



**MARISA
SANTI**

**DANCING
TO
HAPPINESS**



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Dancing To Happiness:
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Аннотация

Dancing to Happiness by Marisa Santi, a novel of love. First chapter of a trilogy.

Under the sky of Turin, Isabel lives; a girl with a great dream in her hands, ready to debut on the stage of life. She is a whirlwind of emotions, resolute, brave and with an innate will to always get in the game. The sudden arrival of Matthias disturbs her dedication. The mystery behind the boy becomes an obsessive thought which makes her vulnerable and makes her feel that something is missing in her life... Matthias is resolute to turn his back on the past which is an obstacle for the present and for the future. He can not indulge in distractions, but Isabel is a strong temptation. Since he moved to Turin, seeing Isabel dance has been the most wonderful thing he has ever seen in his entire life. Soon their interest turns into a deeper sentiment, but there are lurking obstacles with which the two young people will have to deal...



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MARISA SANTI
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A NOVEL

Translated by: Loredana Meleo

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This novel is a work of fiction. All the characters and the events described are the result of the author's imagination. Any similarity to living or dead persons and facts is totally fortuitous.

Dedicated to my beloved daughters and to those who still have the courage to make their dreams come true...

“There's an end to every storm. Once all the trees have been uprooted, once all the houses have been ripped apart, the wind will hush, the clouds will part, the rain will stop, the sky will clear in an instant. But only then, in those quiet moments after the storm, do we learn who was strong enough to survive it.”

Taken by Grey's Anatomy

I

It's a beautiful Friday with a very clear sky, you could not help but to remain with closed eyes and nose up to inebriate yourself with that crisp air. Infrequently, in the middle of July, the city offered something different from the mugginess. We had to take advantage of it.

We are all gathered on the terrace for lunch when the awkward silence is interrupted by Alex: <<Hey Isabel, you still have not told us the date of your next competition!>>

I look at Alex giving a hint of a smile; I would prefer not think about the competition on this wonderful day.

<<I know few days left and I have not yet said anything, but for the moment I don't know the exact time... There were problems with the organization of the event so they're leaving everything to the last minute. As soon as they will tell it to me, I will explain everything in detail to you. You know I could never do without "bearing" your presence and that of the others who cheer for me>>, I wink and smile.

I return to enjoy the wonderful day even though I should train instead of staying here and relaxing. In the last few days I really worked hard. It may well be legitimate to laze and spend free time enjoying my friends' company! I would like to do something different. I feel strange for days now; I am a little out of sorts without knowing why. I feel like Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde!

I should consider myself a fortunate young woman. I live in Turin, city I love, and I have loving parents who run a boarding house for university students which allows me to make friends with peers and to exchange experiences with them. I participate in many competitions in order to increase my experience and to develop my determination with new challenges but above all because I love to give my best to accumulate confidence and to prove myself that, if I want, I can!

During the week I go to the university, help my parents to manage the boarding house and some nights I allow myself a little fun going out with my friends or my boyfriend Max.

Sometimes I think my life is a little tiring because I always have to find the time and the energy to conciliate everything and for exercises and dance school. Above all it's tiring when I approach the competitions, more the event approaches and more my competitiveness grows and with it the anxiety of not being up to it. I don't like to lose and even be second. I think I am a perfectionist but all this gratifies me and I believe it pleases my parents too. It's a way to pay them back for all the sacrifices they have done and continue doing to help me realize my dreams. My existence is very calm: I have parents who love me, we are well fixed financially, I have many friends and a boyfriend who fills me with attention and who many envy me. So why do not I feel satisfied? I feel as if my life is missing a piece to complete a puzzle.

I have to do something to distract myself from this useless and dangerous melancholy and I want to involve my friends too. I have to work hard to contrive a way to escape this routine!

Well, I got an idea: It's been months since Frances, "my mother's best friend", spurs me to go visit her.

While we are all still at the table I propose: <<Folks, what about going on a trip to the seaside this weekend?>>

Alex and Vanessa stay amazed by my proposal looking at me as if there was someone else with my appearance before them; both know that in this period I dedicate myself only to gym and university. Usually, when an exam or a competition approaches I don't even go out for an aperitif or a beer at the pub.

<<Are you really sure you want to “waste” two whole days without trainings and pirouettes?>> Vanessa asked, still puzzled and incredulous to my request. I nod with an expression amused by the faces that they all have at this time; their expression is astonished as if a ghost has appeared in front of them.

The kids confront each other to decide whether to accept or not my proposal depending upon their commitments. They look quite ambushed but also euphoric for the pleasant newness. Sun, sea, friends and revelry. Finally they stop looking at me as if I was just out of the insane asylum and give me their verdict.

<<Yes, for me it's fine>> Rebecca says enthusiastic.

<<And you?>> I ask the others.

<<We'll all come>> they answer, singing in chorus.

And then I would be the strange one! Alex, Vanessa, Rebecca, Victor, Lara, Rossana, Matthew, Claire and Mark have for years been the tenants of the boarding house, we have connected so much that we behave as if we are all brothers and sisters: we are a big family, united by a deep friendship.

<<So it's settled, we're going to leave late in the afternoon!>> I exclaim happily.

After lunch, we soon get ready to leave.

In the meantime, I take my mobile phone and call Max and Roberta, my best friend, to invite them too. Roberta accepts immediately but unfortunately Max is forced to pass up reluctantly because of work commitments. I'm sorry he can't be with us, I won't see him for two days.

I close my bag and hasten to join the others in the living room.

<<We are all here, only you were missing and to discover our destination! We've got everything, now would you mind telling us where we're going?!>> Claire asks more and more intrigued.

<<To the sea! Oh... Maybe you would like to know the place too... To Alassio in Liguria. There's a dear friend of my mother who is waiting for us with open arms! She is always happy to have guests, especially if they are nice boys and girls. She always asks me to go visit her because she feels a little lonely and she would like that I bring some friends with me. She has a very big house with a lot of rooms. Have I clarified your ideas or do you still think that we're going towards the most mysterious unknown?>> I ask making fun of them. <<Come on, let's go!>>

<<Tell us what's your friend's name at least!!!>> Roberta exclaimed.

<<Her name is Frances and she's a very sweet and nice woman. Ah... Maybe you fear she may be the evil witch of Hansel and Gretel, don't you? Who knows, maybe I have made arrangements with her and today's lunch may be a way to fatten and prepare you all for her magic oven...>>

Finally they have stopped bombarding me with useless questions and have decided to head for the parking. We pack up our cars and then we leave.

I decide to get in the car with Robbie who, worried about having to face the highway, asks me to use my car and to drive, as always.

<<Robbie, you have to overcome this absurd fear of driving on the highway. For this time I go along with you but on the way back you're going to drive!>> I tell her reproachfully.

<<You know I haven't the knack...everybody is not like you, Miss-do-it-all! You'll drive on the way back too!>>, she replies, ducking out of the responsibility towards herself to overcome her fear.

<<Okay.>> I answer snorting.

We turn on the radio, turn up the volume to maximum and put aside the bickering. I'm incessantly happy in her company: she always succeed in making me laugh, I forget all my bad moods and the time flies with her.

Finally, after three hours driving and several delays due to traffic, we arrive to Alassio. Along the way we scattered. Fortunately I gave them the address before leaving and the satellite navigation systems always, or almost always, do their job well.

We meet again before the entrance of Frances' villa. I ring the bell several times until, finally, the gate opens and we see the butler Marius who welcomes us.

<<Miss Isabel, what a pleasure to see you again! Please kids, come in. Madam awaits you.>>

<<You are awful! You had already advised her of our arrival! You made me believe the whole way that we had to show up at her house without a notice like boors...>> Roberta tells me quite nervous.

<<Yeah!>> I reply kidding her, aware of her shyness. Somehow I had to avenge myself for only making me freak out on the highway behind traffic queues and crazy people heedless of traffic laws.

I have always been playful and lively so she is enough accustomed to endure an ingenuous joke at her expense. She will get over it and will learn to be less naive. Luckily they love me in spite of my tongue a little poisonous and my sarcasm and however we all have a great sense of humour; it's difficult that we are easily offended.

Frances awaits us at the entrance with a wonderful smile: <<Come in, kids. You're welcome! Isabel's friends are my friends too.>> she says, making us settle in.

Everyone is amazed entering this wonderful house. She has good taste and she loves art. Her dwelling looks like a museum: she has travelled much before her husband's death and from every journey they have brought home some souvenirs. She is a classy woman and I think that she is one of the most fascinating and intelligent woman I have ever met and, in spite of everything, she knows how to put everyone at ease without posing as many hoity-toity women in high places do. Just the thought of the existence of certain people, it makes me sick.

<<Isabel, what a pleasure to have you here! When your mother has told me that you would have stayed two days, she has filled my heart with joy. Now Lucia will show you your rooms.>>

<<Thank you very much, Frances. You are always very

generous. You missed me much. You haven't come visit us for a long time! How are your daughters? Are they always in England?
>>

<<They are fine and they always tell me to greet you! Let me hug you, Isabel.>> She throw her arms around my neck and caresses me as only a mother can do. I love this woman, she is like a second mother for me. Who knows if Robbie and I will continue being so much friends as my mother and Frances. I really hope so!

We have spent the evening joyfully even if we were all very tired because of the drive. After supper the boys and girls have finally relaxed and have overcome the awkwardness. I had forgotten that Lucia was really a talented cook. She prepared a "divinely tasty" dish of spaghetti with seafood and sea-bass en papillote with salad, all accompanied with excellent white wine.

<<Isabel, you are right: Mrs Frances is really a very nice and youthful woman. Chatting with her is amusing.>> Rebecca tells me enthusiastically.

Absorbed and fascinated by Frances' interesting stories, we didn't realize that the time was passing. It's very late now and we are starting to be sleepy.

Victor is the first one to fall in Sandman's arms. <<Good night everyone>> he says while he tries to hold back a yawn.

Little by little all the others do the same and go to their rooms. Robbie and I stay and chat some more with Frances. I would never get tired of listening her talk. Who knows how

much my mother and she had fun when they were young! I can well imagine them breaking hearts and getting on my maternal grandmother's nerves. She is very harsh and I dare not think how many times she will have scolded her daughter for her "exuberance". Luckily she's not like that with me. Maybe getting old, you become more tolerant and patient.

<<Isabel, you're worried about something, aren't you? You know, nothing can escape me. You're like a daughter to me and you can't pull the wool over my eyes...>> she scrutinizes me waiting for my answer.

I look downward on the floor not to meet her inquiring eyes. But she doesn't give up and perseveres: <<I can see that you're frayed, even though you want to conceal everything behind your smile. Your eyes are the mirror of your soul and they tell me that there's something wrong!>>

<<No, I'm just a little tired lately. So I decided to take a break from training otherwise I would arrive to the day of the competition powerless and exhausted.>> I answer off the top of my head before she investigates too deeply. I don't even know what to say, why I'm feeling so melancholy is a mystery to me too.

<<It's true, sometimes it's good to have a little detachment from everyday life. But I continue doubting that you aren't the usual cheerful girl ever. Whatever it is, you know you can count on me. You did well to come here. In this way you have a change of scenery. Now just rest and scoot off to bed!>> Frances

exclaims approaching and kissing me on the forehead.

<<It's really a pleasure to meet you Roberta. I'm glad that our Isabel has a friend like you. She desired a sister a lot and she has acquired her with you. Keep an eye on this little rascal.>>

Frances kisses also Robbie on the forehead and we head for our bedrooms.

I sink my head in the soft pillow and before falling asleep I send a text message to Max:

Good night, I miss you! Kisses

He answers me immediately:

I miss you too. Remember to be a good girl and don't get too close to other guys when you're at the beach. Good night!

I smile and finally fall asleep.

The weekend goes on in a big way: sun, sea, beach games, junk food, disco and a lot of light heartedness I really needed!!! It has been all too short and Turin with its monotony awaits us.

<<Thanks for the hospitality, Frances. We all had a great time. These boys and girls already love you! I'll miss you. Please, come visit us soon.>> I hug the wonderful woman who has allowed us to spend a terrific weekend and we leave. Of course I'm the designated driver but the truth is that I don't mind so much after all. When the road is free-flowing and I have music to keep me company, I feel like the mistress of the world. Meanwhile Robbie fell asleep. I won't wake her thus I can lose myself in my thoughts without arousing indiscreet questions.

Back home we all head for our rooms. We have to rest and

prepare psychologically ourselves for the beginning of a new week of hard work.

II

The alarm goes off and I jump from the bed watching the time with sleepy eyes. Damn! It's already time to get up! It's only Wednesday and I feel tired as if it was already Friday, wearing the weight of a week. I snort, stretch myself on the bed and try to gather my strength to face another long day. Summer is not long over and the city has resumed its rhythm: people running after public transport, drivers who insult each other to the car horn and students of all ages with a backpack and with the indolence that can be seen from their expressions, just like me today. Sooner or later I want to take a day off and lounge in bed all day making me only cradle by idleness.

This traffic light doesn't want to turn green! While I wait to cross the road I'm bewitched by a celestial vision. There's a guy in front of me on the other side of the road who's waiting to cross. He's handsome to take your breath away, like someone out of a billboard. Brown hair with shades of wheat colour, eyes as blue as the sky in a summer day and he is as tall and mighty as a Greek God: it's impossible not to notice him. I hope he didn't perceive my steady gaze. We cross the road in opposite directions and for a moment I meet his eyes. I feel like a fifteen-years-old girl and, overawed by that magnetic look, I blush. I proceed in my direction and try to get rid of the embarrassment, but when I come in the classroom I still find myself trying to get

that wonderful vision out of my head and to take my stupid smile off my face. I start even to feel guilty towards Max. What would he think of his girlfriend dazed at the sight of another man?

The morning drags on heavily between long or boring lessons. Time seems not to pass and my clock is there to remind me that every time I watch it. Luckily it's time to take our lunch break.

<<Planet Earth calls Isabel... So, do you want to make me part of your today's bewilderment or you want to keep it all for you? >> Roberta asks, intrigued by my attitude of teenager with the head in the clouds.

<<Not a big deal, Robbie. This morning while I was coming here I bumped into a not emotionless vision. I feel like Cinderella after seeing for the first time her prince.>>

<<Where have you seen him?>> she asks with curiosity.

<<He was standing at the traffic light. Now that I mention it he had a road map in his hands. Who knows where he was going! Maybe he is not even Italian, from the aspect he could come from Northern Europe...>>

<<Why don't I ever have these meetings?>> Robbie snorts. <<And don't you think of your Max? Don't you think about how he would be hurt if he knows that you remained in a daze thinking of a stranger? Anyway, if you happen to see him again, think that I'm still single!!>> we both laugh.

The first part of my day is over. Now I have to run home to help my mother and then dedicate myself to dance. Sunday I'm going to have a dance recital and bad impressions aren't

allowed. <<Strength and courage, Isabel! Get a move on!>> I say to myself aloud.

<<Isabel!>> my mother screams.

<<Tell me!>> I answer, caught unawares by her agitated tone and diverted in an impetuous way from my thoughts.

<<Listen, I need you to give me an hand to settle the guest bedroom. A new tenant is coming and he will have to stay here with us for some time. I haven't had much time this morning to get organized and I knew of his arrival only few minutes ago. I didn't know he arrived today.>>

<<Is he a student?>> I ask with curiosity.

<<He isn't. Don't make questions now but help me before he arrives!>>

Sometimes I think my parents have really a lot of work with this huge three-story house. The ground floor consists of a hall, a very large dining room, a living room with a fireplace where we usually gather to watch TV or to converse and receive guests, a large American-style kitchen and then my favourite room: the gym where my parents placed a huge mirror all over the wall and a sound system. On the first floor there are the six rooms with bathroom that we rent and my father's office. Instead, on the second floor there's my bedroom with external bathroom, my parent's bedroom with service and finally the guest room. On the top floor there's a very large terrace where in summer we go to sunbathe and sometimes to eat with friends. Fortunately we have a housekeeper who helps us. My mother is a tireless woman,

she takes care of everything, even to prepare meals for the kids. Maybe she would also need to go on vacation and take some rest.

We changed the sheets and cooled the room. Now we just have to wait for the guest.

<<Do you still need me?>> I ask my mother with the hope that I can duck out.

<<No, my dear. Go back to your workouts. Thanks for giving me a hand.>> she says mildly. Finally she relaxed.

<<You're welcome.>> I go away giving her a kiss on the cheek.

Before going down I go in my bedroom to wear a black jumpsuit. I go to the kitchen to get some water and then I run to the gym. "From this moment on no more distractions, Isabel!" I turn on the stereo and begin to warm-up.

Heaven Out of Hell by Elisa fills the room and finally the song and I are one. There's nothing more exciting than getting carried away by music. It makes me feel free, happy and able to fly. I will never stop dancing. It's the thing that makes me happy the most.

While I'm vaulting I feel observed. I stop and see a silhouette reflected in the mirror. It's behind me leaning against the door. I can't believe my eyes! I'm a heap of conflicting emotions. That look overawes me! How is it possible? Usually no one affects me this way. I'm paralysed, unable to utter a single word in amazement. Ironically that wonderful Greek God that I met this morning at the traffic light is here, in my gym, and he's looking at me with a beautiful smile! I'm going to melt like snow in the

sun. He has tousled hair that gives him a very sexy air, wears a grey cotton long-sleeved shirt and black jeans and holds a black leather jacket. He could easily be a model. He has a well formed and lean body. I'm practically making him the X-rays! I don't know how long he is there staring at me. I continue observing that wonder in front of me for I don't know how long. It seems as endless moments have passed and I feel rather embarrassed. Luckily my parents come to save me.

<<Isabel, this is Matthias. He is the new tenant I told you about>> my mother says, noticing my discomfort.

<<Nice to meet you!>> I say almost stammering. Luckily I can pretend that it's shortness of breath due to the physical activity from which I have been interrupted.

<<Nice to meet you too, Isabel! From what I've seen you should be a dancer and, I dare say, even pretty good!>> Matthias says to dampen the formality of introductions but without taking his eyes from mine.

<<Thank you. I dance since I was a baby... If I wasn't good I would be worried a little>> I answer with an ironic and perhaps slightly hateful tone: as far as he makes me happy about the fact that, unconsciously, with that sentence he helped me overcome the initial frost or paralysis in which I had fallen. I don't want him to realize how much he affects me.

Mentally I thank my parents who invite him to visit the rest of the house and soon I take advantage of this to take the reins of my self control back and to metabolise what happened. I turn

off the stereo, wipe the sweat from my forehead and head for the hall to reach the stairs and go to take a shower. I don't know if I'd like to freshen up for the sweat in the gym or if I need a cold shower to recover from the hot flush that has possessed me when I have had the vision of that beautiful man.

Also Matthias is in the hall to retrieve his luggages.

<<Can I give you a hand?>> I ask him putting shyness aside.

<<No, thanks>> he answers smiling at me

I almost melt again looking at his face. I smile too and climb the stairs taking the steps two by two to avoid further contacts with his eyes. What the hell is happening to me? I feel like an idiot. Not even in adolescence a thing like that has ever happened to me.

I meet my mother near my bedroom and ask her: <<Why did you decide to rent the guest room too? It's the first time it happens. Usually when we are fully booked you have never rented this room...>>

<<Matthias is the nephew of a dear old friend of mine, so he is a very special person for us. He is here in Turin for work and, having not other rooms available, your father and I have decided to host him in this room.>>

While we are speaking he comes to us and my mother helps him to settle down in his room.

<<Isabel, get some towels for Matthias, please.>>

<<Yes, I'll be right there.>> I take what I was asked and while they're still in the room I hear my mother who's talking with

Matthias.

<<I'm sorry that this room has not a bathroom as the others. Unfortunately the space didn't allow us to build one and so to avoid making a too small room we decided not to put it. Usually this is the room we use for friends who stay no more than a few days. You can use the bathroom that is next to Isabel's bedroom and you'll have to share it.>>

I can't believe my ears! She's allowing him to use my bathroom, invading in this manner my privacy and my cosiness. Good heavens! Only the thought of having to share something with him gives me anxiety. I begin to hate my mother at this moment, I can't even hold back a grimace of displeasure towards her. Luckily it was noticed only by her. Then, arming myself with a shy smile I address Matthias: <<I promise not to take too long in the bathroom. In the morning I'll try to get up earlier not to make you waste time. Now, if you excuse me, I go to take a shower.>>

I come in my room and lie down on the bed a few minutes, breathing deeply to succeed in focusing myself on the many news of this day.

A freshen up was really what I needed. I relaxed and now I'm ready to deal with the evening with the awareness of having to meet the depth and the blue of Matthias' eyes again. I go into the living room to join the others who luckily are already there introducing themselves to the newcomer.

I look at my friends' face and I realise that Greek God Matthias

not only makes a strange effect on me. His beauty is bewitching. The only difference is that they can communicate with him without stumbling over their words and without being ridiculous as I did!

<<Well met, Isabel! Your mother has been very kind to make me go around the house and to introduce me to the other boys and girls. I saw the terrace and I wanted to congratulate you. She said that you take care of it and, particularly, of the roses.>>

I nod and thank him. My heart beats wildly because he continues staring at me... It's really embarrassing. I can't help blushing.

The phone ring brings me back to reality.

<<Isabel is for you!>> my father yells from the hallway.

<<Hello! This is Isabel>> I answer nonchalantly.

<<Hey! I've been calling and calling on the mobile phone...>>

Max reproaches me.

<<Forgive me, I must have left it carelessly in the gym.>>

<<I wanted to remind you that this evening I'm going to come and get you to go take a ride or something.>>

<<I remembered it!>> I lie.

<<See you later then and, please, don't be late as usual!>>

While I talk on the phone, I notice the presence of Matthias who doesn't hesitate to listen and I see his eyes suddenly become sad. I look away from him and concentrate on the conversation.

<<See you later at 9 p.m.!>>

Lately Max and I don't spend much time together. Once we

saw every night and we spoke on the phone at least a dozen times a day. Little by little we realized that maybe it would be better to meet less. The wait has its charm.

I hang up the phone and come back in the living room: <<Sorry guys and girls! You know how Max is. If he doesn't hear from me a thousand times a day he goes out of his mind!>>

<<Don't worry, Isabel!>> Rebecca exclaims.

<<We were asking Matthias if he would like to go out with us. In this way we will show him this wonderful city and maybe we could also go to some clubs>> Alex says.

<<Of course! I'd love it!>> Matthias answers enthusiastically.

<<What do you say? Will you bear our company?>> I ask him with a shy glance.

He nods without saying a word, continuing to stare at me. I have to overcome this feeling of embarrassment. Now I make him many questions. Maybe, becoming acquainted with him, this fear of meeting his eyes will end. Strength and courage!

I reset everything and with calmness ask him: <<Where do you come from?>>

<<I come from Rome!>> he answers looking at me as if before him there was another person.

In fact I've sent away the awkward teenager who had taken possession of my mind. I don't know how I'm succeeding in it but I'm coming back to me. It's about time!

<<Wow, I love Rome! It's wonderful, but I couldn't live there. It's too chaotic and packed with tourists. Maybe one day you will

guide us in your city. I've never finished visiting all Rome.>>

<<Sure! When you want, Isabel, I'll be at your disposal.>> he says without concealing a sly smile.

<<I'll remember it when I want to escape Turin and my thousand commitments.>>

“And maybe when you will stop getting embarrassed when you look at him.” My subconscious intervenes.

Between a chat and the other the time flew. My mother invites us to take a seat at the table. Somehow she saved me again.

At dinner Matthias is much involved and not at all in trouble. This thing makes me hope in a unexpectedly natural way for his rapid integration into the group and makes me wish, again, to win quite so rapidly the embarrassment that his presence causes me. I get lost when I observe him. He has something mysterious. When he is absent-minded the light in his eyes changes. What is he worried about? Handsome and mysterious... I have to stop looking at him like that. Sooner or later someone will notice it and that's not good. I give a glance at the clock on the wall and I realize that it's really late. It's already 8 p.m and Max will be here in an hour. I say goodbye to everybody and get up to go in my bedroom. When I'm next to the staircase, I realized that Matthias has followed me.

<<Will you bear us?>> I challenge him ironically while we climb the stairs together.

<<I would say so!>> he exclaims smiling at me.

<<I guess you're tired... You better go and rest. Later, when

I'll come back home, I'll make sure not to make noise to avoid bothering you.>>

<<I'm not at all tired. I think I will arrange some things in my bedroom and then I'll dedicate myself to read a book. I'm sorry for invading your space... You know, for the bathroom...>>

<<Don't worry, I can tolerate it>> I say smiling at him.

Matthias is in his bedroom and throw himself on the bed thinking amused about Isabel's exuberance and awkwardness. He is bewildered too by the many emotions of the day's events. He feels attracted to that girl. He thinks back on the moment he saw her whirl. He would have stayed hours watching her while she danced. Since he met her piercing hazel eyes he could no longer look away from her. He is aware of her embarrassment. He feels attracted not only to her appearance but also to her vulnerability that she wants to hide by irony and self-confidence. He found her irresistible when she joined them in the living room wearing that cream dress that left her long toned legs uncovered. Isabel: a particularly beautiful face, framed by long brown hair with russet shades, big amber brown eyes, well designed full lips that contrast with the spontaneous and innocent expression. She has a toned body, a round and well-shaped bottom, generous breasts, narrow waist and curves in all the right places... Evidently, the sport has helped her to ensure that her body was modelled in the right places. Certainly she does not go unnoticed, everything about her is perfection and sensuality... Overwhelmed by Isabel's thought he forgets for a while his

problems and the real reason that has led him to move to Turin for some time.

At the very thought that there's only a wall to separate me from Matthias, it gives me goosebumps. Stop thinking of him! I have to recover and get a move on. I decide to wear a black dress that highlights my curves without being vulgar, black court shoes, a trace of make-up on my eyes and a bit of lip gloss, a few drops of J'adore, a last brush to my hair that I will let loose and, finally, I'm ready.

The mobile phone starts ringing and, as expected, it's Max who calls to advise me of his delay. He never succeeds in being on time!

<<What happened to you this time?>> I ask him snorting.

<<Forgive me, Isabel. I had a hitch, so unfortunately we can not go out together tonight.>>

The reaction is an immediate retort <<And do you tell me it only now? Fifteen minutes before "zero hour"? Nice, we are back to the usual routine!>>

<<You're right to be angry, but my mother wasn't feeling too well and she needs me, I'm sorry. I swear that tomorrow morning I will pick you up very early and first of all I'll take you for a breakfast at the bar and then I'll take you to the university.>>

<<Okay, I forgive you this time too but for revenge tomorrow I won't give weight to my shape and, since you will pay for me, I'll eat whatever will pass under my nose. Don't stand me up again! Now go to your mother and say goodbye for me!>> I say

softening my resentment.

I understand that this time it's for a good cause, but it's seriously hard to bear that he is constantly no-show.

I leave my room, slamming the door involuntarily. I shouldn't but I'm still very angry. It's the third time in the last ten days that he stands me up. I'm so furious not to realize that my "gentleness" in slamming the door made Matthias leave his room. His eyes are on me and scrutinize me from head to toe. Why is he staring at me thus?

Breaking the silence I say to him: <<Forgive me for the noise. But my better half has an innate and unbelievable predisposition to make me mad...>> he continues staring at me embarrassingly, practically he is devouring me with his eyes.

I'm sure red-faced. Finally he decides to tell me something.

<<No, do not worry about me. Tell me what happened to you, instead.>>

<<Max stood me up again! And to say that I got cute for him.>>

<<He will have no idea what he's missing; you are beautiful!

>>

And after this statement I blush even more.

<<Do you know what? Nothing goes to waste! If that's all right, I'll go out with you tonight.>> Matthias proposes.

<<Of course, I'll guide you around the streets of Turin!>> I answer enthusiastically, worried about the strange emotions I feel and about having to be alone with him.

<<Would you like to go for a walk in the city centre and then to a pub for a drink?>>

<<I'd like it! Just give me a few minutes to get changed and I'll be right with you.>> he replies amused to have noticed my eyes on his sweatpants, winking at me. I blush, realizing that I was devouring him with my eyes too. Good heavens! This man would be really sexy even wearing a garbage bag.

In the meantime I went down in the kitchen to drink a glass of cold water to recover and to dampen my ardour although perhaps I should swallow something alcoholic which could make me more uninhibited.

I head towards the hallway and in the meantime I notice that Matthias is walking down the stairs to join me. He wore jeans, a black cotton T-shirt with v-neck and a leather jacket. He is to die for!

He takes my hand and asks me if I'm ready to take him around. I nod and, breathing deeply, I start talking non-stop: <<I'll take you by car to Piazza Vittorio Veneto that is one of the largest square in Europe and from there we will walk down the main streets of the city centre: Via Po, Piazza Castello, Via Roma and then we will get back from Via Lagrange to end up again in Via Po. Finally we will conclude our tour having a drink at Murazzi's.>>

<<Perfect, I trust you!>> he exclaims, amused by my sudden gift of the gab.

We reach my car, a black Alfa Romeo Mito.

Put aside shyness and broken the ice, I start feeling at ease. So, to speed things up and to know him better, I bombard him with questions about his home town and his private life. When I put my mind I'm really pushy.

<<Sorry if I trouble you, but I wonder what the hell you are doing here in Turin, living in a beautiful city like Rome.>>

<<I work>> he answers.

Despite my court shoes are very tall, I managed to walk a lot and to follow the predetermined itinerary.

Going towards Murazzi's I point out Gran Madre Church and Mount of the Capuchins.

<<Did you know that Turin is a magic city? Next time I'll take you in Piazza Statuto. In ancient times it was the gates of the city, considered inauspicious, and out of this there were crucifixions. Because of its historical precedents it is believed that the square hides something evil, even it's assumed that under the central flowerbed there's the door to hell. Turin is the vertex of the triangle of black magic with London and San Francisco and also of white magic with Prague and Lyon. The exact point of the vertex of black magic is a small obelisk built in 1808 on a geodetic point according to trigonometric calculations and it's placed in a flowerbed of the small garden.>>

<<Really?>>

I nod. Then I point at the three statues of Gran Madre Church and I explain him what they represent.

<<The statue in the centre represents Victor Emmanuel I, the

right one is the allegory of religion with a tiara at its feet, while, the left one represents the allegory of faith, a woman holding a chalice. It is believed that the statue looks to the place where the Holy Grail is hidden. Instead one of the esoteric legend says that it is not its look that indicates where the Grail is buried but its index finger. For this reason unknown persons destroyed it.>>

<<Interesting.>>

<<Maybe as soon as we will have some free time, I'll take you for a tour, making you visit the mysterious, subterranean and esoteric Turin.>>

<<I'd like it very much.>>

<<I do not believe in these things... Even though esotericism fascinates and frightens me at the same time.>>

<<I do not believe in these things too. Although at this time I perceive a little magic and more than through the gate of hell I feel to stay through that of Paradise.>> he says looking into my eyes.

<<I knew you would have liked this place...>> I say, pretending not to understand. Because I think he was not referring to the city... I'm the usual presumptuous.

While we are in the pub and continue to drink, Matthias lists the places that he would like to visit. Then he tells me something about his family. He has two sisters and he loves them much.

<<I moved here for work issues. I'm a financial consultant. My aunt told me that she knows people who need me and I need to have more clients and to gain experience, so I decided to move!

Knowing your parents, she helped me to find an accommodation. She asked them the possibility to host me in your boarding house. Unfortunately there's not much space in her house to host me.>>

<<I have never met your aunt. My mother told me she is one of her long-time friend that I have not had the pleasure of meeting yet. According to what she says, your aunt doesn't live in this city. I'd be curious to meet her, she may reveal something that my mother did when she was young. Who knows, it may come in handy when she will be breathing down on my neck!>> I remark with a smirk.

<<Someday if you would like it I'll take you there. She lives in Susa Valley since she got married.>>

<<Thank you, I'd like it very much.>>

I'd like to ask him also if he is engaged but I don't think it's appropriate. He may think that I have "other" interests in him.

We talk still a lot continuing to swallow beer which makes me more confident and less shy. We laugh and have fun throughout the evening. Without realizing it the time flew.

<<It's very late!>> I exclaim, watching the time. <<It's almost three in the morning and in a few hours I have to go to the university.>>

<<You're right, the time passed quickly. I didn't think it was so late!>>

<<Yes... It's time to go to sleep>> I say very sorry to have to interrupt the pleasant chat.

<<Thank you very much for the nice evening...>> I say

pausing to take courage and tell him that I had already seen him.

<<You know, this morning while I was going to university I met you; you were standing at a traffic light with a road map in your hands. I could not help but notice you and I have been fascinated by your look. I thought you were English or Irish... you are particularly interesting!>> I exclaim and then I try to repair <<Forgive me, I shouldn't drink so much, I lose control and I don't think to what I say...>> I blush and avoid looking at him.

He smiles at me and placing two fingers under my chin he forces me to look into his eyes: <<Evidently it's a sign of fate that we should meet.>>

<<Maybe...>> I answer intimidated by him, his eyes and the circumstance.

<<Nothing gets past you! In part you guessed it. I have Irish origins by my mother.>> he tells me proudly.

<<Your features, and the colour of your eyes and your hair suggested me it. You're the classic beauty of northern Europe.>> I confess becoming red-faced. Good thing that I stopped drinking beers. I dare not imagine what I could say... For example that if I wasn't engaged I would jump on him. And now? Where do these sinful thoughts come from?

We head for the car, we get in it and I put my hands on the steering wheel, pretending to be careful to what I'm doing. I don't want him to notice my face still flushed because of my confession of a few minutes earlier.

Matthias is lost in thought and I don't want to open my mouth

to prevent other howlers. The silence is almost comfortable.

Finally we arrived at home. We climb the stairs staying always in silence and we find ourselves before the hallway where there are our bedrooms.

Breaking the silence I whisper to him: <<Good night, Matthias and thank you again for the lovely evening.>>

He looks at me and gets closer to give me a kiss on the cheek. <<Good night, Isabel.>>

We come in our respective rooms and despite the strong emotions felt during the day just passed I fall asleep as soon as I lean my head on the pillow.

III

The doorbell rings: it's Max who has kept his promise. He has come to get me to have breakfast together and to take me to the university. I quickly walk down the stairs ready to face a new day and my unreliable boyfriend.

He is wearing jeans, a white t-shirt and dark blue jacket. I feel like we've been apart for a lifetime. Dark-haired, attentive and bright green eyes, olive complexion, tall and slender. I had almost forgotten how charming he was. We got engaged last year but we met in junior high school He was my first boyfriend. I have always been too focused on dance to think of love, I had some infatuations but nothing more. Poor Max! He has always loved me in silence for years and during courtship he has been very patient and insistent. Maybe I have succumbed to exhaustion.

I join him and ironically say: <<Hi, are you real or a

hologram?>>

<<I'm real and I'm all here for you.>> he replies, dampening a guilty grin.

Meanwhile Matthias was walking down the stairs to reach the living room. He's wearing a grey tight outfit and a white shirt, classic look for a businessman. It's impossible to describe how he looks magnificently good in that outfit. I try not to look at him too much, focusing only on Max.

I feel really embarrassed, I hope nobody notices it. But then why do I feel this way? I study psychology for some years and I'm still not able to analyse my mind. The emotions of recent days are an enigma! I see Max who looks at Matthias and then at me. Maybe he expects introductions...

<<Hello Matthias, this is my boyfriend and my favourite flake Max...>>

<<Nice to meet you!>> Matthias exclaims disconsolately holding his hand out to shake.

<<Max, this is the guy I told you about yesterday on the phone.>> I say trying to deaden the tension. He looks stiffened. The knowledge and the existence of Matthias don't seem to be as much well-accepted and it appears obvious by the way he quickly dissociates himself from Matthias.

<<Let's go now, otherwise you will be late at the university and, besides, on an empty stomach!>> he smiles at me and nods his head to say goodbye to Matthias.

While we're heading for the bar I tell him how I spent the

previous evening. I was uncertain whether to do it or not, then I decide that it would be better to tell him it otherwise he would think that I had something to hide if he becomes aware about it by other means. And honestly I have not done anything wrong!

<<Nice, so after only few hours you had met him, you went out together. Great!>> he reproaches me.

<<Now are you jealous too? I have already explained you that he is the nephew of a dear friend of my mother and there's nothing wrong with having a new friend! He is here just since yesterday and he feels like a fish out of water. Seen how yesterday evening ended, I wanted to distract myself a bit and he wanted to begin to know our city. Come on! Now take me to the university. It's too late to have breakfast, so jealous boy!>> I exclaim without challenging too much his absurd suspicions and his sudden bad mood.

What dude! After all, he left me alone last night.

Fortunately, on the way we meet Roberta.

<<Hi, Robbie>> I say thanking my lucky stars to give me the chance to discuss no more with Max.

<<Hi, Isabel. Hi, Max>>

<<Since I have fulfilled my duty I can go now>> Max says making what might be called a fake smile. He kisses me and says goodbye to Robbie.

<<Talk to you later>> I say returning the kiss.

When I see Max going away I breathe a sigh of relief. Nothing gets past Robbie and she looks at me inquisitively. So I tell her

everything that has happened in the last hours.

<<Isabel, forgive me if I take the liberty of...>

<<Tell me! You know you can tell me everything>> I say worried about the “pearls of wisdom” that are going to come out of her mouth.

<<In the last two months you have practically been a paranoid sourpuss and today all of a sudden you have a smile from ear to ear. When you talk about this infamous Matthias you can not help but notice your enthusiasm. I hope you weren't so euphoric while you talked about him to Max too! I have no idea what can be so special about this guy. But he did a spell: your eyes have found the light that had been extinguished for quite some time.>>

<<Can't I just be serene because today is a beautiful sunny day and because, after many days, I spent some time with Max?>> I ask her confuse about what she has just pointed out to me.

<<Look, whatever it was, welcome back Isabel! Whoever succeeded in doing it, I thank him from the bottom of my heart.>> She says taking me by the arm while we walk towards the entrance of the classroom.

It's true that in recent times I could hardly feel new emotions. In fact, the more time passed, the more my pout was getting worse. My discontent will always remain a mystery. Robbie sees me practically every day and knows me better than anyone else. I didn't know she was so worried about my fickle attitude. Maybe I'm just a little more tired than usual. I should control myself and put a stop to the constant desire to expect too much from

myself. I'm constantly in competition with the whole world, I should give me some limits. But if I want to fulfil my dreams I can not afford to give up. Sometimes I'd like to be more carefree. I have chosen the department of psychology to study the mental processes and to understand human behaviour. In the future I want to work with children and adolescents, very sensitive persons. Some of them may have behavioural problems and I'd like to combine my studies with my passion. I love the discipline that is better known as contemporary dance: performance art that expresses the movement of the body and includes more styles on the basis of classical ballet. I want to be able to impart the same emotions that I feel and I want to teach others to unite body and mind to get carried away and overwhelmed by this combination. Contemporary dance is an expression in the round, also it includes the recitation of texts. One day it would be great to have my very own school! I do not dream to take part in musicals for a lifetime or to gambol in some stupid TV show. I love dance for what it gives me. It's poetry for me, unconditional love and it makes me feel free. I do not need audiences, the music enters into my bones and, from that moment on, my body is able to do whatever I want, even to fly.

I get lost in my thoughts and I do not notice the time that is passing, when Robbie thinks to bring me sharply back to reality <<Is he engaged?>> she asks me point blank.

Understanding that she was referring to Matthias I answer: <<I don't know...>> I pause and then I ask her: <<Could you come

for dinner tonight? In this way I will introduce him to you and you can ask him it personally.>>

<<It's not a bad idea>> she answers immediately, seizing the moment.

In the afternoon I was able to study a little and to spend a couple of hours in the gym, this time without embarrassing interruptions. I go to the bathroom to freshen up and to get ready for dinner. Robbie will come here in a while. I'm still in my bedroom when her message arrives on my mobile phone:

Come down, I'm at the front door.

I rush at the entrance to let her in and make her sit. Matthias has not been seen at all before dinner time, but when he makes his entrance in the dining room to join us, I notice Robbie's look and open mouth. Maybe now she can understand too why he upset me so much. It should be illegal to be so devilishly handsome With two fingers I push upwards Robbie's chin to make her close her mouth and I say amused: <<Close your mouth, you are indecent!>> there's only one thing she can do: remain silent. But she takes revenge with a little kick under the table.

<<Hi Matthias, how are you?>> I ask him staring into his eyes without being mesmerised by his overwhelming magnetism.

<<Fine, thanks. And you?>>

<<I'm fine too! This is my best friend Roberta>> I say to him pointing at her.

<<Nice to meet you Roberta>>

Despite the initial block, Robbie becomes friendly with

Matthias. She shows off her cheeky beggar and bombards him with questions. How is it possible that he doesn't affect my timid friend as he does to me? Last night I was petrified and could hardly speak. We exchanged roles: she has become extroverted and I have become excessively shy. In the dining room there's the background chatter typical of more open conversations. Suddenly Vanessa tells me shouting from a table not very close to ours: <<Isabel, remind me what is the date of your next competition!>>

<<Do you have to take part in a competition?>> Matthias asks me leaking the desire to be invited too

<<Yes! do you want to come along with these lunatics? At least you could control them to avoid making a fool out of me!>>

<<Sure!>> he answers staring at me in way of making me feel uncomfortable. I look down to hide the blushing and above all to prevent Robbie from noticing it.

The evening passes pleasantly. We decide to stay at home and, as usual, we lose track of time if it wasn't for the first symptoms of tiredness that stand out. Given the time, Roberta decides to go home.

<<I'm going, accompany me to the door>> she says, dragging me with her. She thanks me for the invitation to dinner and above all to make her become acquainted with Matthias.

While we are heading for her car she looks at me and says: <<I could not help but see how much tight-knit you and Matthias are: I'm worried about this! I'm your friend as well as Max's friend.

I would be really sorry to see your relationship destroyed. You know that I love you Isabel, be careful. If Max sees what I saw tonight, arguments could arise.>>

<<You are exaggerating, I act with him just as I do with the others...>>

<<Are you really sure? Was I the only one to notice how he watches you?>>

<<Why? How does he watch me?>>

<<With sex drive!>>

<<Robbie!>> I growl at her.

<<Trust me, Isabel! Matthias likes you, it is clear. Also when he was taking his leave he watched you deeply.>>

I burst into a nervous laughter and say: <<Robbie, it's the effect of alcohol! Tonight we overdid the wine at dinner. In my opinion it's not as you say!>>

<<Whatever. I really hope that this is so. However, I can guarantee that he doesn't take away his eyes off you!>>

I try to get rid of her to not continue this useless conversation.

<<Good night, Robbie! See you tomorrow! And just take it easy! Okay?>>

<<Yes... Good night, Isabel!>>

We kisses on the cheeks. I see her moving away with her car and then I return home.

I try not to think about what she told me. I don't want to dwell upon what my friend believes she has seen and upon her "brain movies". It's true that he embarrasses me much and I can

not help but look at him, but it's only because I'm attracted by his appearance. I not even know him. Why does Robbie always demoralize me in this way? Heigh-ho!

IV

The last two weeks have been devastating but the long-awaited day of the competition arrived. Oscar, my dancing partner and friend, and I waited for hours for our turn to arrive. We began with a paso doble and two pas seul. During the wait Oscar has had anxiety all the time. Finally they start with the ranking and we hear our names placed in first position. The strain and the intense sacrifices of these months have been useful!

<<Isabel, we did it!>> Oscar exclaims, then he takes me in his arms and makes me spin like a top.

The tears begin to run down unexpectedly, probably because of the tension accumulated during this last period. Besides discovering myself shy, I have become whiner too.

Still incredulous for first place: <<They have certainly appreciated our harmony. We have always been coordinated and precise in the movements. And we bring home this victory too, Oscar!>> I say to him happily.

In these circumstances all the tiredness gathered in days past vanishes. We are a competitive couple and the presence of our friends made us stronger. Their affection gave us a great energy. We had a great responsibility and we could not disappoint the school, our choreographers and all those who believe in us. This will be our last year together. I will miss Oscar a lot. He

will go to Broadway, in America. We dance together since we were ten years old. I will never forget the time in which he became depressed because he had not the courage to face his homosexuality. He made many hearts palpitate. He is good-looking and a disarming sweetheart; nobody could imagine he wasn't hetero. In these years many girls wanted to have him as a partner and not only for dance. After he has overcome his fear and has been accepted by his family for who he is, he succeeded in finding love too. His boyfriend has his own interests and helped him much to come out of the abyss. We have faced many adventures within the school and in life. The thought that he's going to leave makes me nostalgic. How am I without my Oscar?

I throw my arms around him and say: <<I'll miss you terribly! Thanks for these wonderful years together, I love you!>>

Since I can no more hold the gathered stress, I burst into tears again, leaning my head against his chest. He holds me tightly: <<Hey, Isabel! You and I will never separate ourselves. You will come to visit me whenever you want and I'll do the same with you. You will not get rid of me so easily. You are my best friend and dancing partner and I have an unlimited love for you! Come on! Stop being sad... We have to celebrate!>> he tells me, with one of his wonderful encouraging smiles.

We go to get the award and perform again our choreography. We change our clothes and catch up with the others to go for a drink together.

When we arrive at the club I introduce Matthias to Oscar and

he, like me and all the women who watch Matthias, remains enchanted by this charming man.

<<Where were you hiding this guy, Isabel?>> he whispers in my ear.

<<I wasn't hiding him, I know him for a while...>>

<<Is he hetero?>>

<<I would say so! Hey, aren't you already engaged?>> I ask pretending to reproach him.

<<Yes, but to be engaged doesn't mean that we should stop feasting our eyes. It is not that because one is on diet can not read the menu!>>

<<You're right, don't worry! He has done the same effect on me... But let's not tell anyone about this>> I confide to him smiling.

<<Apparently your Max isn't so sporty.>>

<<Absolutely not!>>

We look at each other and burst into laughter.

The days pass and I resumed the same routine. Thinking about it, it has already been over a month since Mathias arrived and a beautiful friendship is being born between us. Yeah, a friendship that is causing me a lot of problems with Max. We quarrel often because he does not like me to spend time with my new friend; his suffocating jealousy grows day by day. His stupid scenes are getting me tired and nervous. Soon I'm going to have a psychology exam and I'm studying hard. It's difficult for me to focus upon it with one who bombards me with messages and

calls to continuously supervise me. Let's add to this, the exam of the dance school for the academic diploma. Sometimes I think that I have been foolhardy to have chosen both the department of psychology and the ballet school. I did it because I need both. In both cases I can be of some help to others. If I go on like this, I will be the one who needs a psychologist! I stay locked in my bedroom to study for days now. Sometimes I wonder how my father succeeds in not freaking out. He is a businessman, he follows the Financial Exchange and helps my mother with the boarding house. I must have gotten from him to involve myself with thousand tasks. Stop thinking, Isabel! It would be better that I exercise a little to release stress. I go down to the gym and start working on the new choreography for which I'm going to be examined, but each attempt ends badly: These new steps are driving me crazy! I'm going through a bad artistic period; I'm much tired and my relationship with Max is taking a turn for the worst: the one towards the decline! I decide to give it a rest with the workout and to go on the terrace to try to relax a little. I sit on the porch swing and my eyes begin to fill with tears. While I'm busy feeling sorry for myself I don't notice Matthias' presence and seeing him I wince.

He sits next to me and sweetly asks me: <<Why are you crying? What's wrong?>>

I look at him astonished by his presence and his care and answer with a weak voice: <<In a few days I will have to pass an exam and I have an insane fear of not succeeding in it. This

is my last year at the ballet school. I feel tired, stressed out, I try to be strong and indestructible and I want so much to fulfil my dream. I know that I could take a break from the university and concentrate on one thing at a time, but I don't want to fall behind. I'm currently studying hard and there are days, like today, in which I drown in an inch of water. I have trouble doing some stupid steps. Today I'm Miss Doom and Gloom! I don't know, maybe I'm just anxious for the time that is running away too fast...>> surely I can not tell him that I also have some problems with Max because of his presence.

Suddenly I realize that while he was listening to my whining he had taken my hand and was caressing it with tenderness to console me. His touch... I have not time to think about the effect that makes me his hand on mine that, all of a sudden, he takes my face in his hand and, looking intensely into my eyes, says: <<Do not get discouraged, focus on one thing at a time! Is the choreography important now? Then just concentrate on that and think about how much you worked to get here. Take the passion and the love you feel for this work and act. You are hard-nosed and you can do it. You must not give way to despair for some steps, we all have bad days.>>

I do not know whether to be more upset about the emotion I'm feeling with his hands on my face or about the hindrance to the choreography.

<<I feel so stupid.>> I think aloud.

<<Why? We're all allowed to become demoralised, the

important thing is not to lose heart and find the strength to fight!
>>

<<You are right, stop being depressed! Now I will go down and I'll try again and again the steps until they will be perfect, at the cost of spending all night like that. Thank you, Matthias.>>
I say to him, blushing.

<<Good! I want to see you always so full of spirit.>> he concludes, giving me two kisses on the cheeks and freeing my face from his hands.

I needed him to find determination and will to fight and it is thanks to him that I find myself again in the gym more positively charged and motivated than before. Of course, problems with Max remain, but I can not talk about them with Matthias, probably he would not take it well. However, I can not stop thinking about his hand that caressed mine; at that time I felt butterflies in my stomach... I must stop thinking about it!

While I'm focused on what I'm doing, I jerk for the sudden squeak of the door. Roberta bursts into the gym paying no attention to my puzzlement: <<How does your workout proceed?>>

<<Good Lord, Isabel! You scared me! Good evening to you too... What are you doing here? Has something happened?>> I ask her doubtfully.

Usually she advises before coming to visit me. I perceive a negative sensation...

<<Isabel, I need to ask you a big favour...you see, I don't know

how to tell you it. I want you to help me...>> she says without looking at me, almost as if she feared my reaction.

<<Tell me, you know I'd do anything for you!>> I exclaim intrigued.

<<Would you help me to win Matthias?>> she asks me quickly and always more intimidated in a "now or never" style.

This request is like a bolt from the blue that runs through me and I say the first thing that goes through my head. <<I don't know if I can help you.>>

<<Are you jealous?>> Robbie asks me scornfully, regaining confidence in herself.

It's certain that this day is going from bad to worse!

My blood froze in my veins, I feel like a thief caught red-handed. I rebut without ruminate too much: <<Absolutely not! What are you thinking about? Matthias is just a friend. It is that becoming friendly with him I learned that he is very busy with his work and therefore he does not have time for anything else.>> I realize that I'm trying to justify myself clutching at straws and saying the first stupid thing that can save me.

<<Is he involved only with his job?>> she asks me sarcastically, showing off a hateful malicious smile.

<<Stop with these turns of phrase! Okay, I'll try it, but do not blame me if nothing will happen between you.>>

<<At least we will have tried it!>> she exclaims looking at me badly.

<<Yeah right! you are perfectly right, there's no harm in

trying.>> I say to her with a fake smile.

<<Forgive me if I came here without giving you notice. I tried to call you but, as usual, you forgot to turn on the ringtone. Since I was in the neighbourhood I dropped in quickly. We haven't seen for days and anyway I would also come just to say hello.>>

<<You did well, you know that I'm always happy to see you. Would you like some tea, coffee or a cold drink?>>

<<No, thanks. I have to run off! My visit is a hit-and-run.>>

<<Okay, I give up...>> I say, raising my hands in surrender.

<<I leave you alone to your splits and turns. Don't overwork yourself too much, Isabel. You have an anxious and tired face, you look also slimmed down. Take care!>> she says, hugging me with affection. Time to say goodbye and she went away leaving me upset and thoughtful.

Returning home, Roberta meets Max and decides to talk to him about the conversation she had with her friend just a moment ago, about Isabel's strange attitudes and about her presumed doubts. They both suppose that there's the likelihood that Isabel is falling in love with the handsome Matthias.

It's night but I can not sleep. Max continues to be angry with me, Robbie is all over me and asks me impossible favours, I'm tired, I have many important things on which I have to focus and they give me no respite. Don't they realize that I'm at a delicate phase? I'm about to have a nervous breakdown! Then there is Matthias, yeah, Matthias... At this time I'd like to leave for another galaxy!

I don't know what to do. My head is about to explode with all this thinking.

If I could I'd go on a mountain top and I'd scream with all my strength Matthias is right, I must concentrate on one thing at a time. Now the ballet school is important. Stop thinking about Max and Robbie's bullshit! I curl up under the blanket and finally my eyelids begin to get heavy. I just want to sleep and not to think about anything and anybody.

V

Walking lightheartedly towards home, some screams draw my attention. I recognise Matthias' voice, I look towards the direction from which the yells come and I witness an unpleasant scene. At the front door there's him who is arguing with two men with a dodgy face. Without anyone noticing it I stop to understand what they might want from him; but when Matthias notices my presence he asks me in an aggressive way to leave them alone. This attitude caught me off guard, I have never heard him use that tone of voice before, especially with me. I say nothing and look at him in a bad way, although in reality I wanted to insult him heavily. How dare he address me in this way? What have I done to be treated thus? I'm furious but at the same time worried. Those fellows make the skin crawl. I hope he doesn't work with such kind of people or even worse that he hangs out with them. Surely it's not like that. I don't see him going around with that kind of people. Who are they? What do they want from him?

My curiosity thunders, I have a strong desire to go to him and to bombard him with questions. I don't do it not to seem nosy and above all I don't do it for pride. He could use other manners! I stay all the afternoon in my bedroom to study and to avoid meeting him. But my concern gets the better of my intentions. After all is said and done he has always been there for me when I needed it. I arm myself with strength and courage and I go towards his bedroom. Now or never!

Despite my legs tremble I decide to knock on the door of Matthias' bedroom.

<<Come in>> he says with a calm tone of voice.

<<Forgive me if I turn up here, I don't want to seem intrusive or indiscreet, but I wanted to talk to you about what happened today out here.>> Matthias listens but he doesn't look at me.

<<Do you remember when a little time ago I was depressed and you were there for me? Well, I owe it to you; so if you want to let off steam or distract yourself, I'm here for you.>>

<<Actually, I was just coming to get you to apologise to you. I realised that I have been an asshole, I treated you badly for nothing. Forgive me but I was very nervous because of those two men who were there with me.>>

<<Do you want to talk about it?>> I ask, hoping of being able to bring back the smile on his beautiful face, but also to have some answers.

<<I'm sorry, Isabel, but I don't want to talk about it now. I swear that I'll do it as soon as I'll be more relaxed. You'll be the

first one to whom I'll tell everything.>>

I remain puzzled and disappointed that he doesn't want to open himself up to me. I nod to let him know that I understand.

Finally he raises his wonderful eyes towards me, takes my hand and pulls me towards him. <<Come on, sit down and tell me how your plans for the future evolve.>> he says making me sit beside him on his bed.

Good Lord! Staying so close to him is a torture. I immediately move the mischievous thoughts away from my mind and breathing deeply I reconnect my brain. I came here because I wanted some answers and instead he clearly changes the subject to avoid me to make him other questions to which he doesn't want to answer. He will certainly think that I'm nosy! I accept his discretion in keeping his thoughts to himself and answer: <<All right, thanks!>>

<<And how is you friend Roberta? It's some time since I've seen her.>>

Why does he ask me it? I realized that I stiffened and pretending not to notice anything I answer without dwelling too much: <<She's fine, thanks! You know, actually I should ask you something from her. It's already a few days that she asked me it but I never had a chance to do it. She would like to know if you want to spend some time with her. You could go out together one evening; she would love it very much.>>

I don't know why but I have a fucking fear of his answer. My blood is boiling and I would never have asked it. I'm an

emeritus idiot! I'd rather crash to the ground than see Matthias with another woman, much less with my best friend!

<<Roberta is very pretty, but my heart and my thoughts belong to another woman.>> Matthias answers looking down at the floor.

Suddenly I have a tachycardia attack. I can not even look at him, I just want to get out of this fucking bedroom.

Roberta is absolutely right; I fell in love with Matthias since the first moment I saw him. From the very moment he came into my life, I was enchanted by him and then little by little I began to feel something deeper. The only thought that he could be connected with another woman hurts me. I would have never entered into his bedroom. I try to hold on for not making anything leak. Without looking at him to prevent him from noticing my frame of mind, I spell out: <<I understand, forgive me for the intrusiveness!>>

To avoid showing him my sadness, I say a trivial excuse to get out of this miserable situation: <<Forgive me again for having infringed on your privacy, I have to go help my mother for dinner, now.>>

<<Don't worry, thanks for asking, Isabel. Remember that you can come here and talk to me whenever you want!>>

<<Thank you.>> I whisper.

I go out the door, breath deeply and rush to my bedroom to suffer in silence and far from prying eyes.

I don't know how many hours I'm locked here crying, I feel

emptied, I have not even come down for dinner. Now that I have the awareness that I'm in love with Matthias I don't know what to do. How can I get him out of my head? I can't believe he loves another woman. Who's she? Isabel, you are very idiot! How could you even think for a moment that a guy like that could not have someone? I realize that actually I know nothing about him. How could this happen? Why did I fall in love with him? He is so unattainable, incomprehensible and with a fluctuating mood. Look who's talking! My mood also is unstable lately. I begin to understand the reason of my disquiet. In recent months I have not fixed points. Am I in love with Max? I don't know... I'm attached to him but I have never felt with him what I feel when I look at or think of Matthias. Max has always been my friend. Can it really be that I have agreed to get engaged to him only because of exhaustion? At the beginning I was happy, at least I believe it. We were often in touch but it's also true that most of the time it has always been him who bended over backwards for me. I like him physically, he has a wonderful smile and in the past he made me feel safe in his arms. I feel like shit towards him. I have to get Matthias off my mind! Come back on planet Earth, Isabel! You are engaged to a man who loves you and would do anything for you! Poor Max, I'm hurting his feelings. From tomorrow onwards I must avoid Matthias and I must only think about passing my last exams and realizing my dream.

VI

My parents have organised for me a surprise party to help

me find some peace of mind and to gratify me for the efforts of recent months. They have invited all my friends, including Matthias.

I'm really surprised and happy. Fortunately in the last period it's much better with Max. We are again so harmonious to make anybody envious, the classical perfect couple. I'm succeeding in calming down and in masking my feelings for Matthias. I have understand that we do not belong together and that nothing will ever happen between us. It's not fair to think about or desire the man of another and above all it's not fair to hurt the man who loves me. The more I look around me, the more I realize how much lucky I am.

Everybody seems to have fun and the party organised by my parents is taking place for the best; the food is great, my mother has prepared my favourite dishes and everybody is submerging me in affection and gifts.

<<Come on, Isabel! Unwrap your presents>> Rossana urges, distracting me from my thoughts.

<<Yes, come here, so you'll see them too!>> I say to her, knowing her curiosity.

The guys gave me a tracksuit and the girls gave me two sets of underwear: one is in black lace and the other is always in lace but pale pink and with a so narrow g-string that wearing it will not leave anything to the imagination.

A note draws my attention:

Watching you dance will always move me. You can make me

enjoy the feeling of freedom, your every movement is poetry for me. Matthias

Reading it I panic for a moment. I open the box that accompanied the note to see what it contains and with amazement I find an iPod.

I look at Matthias and he tells me with a smile: <<This is more convenient than the mobile phone to listen to music when you go running.>>

<<Thank you>> I say to him smiling shyly.

Amazing! He is a good observer. I think no one has ever paid attention to what I wear and what I use to listen to music when I go running.

I get distracted by the doorbell, someone is ringing the bell and I wonder who it is. Here's my curiosity is rewarded: there are some unwelcome guests, the two thugs with whom Matthias was quarrelling long ago at the front door.

Matthias stiffens in their presence. He invites them to go out accompanying them to the door and he goes away with them, leaving the party without saying goodbye.

I am very worried about him, I have thoughts more and more confused. I wonder what he conceals and what those nasty people want from him.

I don't want to make my concern leak and I try to laugh and to get involved by the happiness of the others even if I'd just like to be alone with my thoughts.

The party is coming to an end and there's neither form nor

shadow of Matthias. I continue looking at the door of the living room hoping to see him back and to make sure he is okay. I'm worried, I'd like to ask my mother, maybe she knows something about Matthias' past. After I change my mind: no, it's not fair! I want him to tell me everything.

Little by little everyone leaves, including Max who I hope didn't notice my "not being there" I must do something to stay up as much as possible to wait for Matthias' return, I need to make sure he is okay.

<<Isabel, give me a hand to tidy up, please.>> my mother asks me, distracting me from the confusion that I have in my mind.

<<Yes, mummy>>

<<Happy for the surprise?>>

<<Very, really! Dad and you have been fantastic. Thank you!

>> I say, hugging her tight.

<<Is there something that troubles you, my darling?>> she asks worried.

<<No, I'm just tired. You know, all the emotions of the just passed day.>>

<<I'll end it alone, Isabel. Go to sleep.>> she says, accepting my fleeting answer.

<<I help you really gladly, you are surely very tired too!>> although I want to be alone and immerse myself in my thoughts, I believe that helping my mother can help me to distract myself and to pass the time. Who knows, maybe in the meantime Matthias could come back and I want to understand what his mood is. He

may need to let off steam. Matthias, where on earth are you?

We clear the table, vacuum the floor, wash and dry the dishes, and tidy the kitchen up. An infinite amount of time passed and still no news of Matthias.

I stay with my mother to chat a little and make her see the gifts I received and then we head for our bedrooms.

I take a shower and get ready for the night. I lie on the bed and can not sleep. I continue thinking about Matthias, where he may be now and who the hell can be those disgusting beings. I wonder why he never speaks about his family; he is a so closed person... He has a more and more unstable mood, from smiling he clouds in no time at all. It does not take a rocket science to understand that those two unsavoury men are primitive; they have ignoble attitudes and certainly they ignore the existence of etiquette. They look like they've come out of some mafia movie. The only thought of them makes me shiver!

Sleep isn't on the cards. I reread Matthias' note and connect the iPod that he gave me to the laptop to load the music.

I hear footsteps! Matthias! I get out of bed and rush to the door, opening it wide.

<<Hi!>> I say, scrutinizing him to understand what mood he can be and above all to ensure he is still in one piece.

<<Forgive me if I woke you, coming back.>> he says worriedly.

<<Actually I could not sleep...>>

<<Forgive me if I went away like that.>>

I don't give him the time to finish speaking and I ask him:
<<Are you okay?>>

<<Yes, I'm just a little tired and I really want to go to sleep.>>

I realize that he does everything to avoid telling me what happened to him. Suddenly he changes his mood and I notice that he looks at me from head to foot and tells me sniggering:
<<Nice pyjamas!>>

I look at myself and I realise that I wear a poor white satin underskirt that covers very little. I blush and try to turn tail as soon as possible.

<<Good night, Matthias>> I succeed in telling him in total embarrassment.

<<Good night, Isabel>> he says, winking mischievously.

Practically I run to my room, embarrassed to death. I forgot what I was wearing. I will go out of this bedroom no more. I'm having a lot of complexes. Oh my God! He could think that I did it on purpose to show me like that!

What should I do to help Matthias? I don't understand why he insists on not wanting to vent with me. Maybe he believes that I'm not live up to it. He promised me that as soon as he wanted to talk to someone about it I would be the first one to whom he would do it. Maybe I just have to have a little patience. Matthias, why are you so taciturn?

"Sweet Isabel" Matthias thinks to himself, still amused by the expression and the embarrassment he has aroused in her and for a moment he thought no longer about his problems

“I have to find a solution as soon as possible. One of these days I’ll tell her everything. I have noticed how much she cares about me. It’s 3 a.m and certainly she stayed up to wait for me. Oh Isabel... If only everything was less complicated!”

VII

I did well to go jogging, in this way I relieved myself of some tension.

The sun emanates an unbearable heat. It’s autumn but today it seems to be the middle of summer. Where are the seasons? I can hardly wait for getting home to take this sweaty tracksuit off, freshen up and to wear something lighter.

Two silhouettes in front of the gate of the house draw my attention. What the heck are they doing here? There are the two well-known “gentlemen” with no good manners in front of the main door, they’re certainly waiting for Matthias.

<<Good morning, Miss. Do you remember us?>> they ask me sarcastically. What the hell do they want from me these morons?

<<Yes, unfortunately! You are the ones who yesterday ruined my party.>> I answer in an annoyed tone.

Their presence bothers me and makes my good spirits disappear.

<<Why do you say so? What have we done? Ah, maybe we took away the most important guest!>> they exclaim making a mockery of me with a smile that I’d like to take away maybe arming myself with a baseball bat and beating their teeth with it.

I stiffen and begin to get nervous; raising my voice I answer

very rudely: <<How dare you go to people's houses without being allowed or invited? What a cheek! Among other things I haven't allowed you to speak to me. Furthermore you are also requested not to stand in front of my house!>> these two men have the power to bring out the worst part of me... they instigate violence!

<<Matthias is my friend and who pisses my friends off, pisses me off too! I don't like you, I don't know you and I do not want to have anything to do with you so, if possible, stay away from this house. Arrange appointments elsewhere, this is not a meeting place for scum like you!>> I pause to breath <<Now, if you excuse me, I'd like to get into my house!>> I exclaim screaming hysterically and at the end of my rope.

While I try to open the front door the biggest man gets in front of me to prevent me from entering in the house and threateningly says: <<Oh! Excuse us if we don't worth your while, little sod! Tell your friend to think well about what he has to do unless he doesn't want to have unpleasant surprises in the future!>>

In the meantime also the other sleazy man approaches and says menacingly: <<Measure your words, presumptuous girl, otherwise we will give you a hard time...>>

At the same time Max arrives. He heard everything and intervenes immediately in my defence. <<What do you want from her? Leave her alone and go away.>>

<<Her friend knows it, ask him! We take our leave, for now...>> while they continue saying bullshit, they move away sniggering. They makes me shiver.

Max stares at me furiously and yells: <<What the hell were you thinking of? Do you realize what kind of fellow those two characters are? Do you tell me what the fuck you are doing? You have never been favourable to quarrels and then you squabble with two criminals. And what if I wasn't here?>>

<<It was not my choice, I found myself in front of them and they wanted to prevent me from entering the house. I'm worried about Matthias, I don't like how they treat him and I'm sure that he has nothing to do with them!>>

Now he is really angry. He has never been in favour of my friendship with Matthias. He sees him as an obstacle.

<<Since when are you Matthias' defender?>> Max's anger is increasingly growing and I'm almost more afraid of him than of those two ugly mug.

<<Have you seen that I'm right?>> he yells with his face red with anger: <<If those two characters are Matthias' acquaintances, I do well not to trust him, and you should do it too!>>

I'm getting irritated more and more. What right has Max to insult and criticise someone who he practically doesn't know? I'm about to explode!

I shout at him: <<What are you saying? He is a nice person! You talk so just because you're jealous. How can you judge who you don't even know, relying only on what you have decided to believe?>>

The tones are increasingly raising and the anger is increasingly

gaining the upper hand. <<I'm not jealous, but I'm fed up! You're not able to do anything else but talking about him, you are smitten with him from day one. How can you deny the evidence in this way?>>

<<Is it possible that you can only say bullshit? I'm sick of your accusations and inopportune reprimands!>> I reply more and more unnerved.

<<Open your eyes! Since he arrived here you are no longer the same: You always have your head in the clouds, you don't even want to make love with me, you always have a different excuse not to get out and stay perennially at home. You are, you are...>> Max's voice is more and more loud and aggressive: <<Stop now! It's time for you to choose...him or me!>>

I feel confused and I seem to live in a nightmare. I try to control myself and with a calm voice I make him notice: <<I got engaged to you, Max, not to Matthias...>>

<<Yes, but actually you would like to stay with him, even the walls noticed it.>>

<<We are just good friends, and moreover he is engaged!>> I exclaim unwillingly knowing that this assertion hurts me more than Max's insults and yells.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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