don’t want to do anything and I spend most of my time at home. I am still a virgin; I continually fear that men will use me and then throw me away,” she said it in one breath. Some people from the group started to encourage her, but my thoughts wandered.

*She told me she has been coming here for about ten years now. Wasn’t she supposed to know more and be better? I got interrupted, as another woman spoke.*

“My name is Puja. I don’t know what men want. It is so frustrating to me.” She was a short dark woman. She rolled her head left and right as she spoke; she was from India. She was sweet.

“I don’t know if they want my body, my money, what is it that they want?” She continued. “Maybe you people here can tell me what men want.” She seemed to be very disturbed with the issue and I picked up her nervousness and became nervous as well.

Then I spoke. “Err, I am struggling with my sexuality. I was with men and I don’t know if I want that in my life.” Few of them told me something but I was so busy evaluating what I had said and what they will think of me, that I was not paying attention to their words.

*Then another man started. Let’s hear what this one has to say. He seems more content and solid, like firm in his life.*

“I am Greg and I am very happy. Recently I met a woman. We have a great sex and we love each other. She is married. She will probably divorce her husband, though,” he finished and leaned back onto the wall.

I looked around in other people’s eyes. Nothing; no reaction. *Ok, this really doesn’t make sense. Why doesn’t anyone tell this idiot here that he and that woman are actually committing adultery and that she was cheating on her husband? And this guy is happy? What kind of people are these? And the doctor is listening and not doing anything about it?* Then I remembered that no one was supposed to comment the actions or look down on another.

Well, needless to say, I could hardly wait to share this with Maya, so I called her right after opening the apartment door.

“Maya, I definitely don’t belong there.” My voice was high-pitched.

“What do you mean?”

“Those people are desperate, immoral and stuck,” I exclaimed as I waived my left arm through the air.

“What about you? You have the problem like they do. So, what’s the difference?” She was calm and deadly to my self—righteousness. Immediately I felt humbled.

“Yeah, I know what you mean; I am not that much better. But they are lost. They all need Jesus.”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“And you know what other thing I found out? These people, they have been going to a therapist for years. For years, Maya! Some of them as long as 15 or even 20 years!” I was again beside myself. “So many years they have been doing, what? Nothing! Continually circling around the same issue, continually talking about the same problem, and what changed? Nothing!” Now I was definitely yelling into the phone.

“Ok calm down, I can hear you well,” she laughed.

The next time I went for the appointment the doctor suggested a few books for me to read. I usually stopped reading them after the 5<sup>th</sup> page. All of them were totally oriented on the body and how it supposedly functioned and this just did not feel right.

*I do not care what this or that means. I do not care what kind of organ the penis is and how it becomes erected. What’s that to me?*

After the sessions were over, I used to walk home, enjoying a 30 minute stroll through the downtown area. The path led me beside a huge football stadium. Usually it was empty, but on this particular day, it was filled with nearby university students, practicing football. They all wore blue outfits. The field was teeming with shouts and movement. I felt like drooling over them.

*I can’t take my eyes off of them. Look at those legs, how perfectly the blue socks look on them, look at the shirts on their chests. Listen to those manly, strong voices...No, I can’t take this anymore. Who am I kidding?*

I felt as lustful and as miserable as ever. I didn’t even bother going home, but I rang Maya’s doorbell instead.

I told her what happened and how I felt, all in one breath. I was waiving my arms and every few seconds I was standing up and sitting down.

“Ok, ok, my dear, relax. What is this, this nervousness? Sit and relax.”

But I could not, so I shouted, “Maya, it must be that I am gay, after all! What else can it mean?”

Then, she looked at me with that special kind of look, the look that always disarmed my defenses and the look that always told me that everything was going to be alright.

“Sinisha, what you just told me does not have as much of significance as you think it does.” She was brief.

“Huh? What do you mean? Isn’t it clear that if a man gets these feelings looking at other men, that he is gay?” I insisted.

“As I said, this example doesn’t mean much.”

By the way she moved her head I knew she was not to say anything more, at least not then. I became silent and hopeful.

*Maybe there is a chance for me to be free of gay stuff. But, how?*

Three weeks went by. I sat in the psychiatrist office and was getting tired of being there and going through the same topics again. I leaned forward, took a deep breath and asked.

“Doctor, do you think that I am gay?”

He stopped scribbling on the paper and looked at me from above the rim of his glasses.

“I don’t know that.” I sensed a very light note of nervousness in his voice. Nevertheless, the answer was simple and honest.

*Then what do you know? This is useless. I’ve been coming here for six months and what happened? Nothing. We went over things I knew anyway and besides the great feeling of being light and happy for few hours after some sessions, I got nothing. I didn’t learn anything about myself. I was disappointed. But I couldn’t help but notice that there were some things I learned. However, it was not what I wanted. Perhaps it was what I needed. I became stronger again.*

*Wow, this is funny. I get so anxious about what someone would say but now when I actually disagree with the doctor, I feel good and in peace.*

*At this point I made up my mind to stop coming here. And these folks call themselves doctors? Ha, they think they can solve many things. How on Earth can he solve my problem when he doesn’t know what’s in me?*

Now the only thing left to do was to muster the courage to tell the doctor, a man in the white coat, goodbye; but not this time.

Walking home, I had an intense conversation with myself. *This whole teaching at the shrink’s place is only encouraging me to look at my body for answers. I do not agree with that. It was listening to my body that threw me in the mess in the first place. His books and TV shows kind of send a silent message that we people do not have a choice. Like we have to accept what is and live that as if it were final. Well, it is not final for me. I side with the Bible. This body of mine is not so powerful.*

When I came home, I immediately shared my thoughts with Maya.

“Alright, nothing bad in that. You see things like that and that is fine. After all, you alone can see for yourself and you alone can decide what to do. I told you that numerous times. I am glad that you are thinking for yourself and that you have an opinion,” she explained.

“Yeah. And now I know that all kinds of life situations and crap that people go through make us to become what we became until that moment, but then also this gives an impression that we can’t change; that all we can do is accept the new concepts and start living them out just like that. That’s stupid. Where is God in all that? Where is His power spoken of?” I added.

By this time I got certain that the way how the psychiatry and the world wanted me to go, was not for me. Bible was for me. And I must admit that although I was still like in a fog and could not find peace yet, the new experience only got me closer to God. I focused on Him.

The time to be courageous came again. Just the thought that I would, as I saw it, stand against the doctor’s opinion, sent me to the bathroom few times before walking into a doctor’s office. So far, all of my life I was running to doctors and listened to them. This day, I was to do something totally opposite and there was no turning back.

“Doctor, I decided not to come to these sessions anymore.” The moment I sat on the chair, I blurted out. To my own surprise, I stayed alive.

“All right, so this will be your last session and then I will send some papers to your family doctor,” he concluded and continued to scribble something on his papers that were ever so unavailable for me to see.

*That’s it? No warnings, no surprise, no trying to stop me? Ok, fine with me.* I felt good, real good. I knew the decision was right, one hundred percent. I felt peace and confidence.

*Walking home and passing by shops and people, I continued my self-talk. Veins, bones, hormones and blood have no answers to life questions. They do not rule. They are not the main thing. At least not for me. Actually the brain, feelings and observing the body parts were the cause of my trouble, not the solution; and they are definitely not to be listened to. My God, how many times I went to see a doctor just because I felt something here or there in my body? And just because I heard of some terrible sickness on TV and got restless, I used to run to doctors every month. What a crazy idea to rely on the body and feelings when they gave me so much trouble in the first place. How many times I felt sweet around my penis and thought that the feeling was the truth and then followed it, only to find the unfulfilled and empty life? Wow, and they want to tell me that this is who I am? No way! Absolutely no way! For years I have allowed my body to think for me and make decisions for me. And I am supposed to continue following that? No way.*

The car horn interrupted my thinking. I took my eyes off the pavement. I was close to home.

## 21. I AM GAY

FEW MORE MONTHS went by. Another spring was approaching. At the workplace I got along well with another supervisor, Peter. He was a tall guy with a long hair that was reaching down to his knees. It took us few years to become friends in the true meaning of the word. Soon after befriending him, Maya and he started to date and became a couple.

The winter was coming to an end but it refused to give in without the fight. The wind was howling and drawing out all the warmth out of Maya's and my bones as we fought our way through the blizzard, with a hope to reach Peter's place alive. He lived only five minutes away but the walk through the fresh snow was strenuous and it made me feel as if I needed an extra meal to reach the destination.

"Welcome," he opened the door and started to laugh at our red faces. "Is it that bad outside?"

Maya gave him a killer look and sat on a sofa. Soon the table was filled with few types of cheese, salami, some spreads and warm, crusty bread. Green salad was in the bowl, rectangular white plates were neatly placed on the table with perfectly arranged napkins. Soon the wine and whiskey bottles were slowly but surely getting emptier. The room was getting filled with the cigarette smoke. We talked a lot and our roars of laughter echoed through the apartment. Around 11 o'clock there was a moment of silence and Maya asked the question,

"Does anyone of you guys feel capable of doing something good to another human being?"

I froze and sat still. I loved the moment because I knew Maya well and I just knew that this was not a random question. I suddenly knew in every fiber of my being that something big was about to happen, in this apartment at the 19<sup>th</sup> floor of a high rise building. I knew the tone of her voice when the special teaching on God and life was coming. There was no mistake. Peter sat opposite of us, in a sofa chair and shuffled in his seat.

"Well, maybe I could..." Peter's voice trailed off and I got lost in my mind. I became nervous and excited and could not focus on his words. From the depths of my being something was coming up. Within seconds it became clear to me what it was.

*Peter really needs to stop talking now. If I don't say what I have to say right now, I may never say it.* I closed my eyes for a moment, to muster courage and to get focused. Then I waived my arm to silence him. Both Maya and Peter looked at me and I started.

"I think that I understand more and more about God and about myself and about people and I think that I have a lot to give. I know enough to help another person and to point him to Jesus Christ." I noticed how Maya was listening with full attention, with her whole being. Then I continued.

"But there is only one thing that crumbles my witnessing of Jesus to others. Only one thing and I don't know how to fight it anymore."

"Quickly, say it!" Maya was optimistic.

“Well, no matter what I do, no matter how hard I try to turn it around, the man’s body and thinking about man always comes back. I look at men with lust and I cannot help myself. I feel terrible because I don’t want it but I feel imprisoned and trapped in this body.” I pointed with my hand to my body. “Every now and then the pictures of me having sex with another man come into my mind.” At this point I began to cry and I felt like the biggest garbage pile on Earth.

Exhaling the cigarette smoke Maja asked,

“So, what are you trying to say? That you are gay?”

“Yes, that’s how it turned out to be. I am gay.” I said every word slowly. This truth, now spoken, felt like handcuffs placed around my wrists, locked permanently. But Maya unlocked those invisible handcuffs rapidly and effectively in the coming minutes.

She leaned toward me and hugged me. In that hug there was all the love, acceptance and understanding that I needed to receive. Also in her eyes I saw something that I have never seen before: relief and gladness.

Looking towards the heavens, Maya said,

“Thank you Father, I have been waiting for seven years for this to happen.” Then she looked at me again. “Since you came to Canada I was waiting for this moment to happen and that you admit the whole truth, as it is. This is the first time that you admitted who you are. This is the first time that you were not searching for excuses and reasons of your problem, but you said it, loud and clear, who you are. Congratulations! Bravo!” She exclaimed.

I was puzzled and nervous, but I remained seated. There was no need to run, no point in escaping anymore.

“So, what will I do now?” I was confused to the bone.

“Ah, you will see. Maybe you can get some guy for yourself and then see how it goes. In any case you don’t need to rush things.” She drank some water.

“But first, let’s cheer!” Peter startled me with his easy going attitude toward me. To confirm it, he took his whiskey glass and brought it up in the air.

Here, in front of my eyes, good things were happening fast. I still had a need to talk.

“But I don’t want to be gay. That is totally senseless. Don’t you see Maya how those gay people live unhappy and miserable lives and most of them are taking antidepressants? All they do is run after another body.”

“So what? 95% of heterosexuals are miserable and without love too.” Her eyes were on mine again. “Nothing new or unusual. And finally, stop torturing yourself and stop making excuses. Everything will be alright. After all, you see that Peter and I love you no matter what. So, everything is good. Go, man, live and enjoy your life.” She raised her voice slightly and automatically went for another cigarette, all the while looking at me. I stared at the wooden floor. Things made less sense than before, but at least I got reminded that I was loved. To feel free from any judgment, I said,

“Well, Jesus doesn’t say anything against gay people. Others were talking about that in the Epistles, but he personally didn’t say anything.”

I knew why I was saying this. I wanted the green light from God that it was ok to be gay and that there was no need to control my body and lust any more. On the other hand, I was yearning for the anchor in my life. I wanted the safe and strong anchor that would help me to overcome the feelings and dominion of the body.

“True, he didn’t say anything about that,” Maya commented.

*I am so drained. I can’t sit here anymore. I must lie down soon.* Suddenly I felt as if someone removed the energy stopper and all of it went down the drain within seconds. *Relax Sinisha, you had this feeling before. Every time a confession was made, you felt like this.* I was trying to comfort myself. Also I was confused with Maya’s attitude. Now I heard her saying something she never said before and she sounded as if the Bible didn’t matter anymore. *She herself told me numerous times that the Bible must be taken as a whole and not just partially as we people see fit. She said that if I took out the stuff I didn’t like that it would be the manipulation of the truth. She said it, I know she did. And now this; her words were now different. Why?* But I could not think any more, so I gave in and said,

“Well, fine. If that’s the case, then I think I will explore more about men and how I feel with them.” I erected my back and stretched as if the firm posture was to back up my words.

Peter looked at both of us with a clear disbelief in his eyes. He turned to Maya and I could swear I felt a dose of anger in him when he said,

“But what are you talking about now? Then the whole Bible is nothing.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking now!” I jolted my body, happy to have the reinforcement of my opinion and suddenly I had more energy again. “And this gives me the terrible feeling of insecurity, because the Bible, that is holding me like the anchor, suddenly becomes less important or not important at all. I also don’t understand this.”

Maya looked at me with compassion, held my hand and said,

“Leave that be, for now. Bible is Bible and you have the feelings that you have. Don’t worry about the Bible now.” She finished with peace and confidence in her voice, like a seasoned teacher who knew exactly what a kid needed at that moment. I trusted her, as always. A new wave of exhaustion came; I stood up and stretched my legs. *I won’t even sit down any more, I must go to sleep.*

“Ok, I need to go now. I feel drained and I need to lie down.” I walked toward the hallway wardrobe and put the feather jacket on.

“Ok, my friend, remember, everything is ok.” Maya gave me the adventurous look.

Peter walked me out the door and I stepped into a hallway. The air was filled with Indian spices.

Exiting the building I noticed it was still dark but I knew the dawn was approaching. The sky was full of stars. *Actually I don't want to sleep. I want to disappear. I want to fall asleep and not wake up again.* Few more steps and the reality hit me. *So this is it. I am gay and I will live like gay.*

As I walked into the apartment, the sexual urge surged through my whole being. *Why this now? Oh actually it doesn't matter. I am gay.* Within seconds hundreds of lustful and porn pictures came rushing into my mind. I decided not to fight them anymore. *What's the point? That is who I am.* I lied down and gave in to sweet pleasure of imagination. Then, my mind blank and body empty, I fell asleep.

## 22. TRAIN WRECK OUTSIDE OF A GAY BAR

I OPENED MY eyes. It was about 10 o'clock. As I was turning to another side, the deep dread came over me.

*Why did I wake up? God, why did you allow for me to wake up?* It was kind of almost funny that I really meant those words. *This is how some people feel all the time. I really mean it. I don't want to live.* The utter horror of the prospect of living as gay person was immense. I felt so bad that it hurt all over my body. It was a choking and smothering feeling that did not go away as the minutes went by.

"So this is what it is." I stood in the middle of the bedroom, looking at the mirror that was showing me myself. I looked into my eyes and spoke aloud. "I am gay; I will live like gay, forever detached and separated from God. I will walk after my desire, run after men and live like that. Well, it makes sense, with so much desire to have sex with a man." After the reality of my own words struck me, I fell on my knees like a sack of potato. The pain that I felt as my knees hit the carpet from a full stand up position didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Then I dropped further down and my body was now lying on the floor in some weird fetal position. The tears started to pour over cheeks onto my hands and down onto the brown carpet. I did not wipe them away.

"I don't want to live like this. God, take me, kill me, I don't care. I don't want to live!" I whispered because I didn't have the energy for any louder expression. I started to shake and cry ever more intensely.

God answered in a different way.

The phone rang.

"Good morning my friend! How are you feeling today?" Maya's timing was always perfect and her voice was soothing, like cold water poured over a fresh skin burn. Also I recognized that she was on the speaker phone so that Peter can be the part of the conversation too.

"Horrible! I don't want to be, I don't want to live." Then the new flood of tears choked me for few seconds. "I don't know what to do. This is the end." I squeezed my face with one hand trying to make some sense out of the situation.

"It is not the end, man. This is the beginning!" Maya said with I-just-won-a-million-dollars voice.

"The beauty starts now," Peter joined in her cheering.

"How can the beauty start? I am forever cut from the love of God. How can I move on and live if I go the opposite direction of God?" I sat up on the floor. "What are you two talking about? I am a bloody gay and what can I do? Nothing! Nothing!" The last word was drowned in the fresh supply of tears and a loud groan.

But Maya was not giving up. Speaking slowly, word by word, she said,

“Now, for the first time, you are in God’s hands.” I felt a jolt of hope as if, in other words she told me not to worry because I was loved.

“How am I in God’s hands when my whole being speaks against God?”

*What’s wrong with them? Don’t they see that I am helpless and can’t do anything about it?*

Maya could not be stopped, though.

“Because you confessed and admitted the whole thing, all of it, in front of God and in front of two witnesses. Now you are naked in front of God and in front of people. By doing this, you allowed God to move in and to begin His work. You did exactly as the Bible instructs,” she was talking slowly, obviously knowing that my mind was very slow to comprehend the words and the real meaning of them, since I was down and in despair.

After we finished talking over the phone, I fell on my knees again; this time with no tears, but prayer. *This is the only thing that I can do now. I don’t even think that I can get up any more. If I tried to get up now, I think my legs would give in and I would fall back down. So I’m going to stay like this. All I can do is pray.*

“God, I don’t understand anything. Please help me. Please,” I looked up and stayed down.

The rest of the day I spent crying on the floor and on the futon. Every now and then I circled the apartment while trying to think. *Ok, so I am gay. I will have a boyfriend and live like that. The two of us will go around holding hands, visit friends and family, and build a life together. Hmm, I, Sinisha, to have a boyfriend? That sounds strange. But hey, I am gay, that’s how it is. I will go to gay places again and have a guy beside me.* This reasoning made me even more heartbroken. In between crying and thinking, I masturbated many times, imagining every possible sexual scenario in my mind. And there were many.

That evening I went to bed with a sincere desire never to wake up again.

But I did wake up. The morning cacophony of the birds silenced all the other city noise, but I didn’t care. I sadly looked towards the window from where the noise and the light were coming. *I wish I was like the morning outside — light and easy.* I continued crying through the morning. Only while crying I felt a relief and some peace. By the early afternoon the crying subsided and my thinking was clearer. I could say that the tiny light of understanding of what Maya and Peter told me the day before started to shine on me.

*Aha, so all this time I was trying to lie to God; I was hiding from God. Never before have I admitted that I was gay. I was continually finding the reasons and explanations but never have I looked in the mirror to say: Sinisha, you are gay. When I confessed to my mom I said that I was with men. Even then I didn’t clearly say ‘I am gay’.* I repeated some of Maya’s words from two nights ago. Then the self-analysis continued. *I tried to be smart and clever and outsmart God. I never saw it like that. I thought I was sincere and that by affirming what God said I would be justified. However, I was trying to deceive even God Himself. Wow, what an idiot I was.*

I was astonished at the level of my own stupidity and deceitfulness.

*I actually tried to hide the facts from God who created me and I was trying to be smarter than Him. Einstein said it so well that the human stupidity was probably limitless.*

I ate some chicken soup. Then I continued. *The truth is that until I admitted that I was gay I was cut off from God, and not the other way around. I thought that I was connected to God if I didn't say that I was gay, but it was not so. God cannot accept lies and by me trying to escape that who I was, I was cut off. How could I have forgotten that it is hiding, and not admitting, that keeps me away from God? I scratched my chin. Until admitting that I was gay, the sin was ruling me. I was under sin all this time, until I said clearly and loudly who I was, in front of people who loved me.*

Until two days ago the spirit of deceit was on the throne of my life. I served her well. Now she has lost her powers.

Now, when the old Sinisha was lying on the floor, God could raise the new Sinisha up. Only now, when the old and corrupt Sinisha was broken and unable to pick himself up, God could raise him up. And He did.

The third day came.

I found enough strength to go to work. As soon as I exit the building and encountered people, it hit me that I no longer needed to pretend in any way. The learned ways of how to look at women and men were gone. At work I felt finally free. *Hey that guy sitting there is so sexy. I love how jeans sits on his butt and how hot his eyes are. I have been looking at him for so long, now finally I can do it freely. Wow, I am gay.* Few minutes later another guy was in my focus: *I like how he talks and how cool his hair looks. This is great. I don't even have to hide that I am staring at him, since I am gay and it is ok for a gay man to stare at other men. That's who I am.*

Not even 15 minutes later the crushing feeling of gloom came over me. *Is this what the freedom was meant to be? That I can be and do whatever I wanted to and that no one cares? That I can just go and be with any guy, at any time, just because I feel like it? That doesn't feel like freedom to me. Not like this.* Despair became too much and I went to see Peter, on the other side of the office floor.

“Are you aware that I literally don't have a clue what I feel now? It's such a mix up.”

He stood quietly and simply observed me.

“I am weak, miserable and powerless. I feel like the words of one song go: ‘I'm a train wreck for you, Lord.’ Yup, a train wreck I am.”

“C'mon, don't be a wreck but move on courageously and fight!” He was firm.

I knew that he meant for me to fight not to be gay. I didn't appreciate that because I wanted freedom. I was sick and tired of pleasing others. But he was also there for me and I was thankful.

Maya was not only neutral, but after telling that I may want to find a guy for myself, she didn't say anything in regards of direction that I should or should not take. This fact that she was never pushy gave me tremendous sense of acceptance and freedom to choose.

My self-pity and attention seeking were on the all-time high. I loved how I was the center of attention of my friends, how they cared for me.

For the next ten days, I was floating in between the worlds. My opinions and feelings were changing every few minutes. Only one thing was becoming clearer as the days went by,

"If I decide to go after men and live as homosexual, I will never come back from that lifestyle." I muttered the conclusion as I was walking home from work, not paying attention to the mild and clear spring evening. The following morning I called mom,

"Hey mom, just so you know, I like men and I can't help it. You knew it anyway, but this is it. The feeling is too strong and I will not pretend anymore," I exclaimed with a dose of pride but also of insecurity.

"Aha, ok," she answered briefly.

She didn't say anything else and I was grateful for that. I had a feeling that she knew that it was not the time to ask questions, if she had any. This floating in between worlds was awkward because although I thought that I would continue my life as gay does, underneath that feeling and that frame of mind, the new current began to flow: the current of the presence of God. This was new. In every step I took, in every sip of water I drank, in every conversation I had, in taking shower, in walking, in sleeping and literally everywhere, there was this new current in me. It felt weird at times, but I knew He was there and I knew that things may turn out in a totally different, new way. That was all I knew.

Few evenings later, as I sat on my futon, looking outside the window, I decided to fulfill the ongoing thought that was alive for a long time.

"That's it. Tonight I start my life." I jumped off the futon and headed straight to the washroom.

"I'm going to that gay bar on that corner, what's its name, and probably find a hot guy for myself. Why not? That's my lot anyway." I looked in the mirror; everything looked cool and I was ready.

Half an hour later there I was, standing in the middle of the gay neighborhood. The night streets had only a few passer byes. From many windows the bar scene was visible and here and there I noticed bartenders carrying trays and men sitting and talking, some laughing. A gentle churn in my stomach was not there a few seconds ago. I continued walking.

"Oh here it is, it was ok the last time I went in here." I continued towards the bar entrance but my steps became slower, hesitant. Then I stopped. I glanced around and noticed some people walking by fast, probably to catch few minutes of relaxation before the day's end.

*I can't. I can't do this. But why not? Inside there must be a bunch of good looking men who will be more than delighted to meet me. But I can't take this step. Why can't I, since I want*

to? *No, I can't, because I don't want to. I do, but I don't.* I noticed how my head was turning left and right, as if being on the cross roads, observing imaginary road to the left, then a road to the right. I was glued to the spot and could not move forward. I felt unable to lift up my leg and take another step toward that gay bar entrance that had couple of rainbow flags stick to the glass beside the entrance door.

Then another thought came, this time a clear thought. *You know what? There is absolutely no way that I'm going to go in there.* Silently I turned on my heels and went home. After entering my apartment I took the jacket off and the scent of the unused night lingered on my skin. I was glad it ended like that.

## 23. IN GOD'S HANDS

THE FOLLOWING TEN days were plain miraculous. I literally felt that God was walking beside me, holding my hand and showing me the world. He guided me through several eye-opening daily situations. I felt as He was telling me, through those situations, 'Look, my child, if you choose this, you will have all of this. If you choose that, you will have all of that. Please choose wisely. I love you.'

It was cold again. It was one of those days when one knew it was spring only because of the calendar date. I was thinking of doing some work out and visited couple of gyms, to check on the prices and schedules. In the second gym that I visited, the owner offered me to go around and check it out. Opening the main room door, the odor of bodies screaming for shower hit me like a wet cloth. The work-out machines were resisting the movements of their users. I started to walk around but instead of evaluating the space I looked into the eyes of men. All of them were gay, which was logical since I was in a gay area.

*Something is strange with these people here. I can't put a finger on it, but something is very wrong here.* I kept walking around, pretending I was checking out the work-out equipment. *Maybe I am getting crazy or something.* Silently I laughed. The moment I looked into one man's eyes, the laughter was wiped away.

*No, this can't be.* But it was. His eyes were empty. There was nothing behind those pupils. I turned to another guy, he was doing the treadmill; nothing again. There was a dark emptiness behind his eyes too; a hollow space; no life. At this point I felt despair. I turned and looked into the eyes of the third man who was just picking up his towel off the floor. His eyes were glassy, void of life and like on a dead man seen in the movies. He looked at me. The lust for me, coming out of him hit me so hard that I turned my look away. My eyes stopped and looked at the second guy again. Now he was eyeing me too and I felt like an object for sex. I could not take that any more. I picked up the pace and within seconds I was back in the foyer. I managed to look briefly at the clerk in a dark blue shirt and mutter the words,

"I'll see if I will join your gym. I'll call back." Then I rushed toward the exit. Stepping out into the cold air felt like my life was saved. I took a deep breath and pulled myself together.

Happy to be alive and out of that place, I walked home. Then, one by one, thoughts came together and like a puzzle that gets solved, slowly it became clear to me.

*Those men with those eyes. It was not them, it was a beast in them. The beast looked at me there, telling me 'Come, I want you, I will have sex with you. Then I will destroy you. Come.'* I shuddered at the thought. Then I realized that the abyss behind those eyes was real. My thinking felt surreal but I knew without a doubt that this was the truth. *Although those men were laughing and making jokes among themselves, their laughter was of steel and iron, not real and human.*

God continued holding my hand and guided me into seeing more of the truth. Couple of other little happenings showed me more of the illusion of happiness that homosexuality brings. But the following nudge from above sank even deeper into my consciousness.

“God, how can I ever have a girlfriend? How can I ever be a husband to a wife? How would it even feel to have a girlfriend and to be in a loving relationship with her? How would I have sex with her?” I was chewing on the last bite of dinner. I stood up and while putting the plate in the sink, the idea came to me. I sat at the computer and in Google search I typed “ex-lesbian”. *If I can find a girlfriend who was the same as me, she would understand me more. I wouldn't be scared of her or of what if I didn't have an erection once we are naked in front of each other.* A glitter of hope shined in me.

Within few minutes, after hastily checking some search results, I found an interesting link. I clicked on it. It was a story of one former lesbian, a woman who found the freedom in Christ. Soon my jaw dropped as always when I got immersed deeply into something that was more than just interesting. In a matter of seconds my eyes were filled with tears and the letters on the screen became foggy. *Sinisha, pull yourself together.* I wiped the tears off with a sleeve of my shirt. I continued reading. She was telling me, the reader, that as she was growing up, being a teenager, she felt that no one understood her. She was lonely and all she wanted was acceptance. She found it with a young woman. The following words cut deep in my heart,

‘I fell for a kiss.’ she wrote. *What a simple and true statement.* Then she continued that because of that sweet kiss by which she felt loved and accepted, she became the prisoner of hell for the next fifteen years. Her story continued,

‘I was feeling worse and worse, going from one bad lesbian relationship to another, only to discover that the new one was even worse than the previous. I was desperate. I was drained emotionally and psychologically. All my friends were lesbians and even if I wanted to turn away from this life-style, I didn't know where to go. I didn't know anybody else but them.’

I stood up and drank some water and then continued to read, with a bunch of toilet paper in my hand, already wet from blowing my nose while crying.

The woman went on,

‘I was completely powerless to get out of the grip of homosexuality. My mind was telling me that I didn't want it, but my body was yearning for a woman. I did not have the strength to stop it. Out of my weakness and complete impossibility to heal myself and change my life, I surrendered to God. I said, God, I cannot do this anymore, and I gave myself into the hands of Jesus Christ.’ The author then continued explaining how the biggest struggle for her freedom came only after she surrendered to God.

*This is exactly the same as what I have been going through. Wow.* It was comfortable to know that there were more of us out there going through the same fight.

She then continued to elaborate on the fierce fight between the body and the spirit,

‘Sometimes I thought that I wouldn't make it. The lust for a woman was sometimes so strong that I felt that I couldn't make it without it. But I persisted and slowly I put my body and feelings under my control. I broke up with the last girlfriend that I would ever have and I completely walked away from my lesbian friends.’

She went on about how the fight was going on for a long time and how she didn't have a clue how long it would last. Then it felt like reading the shouts of her victory,

'One morning I woke up and I knew that it was over. I just knew it! It was over and I was free. I was given the new life in Jesus Christ,' she concluded.

*The beast was defeated in her life, by Jesus, as promised in the Bible. The life of this woman took another turn, into real life and beauty.* I jumped up from the chair, feeling great.

I didn't find a girlfriend online, but I sure got something more important.

"I too will be free!" I lifted my fist towards the ceiling, feeling elated.

*I did the best thing ever! I too surrendered into the hands of Jesus, just few weeks ago, here, lying on the floor of my living room. Maya was right again, that was not the end, it was the beginning of my life.* The story made me stronger and more willing to fight. I didn't know what would happen next, but now I knew that I could win, if I wanted to.

The time came for the illusion to receive a direct hit in between its` eyes.

## 24. WHEN WILL GOD HEAL ME?

ONE MONTH AFTER I said loud and clear that I was gay, Maya said that Peter was preparing another small gathering and that I couldn't miss it. And I didn't. This time the walk to his home was a pleasant one. The spring finally arrived and the snow and howling wind were now just a memory. After we walked into his bright living room, Maya asked Peter,

“Hey, when is Bobby coming?”

My alarm bell went off. *Wait a minute, isn't Bobby Peter's gay cousin? Shoot, what's this now? What will happen when he comes? How will I react?*

“He should be here soon.” Peter answered while walking into a kitchen, probably to make the final food preparations.

Few minutes later there was a knock on the door. Peter opened and a bold guy in his early 50-es entered in. Right away he started to talk loudly and waved his arms around the hall way.

*Ah, whatever, he's not my type anyway. Who cares who he is or isn't.* I relaxed.

Bobby was continually talking while we ate and drank. I found out that he was married before and also had two daughters. At some point in time, in his words, he decided to go gay. Soon, Maya took the conversation in her hands. She spoke about eternal life. Then she asked Bobby what was his opinion on that subject. It felt like the sweetest bait thrown to a hungry fish. Within seconds he started to talk about energy levels, spirits and 'something out there'. They both continued talking about the different levels of consciousness and I felt bored.

*I don't even know what they are talking about.* I took more cheese and freshly warmed French baguette. The taste of that combination was perfect. Slowly Maya turned the conversation to Bible and God. Bobby tried to dismiss it immediately,

“Forget all that, 2000 year old fantasies,” he became visibly upset; the tone of his voice became just a tad uncertain.

*Aha here we go again; another one who would like that there was no God and no Bible.* I observed him and drank some Ginger Ale.

Bobby tried one more time to help us reject the Bible,

“Oh c'mon people, you don't really believe that. Those are the stories for little kids.”

“I know exactly what I am talking about and I know Jesus.” Maya said with a laser sharp precision. Bobby's defenses were getting weaker as I saw him struggling for words to fight back. He became even louder and his face got red. I smiled secretly. Then he said,

“You want to talk about love? I'll tell you what love is!” He was fuming now. “You know what love is? Love is when a guy comes behind you and gives it to you! All people should experience that. Everyone should have a big penis. Even you women, you should have had a big penis.”

*What on Earth is going on here? This guy is totally crazy and out of control.*

He yelled, "You women have that clitoris that is like an undeveloped penis. Actually all people are men and all are gay!" He grinned, obviously happy that he said that.

I just observed. The heavy silence fell on all of us and for a few seconds I felt as cold and immovable as a stone.

*What this man just said is so perverse, so twisted, so senseless and so boastful. Thank you God that you reminded me how the sick and twisted mind operates. I thought similar thoughts only until a short time ago.*

"What I see is that you were probably not patient enough to experience the real and true love. Indeed, you were married, but it looks like there was no real love in that marriage, because if it were, you would not become this who you are now." Maya's words were knife-edged.

What Bobby was talking about for more than two hours, felt more like a vomit than words coming out of him. I felt total despair and could not listen any more. I got up abruptly and walked into Peter's kitchen. It was semi dark and I felt isolated from the rest of them. I took out a pen and a small piece of unevenly ripped paper from my pocket.

*I must capture his words. This is the essence of deprived mind, exactly and precisely as God explained in Romans. I managed to jot down the core of what Bobby said and how I felt during the evening, never to forget it. I will return to this every time I question whether being gay is good for me or not.* Then I broke down and started to cry. Peter must have seen me because he rushed to the kitchen.

"What's wrong?" His voice was thoughtful and determined. I was bent onto the kitchen counter. Through the warm and abundant stream of tears, I whispered,

"Please pray for me. Pray and don't allow Satan to rule over me ever again. Is it possible that this guy and I are the same? Am I like him? Must I be what this guy is?" I breathed in heavily and continued, "These words, this misery, this horror; am I to be like that? I don't want to be that, ever again. Please pray for me to God to deliver me."

"Don't worry, you will win! Just keep walking forward courageously and don't give in," my friend answered with the smile on his face and I felt encouraged.

By the time I got back to sit down, Bobby was standing up, and a minute later he was gone, left like being hunted by a devil himself.

*Haha, too much for him. No one can go against the truth and not get tired in the process.*

Then I shared my thought with Maya too,

"This is terrible. I don't want this kind of life. I don't want any of his way of thinking to be mine thinking. This is nonsense. That man is completely out of control, full of shit and arrogance. I didn't see any peace or happiness there. None!" I clenched my fist.

"Now you see clearly what you are fighting against and what you are dealing with," Maya pointed out vigorously. "I arranged this meeting tonight, so that you can see clearly what's in that mind; what kind of life that is."

I looked at her, surprised. *She did this for me?* I was proud at my friend, her knowledge and the power of guidance. Then another heavy question hit me.

“When will God stop this? Until when will I have gay issues in me? I am fed up with problems. When will God do something to remove the problem from me?”

Maya crossed her arms. “This is how God sits. He sits with his arms crossed and he won’t do anything until you ask him.” She said in an I-don’t-care manner. In a split second I became livid. I yelled,

“And what have I been doing so far but continually asking him to help me and heal me?” I waived my arms and looked at her in an answer-me-this manner. I felt my face burning.

Maya cut me off in my attempt to continue the big self-pity party and raised her voice,

“You have not! But you were double-minded and doubtful. With God there is no a bit of this, a bit of that. You are either wholly with him or you are not. There is no middle ground with God!” She stopped, allowing me to absorb the words. After a few seconds of looking at me, she continued,

“When you decide to stand on God’s side completely, one hundred percent, then God will do his part. Not before that.” She looked at me with a sharp-edged attitude, “And it is enough of this behavior of yours; you and your problems. I am fed up with listening to your problems.”

I was completely tuned in to her words. This was news to me.

“You are getting on my nerves with your crying and spoiled behavior. You think that we don’t have problems? You think that the rest of the world does not have messy issues? Yes, Sinisha, we all have them and no one gets it easy in this life. You are not the only one with a problem and stop acting like a spoiled little brat.”

To me, this was her strongest message ever. I sat there, numb and in certainty that these were the most important moments in my whole life up to that point. I didn’t understand why but the heaviness and reality of her words did something to me, something good.

“Well, that’s true; you are spoiled,” Peter said calmly and leaned back in the sofa.

I collected my emotions and serenely continued, looking at a wooden floor,

“It is so horribly tough to go against my body and Satan in me.”

“You are stronger than any demon.” Maya looked at me with power. “No demon is above you and no devil can harm you. The devil is nothing.” She stressed the word ‘nothing’. “Get close to God and God will get close to you.”

I got up and went to the washroom. While there, I heard Maya telling Peter,

“This time he will listen. You will see; this time it is different, I can feel it. This time he will understand what I just told him.”

*She trusts that I can do it!* Her words gave me a new desire to live, and after finishing up in a bathroom I returned to the room.

Over the next few minutes Maya gave me a solid advice on how to keep my body under my control, reminding me that when I get all sorts of thoughts and feelings, not to focus on them but on to God.

“When that gay feeling comes, don’t get afraid of it. Goodness, we are living people. We have to feel something, otherwise we are dead. Allow that feeling to be there, don’t push it away. But then, instead of following it and making a big deal out of it, simply focus your attention to God. Look up!” After she took some water, she continued, “You understand? So don’t get all nervous and worry about the feeling. Just shift your attention to God. That will help.”

“Ok, I can do that.”

Then, tired but filled with new hope, I told them good night and again, like one month before, I stepped out in the dawn of a new day, this time warmer and more pleasant. About two minutes later, I stopped and looked towards the sky that was becoming brighter by the minute. I was pondering the decision that I was about to make, and after a few seconds I said softly, but with determination,

“This early morning I am walking away from homosexuality. It is done. The old Sinisha died and I leave him behind.”

Then, just to make sure that I was honest, I asked myself,

“Sinisha, are you willing to leave the sexual fantasies about men, forever? To look at their faces and lips, to think about them and to think how sweet it is to see them? Are you willing and courageous to throw all of that away and to walk in the new way, the way of God? Are you ready never again to want a man? Do you really want this change?”

Then, as if in the movies when a person is dying, hundreds of thoughts and imaginations rushed through my mind. I saw them clearly.

I paused and then answered,

“Yes, I am ready. Yes, I want the change.”

After a few more steps, I stated: “Help me, God. Guide me in your way! That is the only way that I want.”

I climbed the stairs, went off to bed and fell peacefully asleep.

## 25. OUTPOUR OF ANSWERS

THE LIFE BEGAN. The freedom came, gradually. Even one evening ago, if someone asked me to describe the freedom that I longed for, I would not have been able to do that. Now, I recognized it. I felt like everything good became possible and within my reach. Every good promise of Jesus was steadily coming alive. All of the things that I read in the Bible for so long were now alive within me, as the possibility and certainty of coming fulfillment. Every promise of Jesus, about His power and presence in every believer was totally correct and real. I knew it beyond any feeling. I just knew it.

Over the next few weeks I was continually singing to God and I felt like I was filled with the brightest sunshine ever.

*I thank you Father, creator of me and creator of all. I praise you and I am fully yours. Thank you for this new delight and bliss that I have from you. Thank you. I now believe that truly I am your son, my dear heavenly Father! I have a Father who loves me! Thank you Jesus.*

One summer evening I was dancing in my home. The windows were wide open and the night sky was flooded with a moon light. For few hours, without stopping, I was thanking and celebrating God. After yet another song ended, I stopped to catch my breath. I glanced down at the spot where I stood.

“Man, only a short time ago I lied down here on this carpet, in a fetal position, covered in tears and asked God to take my life. And look at me now.”

Another song began and being overjoyed, I jumped and touched the ceiling. It was good.

Also I shared with God every little detail and concern in my life.

“God, today I liked that man on the street. He looked hot. I trust that you love me and that you will do your work in me.” Confessing my past to Maya and a priest a while ago and giving it all openly to God now, helped me to deal with the deep—buried shame.

*Yes, the more I tried to hide and pretend, the less chance for freedom I had. As long as I hid, shame ruled over me. It was like I was agreeing that something was wrong with me and that way the shame had a solid hold. As if I agreed that there really was something to hide. Confession and being truthful to people who cared about me the most, broke that prison cell.*

In the coming days and weeks, my mind became filled with the hope and good energy. I knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that I had the Father and that I was loved beyond any worldly measure.

*This is marvelous! Now I am right with God. It is so good that I laid down my whole self in front of you. I don't know how and why it works this way, but it was so incredibly good that I collapsed on the floor and gave everything into your hands. I don't know why it is designed that way, that when I felt that I would die and when it all seemed lost and the hope gone forever, you picked me up. I don't know, but thank you.*

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!” I felt as if I were shining through and through.

What had happened was that I finally made a decision to believe. Through the series of recent events the scales were taken off my eyes. I was shown the truth about homosexuality. What I saw scared me so much that I made a final decision to flee from it and pursue God instead. What He showed me about Himself and a clean life coming ahead gave me the burning desire to stick to Him and look at Him every moment of every day. I was truly becoming a son who is proud of His heavenly Father. Just like a kid who stands in awe of his parents, so I stood in awe of my Father, God. It made all the difference. I said Yes to God.

Fears and anxieties were still there every now and then, but I didn't care anymore. Gay fantasies were there sometimes; and some gay masturbation too. I understood that this all will be changed too. And in time, it was.

"God, you know me. You know what I do and You know my weaknesses. Teach me and show me how to overcome." And He did. Through His Word He taught me to take control over my mind and the natural, not forceful change, continued.

"I will not pretend in any way. That is what I was doing for the most of my life and if I get a gay desire, I will not lie to You that I didn't have it. I know that You are at work and I trust you that I will start getting turned on at a woman." And in time, I was. I knew I was loved and I knew that even better times were coming.

And they came. I started to receive the answers on the questions that were bogging me down for a long time. The knowledge came. The puzzle was getting solved.

"Of course! It makes sense now. When I was a teen, I wanted a man. I yearned to be someone special, specifically to a man, to my friends. I liked being noticed and important." I paced up and down my apartment, imagining someone was interviewing me and I was providing the answers. "And why was I like that? Because I never felt like my dad paid any attention to me. Actually, he sometimes did but those brief moments were destroyed by his drinking and aggression and how I was convinced that he didn't love me, because I reckoned in my little kid's mind, that if he did, he would not make me and mom feel bad and scared."

I made myself a coffee and sat down. The understanding came pouring in.

"And on the other hand, I had my friends. When we became teens we all loved the new sexual feeling. We had secrets. We shared the intimacy of masturbation and other hot stuff. In my mind I started to see myself being special to them, since I couldn't be special to my dad. And what better way to be special to my teen school mates, than to be special sexually? Of whom to receive that special attention but from them? They were nice to me. I felt protected when I was around them and this feeling of safety and protection I easily translated into a sexual desire." I didn't know any of this when I was just a boy. I simply followed what felt good for me. But I learned now.

I stopped talking to myself and went out to buy some groceries, but the explanations kept coming in my mind.

*Oh yes, and that time when I was about five years old and that little boy hugged me while a few of us played that game and I lost...I felt safe in his hug. I felt protected and special. Dang, all my life I yearned for that safety and it led me to become like a sexual servant to a man, first in*

*the imagination of my mind and later in the real life. Sure, I sought my pleasure in that, but it all actually became mixed up very early. Wow, thank You God for understanding. It was never about homosexuality, but about feeling of safety and love and I so effectively twisted it into gay expression.*

*I looked up towards the bright blue sky. Wow, a mind, what a complex thing. How erroneous our thinking can become, all influenced by the deepest desires of a being.*

## 26. WHO IS IN CHARGE HERE?

Only a few weeks later the time to be courageous came again. While I walked down the street, I saw a big disco club commercial.

*Sinisha, it is time.*

The moment I said it I felt happy.

*The crowds don't scare me anymore.* But then the old feeling of fear of people and things being out of control in a disco club, came back too.

*Enough of escaping. I want to live, I want to have fun and go places.*

Truth be told it wasn't like I wasn't social. But since the disco club incident many years back, I always felt insecure and anxious in a crowd of people, in almost all situations; whoever saw me, saw a young man having fun, but inside of me were unease, suspicion and fright.

And I was sick and tired of that feeling.

Now, being touched by the power and love of God, I knew that I could go clubbing and meet people anytime, anywhere, and just be myself. I learned the reasons of my past behavior. I didn't love myself. I continually expected things to go wrong because I expected to be punished. I saw myself as bad, faulty, unfit for a good life. This perception was deeply rooted in me even before homosexuality knocked at the door of my life. Those feelings of being a downer and loser were the cause of homosexuality, to the most part.

"Thank you Father for giving me understanding of myself," I pointed two thumbs up toward heavens.

That same evening I contacted some people I knew and we agreed to go clubbing the following weekend.

Saturday evening I felt like little Sinisha again, fearful and insecure. *Maybe I should just call it off. What if something bad happens in a club? And all those people, and that noise.*

"No! No more! I am not turning back! If I need to die I will die! But no more fear to rule my life!" I proclaimed it with my head held high but I still went to see Maya before going to the club.

"This is so typical," she started with a smile. "Do you see the pattern in your behavior? Continually the same thing happens."

"What do you mean? What happens?"

"Man, every few weeks you get enthusiastic, no, beyond enthusiastic for something, whatever that is. Then you make one step, maybe two, and then you quit. It's always like that." She paused. "Look at yourself. No, I mean really, look at your actions and how you repeat the pattern."

“Oh my God what am I doing to myself?” I said, hit with this revelation. “But, Maya, I really feel that clubbing may not be for me anymore.”

“Really?” she lit a cigarette. “Are you really sure that the feeling is real? Which Sinisha is telling me this?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, who is talking to me now? Which Sinisha is telling me that clubbing is not for him? Is it a scared little baby Sinisha, or a grown up Sinisha?”

“I don’t know.” I said.

“Ok my dear. Then do nothing. Anyway that is what you always do: nothing. Just talk and talk and no action. Just give up again. Because if you moved on, if you didn’t give up, your life might change for better, and you don’t want that, right?”

After a minute or so I got up and 20 minutes later I was in a club. The night was awesome! On few occasions the old thoughts crept up but I chose to trust God instead. And it was good.

In the coming days I felt like a new man again, set free in one more area of my life. I lived again. As the weeks went by, my nervousness was replaced by enthusiasm and peace.

*This is what it means to trust God, in real life. This is what the walk in faith is about. For me it is always doing it first and then receiving the freedom. It’s like I always first need to step out in faith, surrounded by fear. And then, only then, the illusion of fear bursts like a bubble. I grew in confidence.*

*Relying on God is really a minute-by-minute thing. It is not a theory but actually going through the issue, looking up and walking on the water. This means courage and trust. I trust you, Jesus! I trust that you are here with me and that with you I am retaking the ground that the devil has stolen from me years ago. Thank you, God!*

“Of course! When I was afraid of people and places, I was afraid of myself. As if something was wrong with me and as if I deserved the worst. And this illusion came from the time I felt like my whole world was out of control because of what dad was doing over the years and how I interpreted it. As if it were my fault.” I jumped and with my fingers touched the ceiling. “And not just my dad; it’s not like he was a villain or something. It was others too. Other people who walked through my life and made me feel somehow at fault and less confident of me. Not to mention my own thought and perception of me and the world. Oh well, who can really say what was all that was going on in my little kid’s mind and how I interpreted other peoples’ words and actions? Anyway, that is all gone now,” I was pleased.

“I am free! And I am loved!”

From that day when I walked away from homosexuality and completely surrendered to God, my life changed more and faster than at any time in my previous 35 years of living. Sure I had my weaknesses, but I reckoned that would change too. Other changes were on the way.

Maya taught me that once I dealt with one area of my life properly, that it then goes like a chain reaction and the change happens in all other areas as well.

And she was right once again.

## 27. A RED HAIREH HOTTIE

ONE MORNING AS I was reading the Bible, I stopped for a moment. A thought came to my mind, one about the morning when I walked away from homosexuality.

*How did I do it? What was different then, compared to before? After all, there were few other times when I kind of decided to end the old life, but it didn't work. I made myself a breakfast and while chewing the food, the answer came, clear and pleasant.*

*That is it. I just said 'kind of'. Yes, all the decisions before were kind of decisions, which means they were not decisions at all, but just a spur of the moment. But that time when I walked home from Peter's place, I made a final and complete decision. That's why it worked. I was ok with it on all levels of me, of my being. By making that decision I knew full well that I could not do it alone. I knew that only with God it can be done. So that was the time when I really trusted you God, for the first time, truly. Just like in the Amazing Grace song, where somewhere along the lines the words go: How precious did that Grace appear, the hour I first believed.*

"I believed and Your Grace came!" I shouted.

I drank instant coffee with milk and continued what was now a sweet analysis.

*Just like Maya told me so many times that God said that we must be hot or cold for something. Until then I was lukewarm and what is that? Nothing. God said that when I am lukewarm, I am disgusting not being hot or cold; that I should be vomited. That's it. Once I was hot for that choice and decision, God backed it up with His power and the new life could be developed in me. God waited on me to make a decision.*

"Well, God, thank you for your patience," I beamed.

As the minutes of the morning went by, another idea got ripe in me.

"God, I want to know a woman like never before. I want to feel her and hold her. Genuinely feel her, with no fear and no doubts."

A week later I went clubbing again.

I looked in the mirror.

*Looking good, Sinisha. The shirt matches the eyes; the hair looks good, a bit messy, as I like it. Cool. I winked at a man in the mirror.*

The perfume was on and I was out. *Tonight something great is going to happen.* I was as confident as confident can be. Some friends and I met early and got some good seats, right beside the pool table. The dance podium was a bit further away. Few people stood in the corner, laughed and drank. We chatted about nothing and I was getting tired.

*This topic about what's on the news, like, seriously, who cares? Please God, do something,* I prayed while drinking Alexander Keith's and browsing the club with my eyes. I was about to give up and walk away. But then, there she was. She stood in the group of people

unknown to me, except one guy that I knew, from work. It must have been that I stared keenly at her, because as soon as I came closer, my friend introduced us.

“Hi, how are you?” she was smiling. She was a bit shorter than me, her hair straight, down to the shoulders, her eyes sparkling but I couldn’t tell the color; the lights were dimmed.

“Great! How are you?” I told the truth because suddenly the whole evening became great.

“I’m ok” she said and we got closer to each other. Within seconds the world around me disappeared.

*She is hot!* I meant it. This truth almost floored me. This was the first time, as far as I could remember, not counting some fleeting teenage feelings for a girl, that I was able to say that I got attracted to a girl, and honestly mean it.

*Father I thank you for this. Now I know that I am healed and that every word and the promise of the Bible are true.* I looked up with my spiritual eyes towards heaven because my physical eyes were glued onto her. Since this news was too unbelievable to my mind, I needed to assess myself again. Few seconds later, it was still true: I was attracted to the girl, positively and quite thoroughly. Then another truth hit me: I was not forcing myself to feel attracted because I thought it was expected of me or to feel better. I felt great anyway. There were no shoulds or musts in this. Only the truth: I liked her and I wanted her sexually.

*This is great! I have been talking to her almost all night and it was cool.* It was about three o’clock in the morning and we were all leaving.

“Will you come the next week too? I think there’s going to be some special program and music,” she asked as she was putting her red sweater on.

“Sure I will come,” I smiled seductively and pierced her with my look.

*Wow, where did this come from? I didn’t know that I had it in me.*

I was happy.

The following week went by too slow, but I used the time to ponder on the new experiences.

“Now I get it! Before I could not feel like a man does.”

“What do you mean?” Maya asked. She came over to my place for a coffee.

“Well, you see, I was so much down, so much under pressure, since the time I was a child. I always felt weak and insignificant. It was easy to feel like that, since all I saw and heard was dad scolding me, not caring for me. He lived for his own pleasure of drinking. So many times I saw mom crying and weak. My whole world was the one of weakness and uncertainty. And that is how I became too. Then, of course, as such, I never developed any manly characteristic. So I could not be the man, the man who loves himself and the man who loves the girl.” I stopped, as if to allow Maya to grasp the words and correct me if I was wrong.

“Ok, go on.”

“And it looks like it didn’t matter much that my mom really loved me and took care of me. She really did and still loves me, totally, but it seems that in the past it didn’t matter so much, in terms of me becoming a man.”

“Right. As I already told you, out of a natural desire to do everything for their child and to protect it, mothers can easily become overprotective and this can actually spoil a child; like you became spoiled. And not only that, but a mother can inadvertently help develop the feminine side of a son too much,” Maya added.

“Yes. And then what I did, I went out to look for what I was missing: love coming from a man. As a teen I mixed it up with sexuality. I wanted the security of a man, stability of a man and...the rest is history. And now, since God showed me how much He loves me, I can finally become the man. No love is missing any more. He gives me His attention and love, so now I can stand firm and free. No more weak Sinisha!” I exclaimed.

“Good, my friend; good.” She was glad, because she saw the change in me; she saw that I was more content about who I truly was.

Seven days went by, after all.

*How will it be when we meet again tonight? Will I still feel good and hot around her? What if she doesn’t even come? What if she doesn’t pay attention to me anymore? Ok stop it, you are going in circles again. It will be as it will be. But I hope it will be good.*

Looking sharp, I took the street car. 10 pm came and most people were there. *Ok, no worries, it’s still early.* I was continually looking around; looking for Janice. That was her name.

*Man, it’s 11 now and she is not here. She won’t come. No, she said she would and she sounded confident.* I ordered a whiskey, Canadian. The music got louder and people started to dance.

“Hey man, how are you?” a guy from work asked me as the few of them stood around the circular bar table and were hopelessly shouting over the loudspeakers, now blasting with “Living on a prayer.”

“Good. How is it going?” I didn’t care for the answer; I was focused on the entrance door.

“Great! We were just talking about hockey,” he continued.

*Haha, me and sports, doesn’t go together.*

“Oh, cool,” I didn’t mean it. Then I stood still.

*There she is. Yes! Her red hair I couldn’t miss for the world.* Something started in me and I decided to plunge ahead.

“You look gorgeous tonight.” I told her as soon as she came close enough. The wide smile on her face told me that I chose the right words.

“Thank you, I am glad that you could come,” she fixed her hair with a quick movement of her arm. Our eyes locked and the surge of electricity flashed through my belly.

“Hey people, you want to play some pool?” a young man and his girlfriend came at the right moment because I was nervous and like a teenage boy around Janice, not knowing what to do and wanting everything at the same time.

“Sounds good,” Janice said. Then looking at me she asked: “Is it ok? You want to play?”

“Sure,” I nodded with a confidence not seen in me for the longest time.

Four of us walked to the pool table, separated from the people’s pushing and shoving. The game began.

We started to play and then it hit me. *It’s time. Enough of waiting for something special, this moment is something special. I am taking the step.*

Even before the thought finished I came closer to her and wrapped my arm around her waist and her left arm. Her skin was soft and a bit prickly with a mix of some pimples and goose bumps. Goose bumps felt sexy and I felt sexy all over. She drew closer.

*My God, I even forgot it was my turn to play, that’s how interested I am in her. This is real.* I knew I had to keep on walking courageously.

“You are so cute that I cannot resist you,” I said and pressed my lips on hers. She accepted the kiss and I went for more.

*God, this is great!* She must have felt my excitement, because she gently pulled me into her arms, the move which I welcomed with my whole body, mind and soul. She was beautiful, soft and desirable. While kissing her, I gently moved my eyes upwards towards heavens and whispered in my mind, *Thank you.*

Playing the pool and holding each other at the same time became the impossible task to do, so we hurried up to finish the game. We won. Then we walked to the dance floor, where we continued to hold each other ever so tightly and dance in a long procession of soft pop songs. The music, the dance floor, me and her, became like one.

*Wow, the place is almost empty.* I looked at my watch, as if just being awoke. *What? 2am already? When did that happen?*

We moved to a corner sofa. Couple of people were kissing and looking at each other in ecstasy. Beside them a drunken man was fighting to keep his head above the table. He failed. We ignored them all. Sinking deeper into a sofa, we held each other’s hands for the last time, drew closer and flew to another world.

## 28. CURTAIN REMOVED

THE MORNING BROKE. I opened my eyes.

“Thank you, Father.” I whispered. Our closeness and oneness in that club was so strong that I could still feel her on every inch of my body.

“There is nothing left to prove, to myself or anyone else. There never was anything to prove. I am free to choose now. I choose you, God. I choose to be the real me. I choose to be the man, made in your image and likeness. I choose love. I choose Your authority, God, and I choose to follow you alone.” I jumped off the bed.

“It is not about sex or having a girlfriend, although that is awesome too. It is about You.”

Looking through the window, I marveled at the various shades of a blue sky and concluded happily,

“I am your son.”

Light as a feather I put the clothes on and went for a walk. The sun was high and the day was warm. The gentle breeze was on my face. Coming to a nearby park, I sat on the cool wooden bench, underneath the thick canopy of the tree branches. The sound of cascading water drew my attention. I looked ahead. The small stream of crystal clear water was happily flowing into a bigger stream, and the bigger stream into a river.

“Thank you Jesus. You are my water of life. Thank you.” The tear from my eyes dropped onto the palm of my hand.

“The water is in me.”

For more guidance and tips on healing, visit the author's website:

<http://www.ilivestraight.com>