R. Marin

A Spark of Love

Did I love, or did I mostly love being in love?

Here I am on the train.

A morning InterCity train, a window seat. Outside, the coast slides by. The sea is calm, almost still, a pale blue that the sun barely awakens. The hills plunge toward it, covered in dense vegetation squeezed between the tracks and the water. Now and then a tunnel, darkness, then the light returns, and the blue is still there.

I am leaving my hometown. Once again, heavy-hearted, telling myself that my life seems unwilling to be here.

Heading for that tower that has been leaning for centuries without ever falling. From there, I will catch a plane back to France. Back home, if you can call a place home where no one is waiting for you.

Of course, work is waiting for me. But work fills your days; it does not fill a life. And what is a life worth if not lived together?

Yes, it is idyllic. But that is what I have always wanted. An incurable romantic.

The train is full. People everywhere, voices, suitcases, someone laughing behind me. But I have my earphones, and in my ears there is only one song. *That's Why You Go Away.* On repeat.

Again. And again.

And all these people around me disappear.

All that remains is the window, the landscape, the music, and me. The sun shining, the colors, and these shores. These shores that watched me as a child, strolling, diving into the

sea from a rock, swimming, laughing, and loving.

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For two weeks, I walked these streets. I found the sea every morning. The alleyways, the stairways, the little squares where time forgot to pass. I ate the focaccia from the harbor, I drank my coffee standing at the counter the way you do here, I watched the old men play cards in the shade. I walked alone, but it was not the same solitude. Here, the walls know me. The air has a scent that takes me back to childhood. The sea is there. In the same place.

Faithful, she is.

Holidays end. Always. The train rolls on, the landscape slides by, and the more kilometers pass, the more I know what awaits me on the

other side. My apartment. The silence. The walls that do not know me. Monday's routine. No one to say, "I'm home," to.

That is where, I believe, it all began.

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I close my eyes for a second. When you stop looking outside, the sound of the wheels grows louder.

And behind the sound of the wheels, there is another sound. The one inside.

Here I am, despite everything. After all those relationships, after so much heart given, here I am alone. Again. And it has been three years now. As if some pallid fate had decided that I, yes I, had no right to long-term happiness. A moment, sure. Years, no. Not for you.

Not a precise memory. Not a face. Just the void.

This void I have been carrying for so long. The one I manage to silence when life keeps me busy, a woman in front of me, the sun, streets to wander. The one that holidays cover with a light veil, enough to forget, not enough to heal.

On a train taking you back toward silence, the void no longer needs permission. It returns. It sits down beside you. And it starts to talk.

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My heart raced.

For no reason. Without warning. As it has always done. This heart that has always spoken to me, that has so often dictated my life, that has never left me in peace.

And today, fate seems to be telling me once again: not for you. And the question comes to me. Did I love, or did I love being in love? What did I truly understand about love? Or is it simply a void I can never fill, neither alone nor as a couple?

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I open my eyes. The landscape did not wait.

I do not know how many times I have fallen in love in my life. Many. Too many, perhaps. Or not enough, depending on how you look at it.

What I know is that every time, I believed. Every time, I thought: she is the one. Every time, my heart took off without asking my opinion, and I followed. Eyes closed. All in. A hundred percent. Sometimes two hundred.

For me, love has always begun like a spark. A look. A smile. The heart quickening. And when the feeling was mutual, the shift was immediate. I did not need to count the days. I did not need to think. I knew. I felt. And I surrendered to it.

Why go slowly when the heart has already left?

That is what I told myself every time. Today, I wonder if I was right.

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The seat beside me is empty. A space made for two, and me alone in it.

And the images arrive.

The blue slides by, the music plays on, and behind the glass it is no longer the hills I see.

Shoulder-length brown hair, a summer, games in the countryside. A smile that never truly faded.

A narrow alley, a glance exchanged, a turn back. The impossibility of pretending nothing happened.

Roses brought to a woman who had come to leave me, and who stayed.

Eyes that loved me more than I knew how to love in return. A face whose name I have forgotten, but not what it gave me.

And others. So many others.

Each image passes like a landscape through the train window. Fast. A flash. A light. Then another.

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The sea is still there, outside. The train goes on. The song starts over.

And I remain with this question, the one my heart asked that morning, without my expecting it, somewhere between my hometown and the tower that never falls.

Did I know how to love?

Or did I mostly know how to be in love?

I do not know the answer yet. Perhaps it will come during this journey. Perhaps it will not.

The sea is calm, the song plays on, and the memories have already begun to travel.