

Antonio Gargallo Gil



In five languages:
English, Spanish,
French, Italian &
Portuguese

The psychologist from Nazareth

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that will give you inner peace



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1

The sea breeze massaged Cristina's face firmly, making her blonde hair dance around her green eyes; eyes in which sadness had lodged, leaving its roots encrusted strongly into the innermost of her being. The only consolation that her totally stifled and dejected body received was the listless embrace of her arms around her thin legs. Her body was painfully thin due to the involuntary fasting that it was constantly being punished with, and only the compelling need to silence her growling stomach, acted as a visceral alarm.

That was how Cristina García's life was. She was a magnificent journalist who, at the age of just thirty, had fallen into a web of apathy, demotivation, and desperation. One of those times when a person, without knowing how or why, begins to see that his own life lacks meaning and, what's more discomfoting, that the only horizon existing is the sea, which relentlessly but serenely, draws one on to magical paths that the sun charts, as if on a promise never to be fulfilled.

The sound of the mobile vibrating in her handbag made her realize that she had fallen asleep on the sand of Benicasim beach for over two hours, but it was the only

place where her mind respected her and filtered some of the thousands of negative messages which constantly bombarded the vault of thought.

"Hello" she said sleepily.

"Where are you? I've been waiting for you for over half an hour! If you didn't want to meet, you could have told me in advance."

Cristina put her hand on her forehead, bit her lip and closed her eyes in a sign of anger. She had arranged to meet her best friend, Marta, to go shopping and make the most of Saturday evening. However, her mind was so weakened and focused on herself that she started to forget about other people.

"Goodness me, it's half past five already!" she exclaimed, while looking at her watch. "Please forgive me... but I lost track of time and didn't remember that we had arranged to meet. I'll head straight there now and to make up for it I'll get you a hot chocolate with churros. Is that a deal?"

"You didn't remember that it's my birthday today either, did you?"

Cristina frowned and her hand returned again to the place where ideas are born, but this time in the shape of a fist, to hit herself repeated blows which dispelled her confusion.

"Marta, how would I ever forget the day in which spring starts?" she lied, as she wasn't going to harm the only friendship she had maintained. "I bought you a present you're going to love. I'm arriving in fifteen minutes."

The quarter of an hour doubled, as Cristina had to stop at the first shop she found on her way to choose a revealing black sweater, which she wasn't even able to wrap in gift paper. Fortunately, the bag in which the shop assistant handed her the sweater was nice enough for that detail to be overlooked. The only thing that didn't go unnoticed for Marta was seeing Cristina in her sportswear, considering

that her friend was one of the most flirtatious people she knew.

"Sorry about the delay" smiled Cristina, handing her the present directly in order not to give her an option of a reprimand which would sink her mood. She then gave her two loud kisses and warmly added: "Happy birthday!"

Marta had known her friend since they were fifteen years old. Just by looking into her eyes, she knew that something was wrong in the life of one of the nicest people she had ever met, although she had also noticed that her personality had been gradually turning bitter over time.

Due to her hectic work schedule, it had already been more than a month since she had seen her, a period in which the effects had had a big impact on the physique of her friend, who was much slimmer. Her cheekbones were worryingly gaunt, which gave the impression of finding yourself right in front of a person who was about to leave the world.

"Thanks, it's lovely!" she exclaimed, confirming the suspicions that Cristina was engulfed in a major crisis. Black was the colour she liked the least! However, a second look at Cristina's face was enough to confirm that black was the colour her look transmitted. It was like a scream in the night; silent but bitter.

They both went into their favourite café. It was the only one in the village where you could not smoke and where they made really tasty fares in order to awaken the addiction of the palate and therefore guarantee their clientele.

The two women of a similar height, one blonde and the other brunette didn't go unnoticed to the waiter or the male clientele. The onlookers accompanied them faithfully with their stares until they sat down on one of the sides. Nevertheless, Marta took centre stage, as she was a beautiful woman with a wonderful figure, and her features

were so symmetrical that they made her border on perfection. But what stood out most of all about her were those brown eyes, easily distinguishable because of their size.

“What can I get you, girls?” asked the waiter, once his customers had made themselves comfortable.

“We’ll have a dozen churros and two cups of hot chocolate” ordered Cristina, loyal to the promise she had made.

The waiter prepared the order leisurely but he intentionally served it slowly so as to be able to admire his two favourite customers who were by far the two most beautiful women on the premises.

Both of them started dipping the churros in hot chocolate, letting silence take over the moment, and therefore help them to feign the apparently relaxed atmosphere they were in. Despite this, Marta still noticed a bit of tension, which was fruit of the negative energy that her friend transmitted. In turn, this led her to speak directly and frankly.

“You look a bit strange. Are you feeling alright?”

The question relieved Cristina, who couldn’t go on pretending. She needed to talk about everything that was wrong with her and Marta was the only person she could trust to open her heart to. Her mother, who lived alone in Alicante, was unwilling to listen to her daughter’s feelings. Her father, on the contrary, remained oblivious to any novelty, since she did not even have the opportunity to know him because he had abandoned them the year she was born, according to her mother.

Cristina looked up and sighed before intervening.

“What would you think if I told you that I want to die with all my might and the sooner the better?”

Marta let go of the churro she was about to caress with her lips. Suddenly, the air ceased to exist and a sort of agony began flowing right through her body. She had forgotten to breathe before the shock of the words got embedded inside her like a spear in her heart. How could a person who had everything want to die? The answer was clear and conclusive: Cristina had fallen into a deep depression and the proof of that was her anorexic figure.

In the hospital where she worked as a nurse, Marta was tired of seeing how life acted like a roller coaster. She was used to seeing the constant ups and downs of people's mood, although admittedly many threw in the towel and were anchored at the beginning of the high, being simply unable to move forward and look upwards. This particular mental illness was wreaking havoc on Western society in the 21st century, affecting all kinds of people of all ages, ranging from young children to the elderly.

"I think you need urgent help," Martha disclosed, reaching out and holding her friend's shaking hand, which quivered like a cold flan.

"No one can give me back the will to live," she replied. "Besides, what's the point in just watching the days go by and not even realizing that life is happening all around you? It's like being under a steam iron that oppresses and crushes you, without leaving any possibility of escaping its force, while you think everything around you is suffering and anguish. I assure you that, as much as I would try to put into words the agony that runs through my whole being, you wouldn't be able to understand it."

"I understand your feelings because I know many people who have the same symptoms as you. I know it is a very complicated situation for you, but it is precisely in these dark times when you have to make an effort to try to keep your head up and see the light.

"I can't take it anymore." Cristina put her hands over her face and began to cry.

"Come on, calm down, you'll see how things will all get back to normal soon."

Marta got up and hugged her friend as tenderly as she could, showing that she had a real friend who she could count on for anything. Even more so when she was aware that in times of extreme weakness, the human being could adopt very radical positions and opt for the most dramatic exit possible: suicide.

"It's just ... nothing works out for me," she added despondently. How long do I have to endure this ordeal?

Marta understood that the trauma her break up with Ivan had caused, just a week before marrying, was still wreaking havoc inside her. A year and a half had already passed since that event but it was obvious that time had not acted as a balm; perhaps because of the way they had ended. Ivan was unfaithful to her on his stag night, showing no modesty at all and doing it completely out in the open with the clear aim of the infidelity being discovered by the woman who was to become his future wife. This thus served as a pretext to end the relationship forcefully, in such a way that there were no more words spoken between them. There was not even a telephone call or a farewell, just a letter she received in the mailbox three days after the unfortunate event. However, she did not dare to open it, nor get rid of it, for fear of reading something that could end up crucifying her. She opted to leave it out of sight in a drawer of her bedside table with the intention of reading it someday and later close a wound that was still open and bleeding. In addition, if it was a hard blow losing the person who was going to become the man she would share the rest of her life with, it was an even greater blow when she learned that he had made this girl who had robbed her life pregnant. A girl he would end up marrying a few

months later, while she was left all alone to be devoured by loneliness, which she hated so much and couldn't hide from. This sad, melancholic feeling seemed to have tentacles that covered her entire existence.

"I know it must be hard for you, but it's time to forget all about it and put it behind you," urged Marta, knowing exactly what she was talking about. "You'll soon see how you'll meet someone who will make you the happiest woman in the world."

Cristina took a tissue out of her pocket and blew her nose with it, releasing a little of the tension from her body, moving it to her tongue and getting it out in the form of words.

"I don't want to know anything at all about men," she blurted out. "At least you have a father who loves you and a husband who respects you. However, what's incomprehensible is that I've been repudiated by my father and abandoned by the man I loved the most ... all because of a horrible tart!" she added angrily. "I hate men and detest their existence. Oh, and I'll tell you something! To top it all off, my boss is making life extremely difficult for me too!"

"Don't tell me he's done it again?" Marta asked as she returned to her seat.

"Yes he has." She nodded more reluctantly as she had a chance to vent and express her feelings. "Since he has nothing else to do, he walks around our desks as if he were a god that everyone should worship. So what's the problem exactly? If we don't lay out the red carpet when he comes around and suck up to him, then he retaliates against those of us who don't praise him. You know I'm not the kind of person who acts falsely and hypocritically in order to gain favouritism in exchange for ... "

"That guy is the typical asshole boss who thinks he's better than everyone else just because he has a managerial

position. There's no doubt that he's a poor wretch whose only satisfaction is having his ass kissed because he's probably rotting inside."

"Come on, forget about it and don't take any notice of him."

"Maybe you can't understand it, since you don't have to endure the harassment we're subjected to, especially those of us who don't drool every time his creepy figure crosses our paths.

"Why don't you move to another newspaper?"

"As you know, I've been working there for five years. If I leave now, how will I pay the mortgage on my apartment? Knowing full well that the labour market is so bad and there is no work for anyone. I wish I had done the state exams for local government positions when I finished my degree!" grumbled Cristina, aware that politics had now become the grand jury of any examination in which one's own merits succumbed to any illustrious surname.

It was just then when a ray of sunlight passed through the panes of glass on the window nearest her table and placed a special shine on it, leaving a glimmer of hope visible on Marta's lips.

"How come I didn't think of it earlier?" She exclaimed as her eyes were bright with emotion.

"What's up?"

Marta quickly opened her handbag and took out a pistachio-green card.

"I don't know if this is any good to you or not, but yesterday I met a very peculiar guy in the hospital. When I was about to finish my shift, a middle-aged man with a slender figure and funny-looking long hair came up to me and handed me this card." Cristina looked at it curiously. "Apparently, he is a psychologist who comes from Nazareth and he's trying to earn his living in Europe. As he speaks

Spanish perfectly, he decided to travel to Spain and, according to him, it was destiny that brought him to the Mediterranean."

"Of course, and you want me to go and visit an unemployed stranger who won't have a penny to his name."

Marta was disconcerted by her friend's response, which she didn't hesitate to refute strongly.

"Cristina, you pass judgement too quickly. That man gave me the card as a gift so that I could give it to a person who in my opinion needs psychological help and for your information," she remarked in a serious but calm voice, "he told me verbatim", "This card is very special as it is the only one I have made and I will offer the therapy free of charge to the person that appears in my practice with it."

"Sorry, I'm a bit nervous," she uttered, wanting to apologize and noticing she had annoyed her good friend.

"It is true that at first it seemed a little strange to me, like it did to you, for a psychologist to stop by the hospital on purpose with the goodwill of offering free therapy. Although that wasn't what surprised me the most." Martha suddenly went silent, as if she had entered a trance while recalling a past situation.

"What surprised you?" Cristina asked curiously, seeing that her friend had stayed quiet.

After a grimace on her lips she continued, as if the silence had not existed.

"His gaze" Another long silence left Marta lost in thought, but this time she did not hesitate to react. "His eyes had amazing peace in them. I had never seen such a clean, kind look in all my life! I don't know, but he transmitted very good vibes, and ... what do you want me to tell you? I am one of those people who believe that things don't happen by chance. Moreover, the mere fact that he wants to use the most humble advertising technique on the planet, and the most effective one; word of mouth, is

probably because he really does work very well." Even though her interlocutor remained silent, it wasn't difficult to perceive a different attitude developing to the one she had shown up to that point. She was finally willing to listen without the narrow-mindedness that flustered her. "Cristina, I'm telling you straight from the heart that you need help and you won't lose anything by going to see him. Try it, and if you don't like it, don't go back."

In light of the good advice she was receiving, Cristina couldn't help but look at her friend and nod at her gaze.

"Maybe you're right and I do need help ... I'll go, and if he doesn't convince me, I won't return and that's all," she thought, as she skimmed the business card with her fingertip as austerely as the arrival of any penniless immigrant who relies on providence and the compassionate help of a human being who takes pity on him and offers a dish to eat or, at best, a job to support himself and guarantee a decent future.

"All right," she replied with an imperceptible grimace of illusion; although it was sufficient for a ray of hope to reach her heart as she was so dejected and punished by a mind where reason had ceased to coexist. It had given in to disillusion, bitterness, sadness and anxiety which had easily won the battle against joy, peace and harmony, which lay moribund and powerless before the overwhelming dominion of unreason.

The nurse only smiled, so that Cristina wouldn't feel any pressure regarding that decision. It was a factor she took advantage of to turn the conversation around and move on to more incandescent and less transcendental matters, which Cristina appreciated. So, for a few moments, she could leave her sorry self to one side and enjoy the company of a friend whom she loved like a sister.

They extended their meeting until the sun was about to abandon the firmament, which would mark a melancholy

farewell on Cristina's behalf, who much to her regret, had to return to her place and face her roommate; dreaded and exasperating loneliness.

On the way, a multitude of unanswered questions stalked her. Why was life being so hard on her? Did she not deserve a truce? Why couldn't fate team up with her and dance to the sound of happiness? Or maybe was it because she deprived of any kind of joy and would have to dance with sadness for the rest of her life? "How unfair!" she thought as her disjointed steps carried her to what she considered more of a cemetery than a home.

The sound the lock made while she opened the door of her house paradoxically sounded like the bolt they slam shut on prisoners when they have to occupy their cells at bedtime. It was like crossing the threshold of the door and coming across a cloud full of melancholy, as if it were waiting for her, Machiavellian-like, to perch on her head. It was like a hornet of destructive thoughts that only partially stopped when she turned on the television and let the soft couch swallow her. She just mindlessly ate the first thing she could find in her half-empty refrigerator, a simple sandwich.

Between bites, her mind inexorably absorbed the depressing news that every single channel offered the viewer: deaths, corruption, natural disasters, robberies, fatal accidents and endless bad news that would sink anyone's mood. It was exactly the same news she had to write about every day in her newspaper. Although she was nevertheless unaware of being part of a machine that the political class was manipulating freely in order to create cloned brains and constant contradictions to keep society in line with a subtle and subliminal message: "The world is a mess, fortunately you are one of the lucky people who is alive today; so don't worry, remain docile to the orders of the faithful presidents who watch over your security and

continue working unquestioningly. This will enable you to continue enjoying the purchases you need to make every day, to be able to belong to the world of the chosen few, a world ruled by the only god who can give you happiness: the God of money.” And the news typically ended with nothing more subliminal than the sports section, which discussed the completely politicised and monothematic world of football.

So this was the perfect time for its detractors like Cristina to make the most of it and go to the bathroom to brush her teeth and put on her pyjamas quickly. She then prepared to see a romantic film, where reality became fiction and the mind subconsciously transformed it into an idyllic dream of what could be but isn't. It was an ideal cocktail for bedtime, consisting of the frustration of not getting what others apparently have already got and thus ending the day with a litany of lamentations, turned into a ritual of punitive thoughts with which Cristina said goodnight every night: “Damn it! How come everyone finds the love of their lives and I don't? Am I so miserable that no one on earth notices me? Why the hell does all this have to happen to me? What a shit life this is which takes everything out on me and makes everything go wrong. Am I ever going to be able to be happy someday? And to top it all off, I'll return to work tomorrow to see the «Owl» —This was a nickname that she and another colleague used when they referred to Alberto Vallado, their editing boss, because he was always controlling them—. He is an unbearable guy, if not to say a real prat. Who does the guy think he is anyway? Does he think we are his slaves and that everyone has to revolve around his stinky ass? And to his delight, four ass-kissers dance to his tune and roll out the red carpet each time he greets who he thinks are his commoners: they must be really stupid! Don't they realize that he is a fake, stuck-up

and arrogant guy capable of exasperating anyone? How dare that little prick warn me to do exactly what he says or else he'll fire me, just because he is the boss. Does he think he's a superior being only because of the insignificant position he has, which is just thanks to his father's connections in any case? Tomorrow I'm going to teach that little weasel a lesson."

"Don't you dare!" shouted Concha, seeing that the phone was already in her hand.

"Do you want to bet?" Christina challenged with a Machiavellian look and smile.

Concha burst out laughing upon seeing that her friend wasn't hesitating to do what she had long been planning.

"Come on; move closer to the bulletin board" - the point where Alberto's office could be seen-. "Let me know if the Owl comes, because on top of the fact that the guy doesn't do a stroke and spends the day vegetating, he is not going to get away this time," she added, dialing the phone number with determination.

Concha followed her colleague's orders, as she watched in disbelief what she had heard so many times, until finally the threats came true.

"Good morning, I would like to inform you that on number five Lepanto Street, there is a BMW with registration plate number 1387 MLZ parked badly on the sidewalk and it is interfering with the pedestrian crossing."

Cristina raised her fist in a sign of victory, a gesture that went unnoticed to the other six colleagues who were in the room, though not for Concha, who was completely aware that the plan had been brilliantly executed.

Concha's speed of action implied to Cristina that danger was lurking. She quickly put her phone in her handbag and sat in front of the computer keyboard, because if her hands

were not on it, she would be open to the typical reprimand that she had never got used to.

“Come on, you slackers, in an hour I want your news on my table,” Alberto ordered, waiting for the smiles of his minions as he went on his peculiar office stroll.

Look at him, in his medieval tie and youthful shirt, thinking he's Tom Cruise, when he's just a dirty old man. I visualised sitting him down in the toilet of his house pulling the flush and being lucky enough for a powerful swirl to suck him down the pipes, to end up where he deserves to be: in the sewers! He's like an accordion with so many wrinkles and his grey hair. Imagine, he thinks he's the handsome guy from the 'celebrity island' show, when he's really nothing but a scoundrel whose saint of a wife can't even stand him! She has to sit him down to eat alone in one corner of the kitchen because she can't bear the sight of him. There he goes again, waiting for everyone to pat him on the back. "Good morning boss, what a lovely tie you have," says one sweet-talking underling, sucking up to him to try to get a raise. "Hi boss, I'll bring you one of those articles you like right now," says Jesus the flatterer, covering up his incompetence with flattering words — Cristina thought totally indignantly—. If he says something impertinent to me, I won't be responsible for what I'll say to him!

The room was composed of a long corridor, on the sides of which were the employee's desks, with a medium-high glass panel that granted a kind of independence from the other workers; though not enough privacy if someone was standing or walking around amongst the staff.

Just then, as Alberto was about to pass in front of Cristina's desk to speak to her, Jesus's voice intervened.

“Boss, is that your BMW the pick-up truck is towing away?”

Alberto rushed to the window with an astonished look on his face and in utter disbelief. He had parked in the same place for four years and in that time had never received even a verbal reprimand.

“What the hell are they doing?” He shouted indignantly when he saw it really was his car.

Alberto sprinted out of the office at the speed of light.

Concha and Cristina exchanged a look of accomplices, one of those expressions that show personal satisfaction of non-exteriorized joy.

My God wasn't that effective! —She thought, at how fast the local police had acted—. *It takes them hours to turn up when there's a robbery, but when it comes to handing out fines to raise money, it literally takes seconds!*

All the employees rushed to the window so as not to miss the epic scene. Nevertheless, the party-pooper enabled Alberto to arrive in time before the pick-up truck had hauled the car away. This was of course in exchange for a dreaded police prescription, which involved the payment of a fine for one and the reward of five years of humiliation for the other.

Alberto arrived proudly back in the office, unaware that one of his own employees was behind that prank, and added with a complacent look on his face:

“Never mind, no panic! A small fine which I won't have to pay.” After a brief pause he exclaimed with self-satisfaction: “Well, brothers-in-law were invented for a good reason!”

The grimace of contentment on Cristina's lips disappeared after hearing Alberto's confident words. She shook her head from side to side in desolation and looked at her loyal colleague, who mirrored her outrage with her piercing eyes. It was gut-wrenching to both of them to realize that this plan had fallen through because the aforementioned had a sister whose husband was a councillor in the city

council. He would have no trouble getting the offender off scot-free.

It's totally obvious that kings aren't the only ones who are privileged. Long live democracy!

It would be lunchtime when Cristina and Concha would talk discreetly next to the coffee machine that was in the adjoining room. Here they could take advantage of their colleagues smoking break absence, and discuss the highlights of the morning, just as TV commentators do at half time in Real Madrid and Atlético de Madrid football derbies.

"Did you see the old man's face when the party-pooper told him about the car?" said one.

"God! I was cracking up laughing," answered the other.

"I am one hundred percent sure that the Owl, being the arrogant twat that he is, will park in the exact same place again tomorrow. You can rest assured. But this time, please, do me a favour and put on a sexy outfit. Then go outside and consult with the tell-tale police-officer on shift who sticks his nose in everyone's business. If we get the pick-up truck to finish its job properly this time, no one stands a chance of cancelling the fine."

"In addition, the double nuisance and humiliation of having to go to the warehouse to pick up the car would be priceless."

"Furthermore, the nasty feelings and resentments will haunt poor Alberto long afterwards."

They both burst out laughing, just thinking of the pleasure they would have seeing their boss absolutely fuming with rage on finding a little yellow triangle pointing him towards the new location of his car.

On many occasions they had thoroughly discussed how unfair and lousy it was to work with someone who thought he was just above every other living person. It infuriated

them that this so-called boss thought he had the God-given right to park wherever he felt like it, without an ounce of thought about the inconvenience he could cause pedestrians in the area. Not to mention the discomfort and danger his carelessness exposed to wheelchair users, who had no option but to invade the public thoroughfare as the footpath was totally blocked.

"By the way, do you think they'll sign Charo for the NBA league?" pondered Cristina. "What a lovely tie you have boss," she sarcastically repeated the phrase Charo had previously commented, in a high nasal tone. They considered her a real sycophant, capable of flattering even in her sleep. "I think she is trying to butter him up so that when the grandfather retires he will give her his position."

"There you have it," Concha agreed. "As soon as they get rid of that thief, we're sure to get Charito, who's a real bossy tyrant. Watch out, if they make her boss ... the eagles will be back!"

"Have you noticed that whenever she can, she goes into his office and leaves him drooling with her nonsense? She even looks like a snail; the only reason she doesn't creep any more is because she isn't able to."

"I've noticed!" The only thing she needs to do now is open her legs.

"That's if she hasn't done so already, of course."

The sound of the crank interrupted their lively conversation. Once the nicotine craving was satisfied, the smokers lined up at the coffee pot to get some caffeine into their bodies.

"Since I've got a moment, I'm going to phone my mum - it's her birthday today," Cristina told her workmate.

"Great, I'm going to write an email to my brother in the meantime," her colleague added.

Cristina went out onto the street for a breath of fresh air and thus used up the ten remaining minutes she still had free for her break, before arriving at the newsroom again to get started on the articles that made up the key section that she was the manager of: politics and the Spanish economy. At first it seemed outrageous to her to manipulate the information received, until she understood that it was a natural law. This was how society worked and there was no choice but to jump on the bandwagon to survive and earn a living. Either the newspaper was politically oriented and received subsidies, financial aid, advertising revenue and all kinds of benefits from the political party in question or there was simply no way of reaching the profit target that the board of directors had set for the year. In this particular case, the newspaper was clearly left-wing, because whenever a member of the PSOE party committed any wrongdoing, its mission would be to counter the information that right-wing newspapers offered on the same matter. Other times she would produce news items that could expose a member of the right-wing Popular Party. Due to the fact that most politicians had dirty laundry of some sort, it was relatively easy to find clear cases of corruption, bribery or prevarication. The system was so corrupt in fact that everyone involved covered each other's back, which unfortunately meant that the real victim almost always ended up being the common worker in the street.

Today she would have to cover up the ever widening deficit that the Government was creating for the Spanish people by offering some positive data in the most eloquent way possible to pull the wool over readers' eyes. Thus, despite the disgraceful four million unemployed figure, she could cunningly throw in some positive data, showing that unemployment had actually declined during the current month of May, compared to May of the previous year.