

This book is not a final draft. Its purpose is only to allow the book to be understood by English speakers. The English version is being edited.

BLUE CUP CAFE

By Shantal Freitas

**For a friend who no longer is,
a friend with 3 A's,
a bald guy,
an Aurora,
a critical reader and
all my Wattpad readers.**

01 - [The Flutist]

I never knew her name. She wasn't of many words. Whenever I looked at her, I imagined that she must be called Michel or Raquel. A name that, to be pronounced by her French accent, would have her tongue rolling.

I named it A Flutista (the article comes with the name). She was the type who demanded an introduction before something that preceded something else.

Her bangs were cut to perfection, as was all her black *Chanel* hair, which swayed elegantly as she spoke. The collars of his white shirts were always pressed, and his shoes were clean, even on snowy days. Her brown eyes were serious and looked at her instrument case intently, afraid that someone would touch her precious one.

The flutist appeared on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 7 and 8 in the morning, asking for two eggs and toast with little butter. Decaffeinated coffee with skim milk. When she showed up for the third time, I started arranging her plate so that it was as symmetrical as possible so she didn't have to tidy it up before eating.

It is noticed that the flutist is a person with manias (some, even excessive). For this reason, I was surprised when she walked in on a Monday afternoon without her instrument in hand. She didn't sit at her usual desk: she took a seat at the bench that faced the street and watched the movement.

I leaned over the counter after filling a lady's glass.

The Pied Piper tapped her fingers on the table looking anxious. She would say she was expecting someone. She wasn't in one of her dress shirts and neatly cut fabric pants. She had on a swirly blue dress that fell to her knees. Well-groomed, like someone ready to go to a cocktail party or—

“Stop living inside others, Aurora,” said Robert, the barista/waiter/manager who worked with me, placing a cup with an order in front of me.

I take the order and prepare it quickly. I hand the cappuccino to table 4 and take out the notebook, heading towards À Flutista.

"What can I offer you today?" I ask with my pen ready to write. I felt that we would have something different that day.

Pied Piper picked up one of the menus in front of her and looked around.

"A medium espresso," she replied, reaching for something outside and finally turning to me, "please."

“Anything else?” I ask, even though I know there wouldn't be.

“That's all, for now. She smiled before turning her attention to the outside of the cafe.

It was the first time she smiled at me. A simple and polite smile, worried and anxious. I smiled back, but she was no longer looking at me. I ran to the machine to prepare her order.

For a moment, I shared her anxiety. I attended to the other customers, letting me spy on what she was doing. Something that, for 23 minutes, was nothing more than an exchange of glances with the outside world and the cell phone, until, finally, an old man walked through the door.

He was well into his 70s. His walk and mottled skin told a story. The dark suit gave him the class of someone completely satisfied with his life. Seeing him enter, The Pied Piper jumped up from her chair and greeted him with a very formal handshake. An awkward smile escaped him.

I went to them to ask if they wanted anything, but I was turned away, with no excuse to go back. I wished I could hear what they were saying, but a group of teenagers had just arrived, and orders for highly elaborate coffees pinned me to the counter.

When you left, The Pied Piper was left behind with a letter in her hand. She stared at the words in awe, with a joy she didn't imagine there was inside her.

I didn't disturb her happiness by going there to ask if I could offer her anything else. I watched her place the payment on the table and tuck it under her glass like she always did. That day, she left a 40% tip. It was the last time I saw The Piper, which made me imagine several possibilities: maybe she had received a huge paycheck and had moved back to Paris, maybe this was a letter from her old college offering a job in Lyon. He also liked to imagine it was a love letter from her from high school asking her to move in with him in the Caribbean.

"I heard the man say something about the Symphony," Rob said as he walked past me, knowing what I was thinking.

02 - [Maya]

She didn't have specific times or days. Maya showed up at any time, always carrying her backpack, camera, and passport. I've never seen anyone with so many stamps on those sheets. She had already passed through all parts of the world: Asia, Africa, America, Oceania, even Antarctica.

She was the type who liked to talk. She always arrived ready to share one of her adventures around the world. She was a photographer, half a journalist, National Geographic type, or any other channel that was interested in her stories and beautiful images.

She never repeated her requests. She said that "there is a lot to experience in a very short time". She lived life to the fullest, every second as if it were her last.

She told about her trip to Thailand's rainforests and how she ended up lost for two days. She was sure she would die there, but that's where she got her best images. I did a search looking for these photos and found that, in addition to having been published in a magazine and awarded, they were part of a small exhibition: "The best moments of the worst moments".

Maya had a boyfriend. Frederick. It seemed like the right name. He was a funny man, around 35. He shared her energy. She couldn't tell how old Maya was. She dressed like a cool explorer, but she also spoke with the wisdom of someone she understood about life. Having walked so much of the world, I couldn't imagine she was still in her 20s, but her excitement made me question my judgment.

"Where are we going today?" I asked as she sat at the counter happier than usual, carrying her huge travel bag.

"Thailand. And I'll let you guess why." She pulled the menu towards her.

"Photos for some important magazine?" I made my first attempt.

"Ahh, come on, Aurora!" I know you can do better... And a mint coffee for the trip, please.

"You're going to interact with a tribe that lives isolated and doesn't know the rest of the world exists," I say, reaching for a glass to prepare their order.

She laughs.

"Nice kick, but no. It's the best reason in the world to travel..." Her eyebrows wobble, hinting at something I don't understand.

I look at her not knowing what that reason might be. Nothing with Maya was expected. So I preferred to wait for her to complete the sentence.

"Love, Aurora. Love! She adorably hugged herself, making it apparent how much she was in love. Frederico was a lucky man "I'm getting married!

"That's great." I walk around the counter so I can hug her "I'm so happy for you."

"Thanks. I have never been happier. Lucas is so awesome! All that I ever wanted."

I stop for a second, confused. Frederick was probably not named Frederick, but he was sure he was not named Lucas.

"But... I thought..."

She looks at me, understanding my confusion.

"Ahh, don't worry. Frederico and I broke up after I met Lucas.

"But you were with Frederico here less than a month ago," I say, still trying to absorb it.

"Yes, I met Lucas three weeks ago. But you know how it is... When you find the right person, you just know. There is no reason to wait. I know we were made for each other. Our souls have wandered through the ages just so we could get to that day.

I, confused, watch her. Something so impulsive made sense to who Maya was. She was sure of herself and with a conviction, few people could express. Even though it sounded crazy to me, all I could do was be happy.

"What are the plans then?" I place the glass in front of her.

"It's just the two of us on the beach. And then I don't know. Let's discover it little by little, one adventure at a time.

"Can I ask you where you met him?"

"I was doing my morning run in the park and I saw him. It was love at first sight. At that moment, I knew we were going to spend the rest of our lives together. He came to talk to me, and we continued to run together. Two weeks later, we were planning our wedding. Did I mention he is an artist? Because he is. He painted a picture of me. It's the most beautiful thing ever...

And for half an hour, Rob and I took turns waiting tables and listening to details, while Maya took her takeout order right there.

She then left. She embarked with Lucas on her way to "eternal happiness". I haven't seen her for a week, then a month, a year, two years. In the meantime, I haven't forgotten about her, but her memory of her has become a little vague, blurry, so much so that I didn't recognize her when she walked into the cafe one winter's day.

I saw someone familiar in that woman, but associating her with Maya's image was difficult. She had dark circles under her eyes and looked exhausted. She carried a small bag, which the former Maya would have criticized for not holding any of her cameras. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail, the color darker. Her clothes were nice and branded, but the corner of her blouse was sticking out of her skirt and she had a small stain on her sleeve.

"An espresso, big, please," she asked, sitting down at the counter and letting her bag fall to the floor.

The old Maya despised espresso, she said it was a drink for people without creativity.

"It's for now. I quickly mobilized, continuing to place the other two orders that were in front of hers.

She didn't say anything for a while. She watched as I made the drinks and carried them to the tables. When I finally gave her hers, she said:

"You don't even remember me?"

I stopped and searched my mind for all the people she could be, and I saw deep in those tired black eyes a lost Maya. I jumped at the memory. I greeted her with a hug across the counter, and she told me about her life.

She had changed a lot. After the wedding, not long after, she became pregnant. Greg was her little one's name. She had quit her shaky job as a photographer and started working at a finance company. Her husband left art as a hobby and started a small car dealership with his brother.

“And that's the end of my tragic story.

“It's not tragic. You are a mother now!” I try to cheer her up.

“Yeah, I used to tell myself that, but I realized that I became just that.” She took her cell phone out of her bag. “Damn! I have to go. If I'm late, my boss will kill me.”

Maya comes back from time to time, but she is not the same. Not much of that euphoric energy was left in her. She seemed bitter about some of her choices, and missed her old life.

However, Maya was not just a tragic life. It was a normal life like any other, where, not always, the best decisions are made, and you have to deal with it. She had changed like anyone else. Perhaps, if she had first met her that way, she wouldn't have seen any problem.

That's what I got used to. Not looking at her as a comparison but as a completely new person. And I realized I was wrong: there was still plenty of Maya full of energy inside her. When she talked about her son, her eyes always sparkled. Better than me, Maya accepted her new life. And every time she came back, each time, I could see a flame growing inside her as she told about Greg's first steps or her first words. Maya had embraced what she often considered a mistake and turned it into the best deal she could make.

03 - [Sahra e Norma]

Sahra and Norma always came together once a month. They ordered a small feast at brunch time: pancakes, toast, coffee, eggs... They never ate everything but loved to see the table full.

I didn't know much about them other than the few conversations I overheard, and the times they spoke to me. The two of them always seemed very entertained with each other,

chattering about something that happened at the office and how hard it was to be an intern at a law firm.

They used difficult words for no reason and always referred to laws with several numbers. They left the 15% tip perfectly counted, not a penny more or less.

Sahra had beautiful golden hair, while Norma had shiny black hair. Sahra was calm, Norma, the definition of a chipmunk. They completed each other in every aspect. Coffee with lots of sugar and nothing, chocolate pancakes with blueberries, or regular with butter and maple syrup. I loved how, even completely opposite, they understood each other. It didn't matter that they didn't know simple things about each other: every day they discovered something new because when it came to the important things, they were in perfect sync.

I could remember the day they came dressed up to a Halloween party (Max and Caroline from *Two Broke Girls*). Or tell about their matching bags, or even how their boyfriends were eerily similar. However, I think my favorite day was when Norma didn't show up.

Sahra came and sat at any table, ordering a single dish. I was surprised not to see her accompanied, but I wasn't surprised (people can change their habits). I brought your plate and I commented without interest (or with a lot):

“Your friend didn't come today.

She didn't expect more than a little nod or a smile in response, but she elaborated:

"She won't come again." - Sahra replied, making me imagine the worst possibilities - She got a promotion and was transferred to the Buenos Aires office.

I breathed a sigh of relief that Norma was still alive, and she said,

“Looks cool.” I mean, having no idea what difference it made “You must be proud of her.”

“Yeah...I just don't see her that often, and you know...That's how friendships end.

“You can talk to her over the phone or all the other unimaginable social networks,” I commented.

I looked around, noticing that the cafe was pretty empty. Rob could cover me for a while.

"I used to have a friend in high school," I began. “We were inseparable, just like you two. And all of a sudden, after I went back to school, right after vacation, she wasn't there anymore. Found out she had moved. We continued to talk, at first, almost every day. Then a

few days for weeks and then months. Ultimately, we were reduced to a few conversations a year.

"Is this supposed to help me?" Sahra looks on, annoyed.

"I finish, and you tell me whether it helped or not. Anyway, I still talk to her sometimes, and even if it's not every day, she's still my best friend because she understands me better than anyone else. And maybe I should make an extra effort to talk to her more often... But none of that matters, because we're the same friends as before, only a little more distant.

Sahra stares at me for a while without letting me read her expressions.

"It helped..." she finally says with some resistance. "Thanks.

I get up satisfied and go back to waiting on tables. That was my first story that actually helped someone. It wasn't true, but in the end, it was better than any truth I could have told.

Sahra was slow to return, but when she did, she was smiling. She sat at the table, ordering a little more food than she would be able to taste. This was the continuation of their friendship. Across the table was Norma, inside her cell phone screen. She was in some cafe in Buenos Aires, with an exaggerated amount of food in front of her.

I like to think that they continued this ritual until the end of their lives.

04 - [The Cloud]

Devon. He liked to show up in the late afternoons, mostly in winter. He had a strong cigarette-smelling smell and a beard that was often short and well-shaped. He used to talk to Rob. They exchanged a few words between sugary espresso glasses, and always, in the end, with the bill, he left one of his expensive cigarettes behind.

He wanted to ask why, but I never did. First, I thought Rob had a secret addiction to expensive cigarettes, and Devon was his supplier. However, I noticed that after putting the cigarette in his pocket, he transferred it to a box under the counter.

I couldn't contain my curiosity for long, and once, at the end of the day, I was hidden away to peek at the box. It was full. So many cigarettes that, just being near her, I was afraid the nicotine would jump into me.

I removed that image for a month, imagining several reasons. When nothing else made sense, I asked Rob.

"I'm helping Devon with a project," he answered me, knowing the incomplete answer would make me that much more curious.

"Building a stockpile of cigarettes if they become illegal?" I joked, hoping this would elicit a more concrete answer from him.

He rolled his eyes.

"I can't tell you. It's not my secret to tell you.

And, as always, Rob let me drown in curiosity. I needed to know the reason for the box, but I didn't get answers until months later when Rob wasn't there to attend to Devon. We didn't talk, much less dared to ask him directly (I knew how nosy it would sound, even more so than my natural intrusion).

Devon paid the bill and handed me the cigarette along with the money.

"Can you please give Robert to me?" He had a smile on his face.

I said yes, and he was gone. I was just going to throw the cigarette along with the others, but I noticed something scratched on it: the letter O, or at least a drawing of a circle.

The next day, the first thing I did was hand Rob the cigarette. He broke into a proud smile when he took it.

"We achieved! He smiled the same way Devon did.

"Got what?" "This time I needed to know, no-frills.

He hesitated but continued:

"Devon's wife is pregnant. He wanted to quit smoking because of the baby. We made a deal that he would give me a cigarette every time he came here. It was one less cigarette he would smoke. That was his last. "He lifted it with a certain pride. "I have a friend who's going to buy the cigarettes to make a play, and with the money, Devon is going to buy the baby's first gift.

"That's really nice of you," I say. I had no other words.

"I'm a nice person." He laughed.

"You're."

Jai lived in the cafe. She was 7 years old when she first appeared. We baked him a birthday cake on the day he turned 9. He lived two blocks away with his mom and dad, whom we didn't know, but we knew they fought constantly. Every time an argument started, Jai would come to breakfast. However, even with the conflicted atmosphere at home, he kept a smile on his face. He didn't like to talk about it, so he focused on school events and sometimes brought homework to finish.

His most common order was a huge hot chocolate with blackberry pancakes. In winter, he would put his gloved hands around the steaming cup, and bring it close to his face just to feel the warmth and aroma of the chocolate.

Rob liked to keep her company. I think he somehow related to the boy's problem.

"You came loaded today," Rob said, seeing little Jai sitting at the counter with two backpacks on his back.

"I'm going away," he said, smiling.

"Uhh. Sounds fun. Rob began to prepare the hot chocolate the way he liked it. "Where are you going?"

"Cardilif!"

"Cardiff," I correct him, leaving the dirty glasses on the countertop inside. "What are you going to do in Wales? I ask, curious.

"My aunt lives there. I will stay with her. I have two cousins there, it's going to be super cool. We're going to play PS and go to the beach, and..."

And he kept telling us his plans for when he arrived. Rob and I had fun watching his excitement.

"What time is your train? Rob asked, worried that he'd wasted time in the middle of the conversation."

"Four-thirty," Jai replied.

"Are you sure you haven't forgotten anything?" It would be terrible for you to forget about your lucky socks," I say, knowing how much he believed those yellow polka-dot socks had a magical aura.

Jai swiveled around in her stool and placed one foot on the counter. The quick movement threw him off balance, but I was quick enough to pull him back forward.

"I said they were lucky!" he'd say, taking my credit for saving him, and giving it entirely to his socks.

With a rather adult movement, he tugged at the sleeve of his sweater and glanced at the Gravity Falls watch on his arm.

"I think I have to go," he said, seeing it was just after three. He tipped his cup of hot chocolate and then jumped off the stool.

"Aren't your parents going to take you to the station?" I ask, finding it curious that they aren't going to say goodbye to their son. Even though the parents looked reckless, letting the boy go to the station alone seemed too much.

"No, my mom and dad are at work, but that's okay," he said as if he had everything under control. "See you when I get back. He put five pounds on the counter and winked both eyes in an adorable attempt at a wink.

We saw him leave happier than ever, unlike when he needed to get back to the house where his parents could still be fighting.

The next day went normal, until the moment we had the pleasure of meeting Júlia, Jai's sloppy mother, accompanied by a policeman and huge red eyes whose eyes she had been crying.

"Excuse me," said the cop, approaching the table I was finishing serving, "we're looking for a boy. He held up the photo of Jai. "We wanted to know if you—

"Jai?" I interrupted. - What happened to him? Didn't he arrive at his aunt's house?

"Aunt's house?" the mother asked, stepping in front of the policeman.

"He came here yesterday before he left for Cardiff, to his aunt's house. That's what he said."

"Damn it! Was because of this! "She seemed to understand something I didn't know."
"I know where he is."

Julia came out taking her cell phone out of her pocket and taking the policeman like a shadow.

I followed those days and the following ones without really understanding what had happened, until, three weeks later, Jai reappeared fully in the cafe, as if nothing was out of the ordinary. He explained to me and Rob how his parents didn't know about this trip/escape. He had planned everything with his cousins: the two cousins who had already arranged a room in the attic for when Jai arrived.

The little one was so smart that he wrote a fake letter from high school for a trip to Cardiff, so he would have parental permission to travel alone. And still, for months, he saved money for his trip.

With the parents not very interested, everything went unnoticed, until the school called asking about Jai's absence that day. In addition, I had handed over his position to the police. His mother called his sister, who found the boy already settled in his new room. Julia went to get her son immediately.

"But do you know which is the best?" Jai asked me after telling her story. "The socks work."

"IT'S? Like this?"

"After I came back, my mother grounded me, but now she and my father don't fight anymore." He smiled.

I smiled back. After the scare Jai had given her parents, I imagine they put his priorities into perspective. I was happy for Jai and her socks. Magic or not, he had gotten what he wanted.

And after that day, I learned never to underestimate a child again. They are much smarter than you think.

06 - [Sam]

Among the people who appeared the most at the cafe was Sam. The Blue Cup was his favorite breakfast spot, where he would bring back his achievements from the night before to say goodbye and lose them completely. Blondes, brunettes, redheads, tall, short,... He made no distinctions as long as they met his highly superficial standards of beauty.

I never wasted time judging what he was doing with his life, but Rob certainly wondered what the secret was. The few times he showed up alone, he sat at the counter making conversation. He liked to tell about the girls he knew and the tactics he had used.

"Princess" Sam looked up from his cell phone, finally speaking after a few minutes "what kind of special coffee are you going to prepare for me today?"

"Does your girl have any preferences or allergies?" I ask, as usual, after we've had to deal with an anaphylactic shock.

“No girls today. I am free to ingest lactose, sugars, and peanut butter. He pulled the sugar closer with enormous relief.

“What happened? No luck last night? I start making a latte with peanut butter and raspberry jam.

“No. My mother is in town. She prepared 3 types of lasagna and wouldn't let me out of the house.

"She looks terrible," I joked, not looking at him complaining. "Did you show her the city?"

"This city is infested with people who don't have time for their own mother," he would say, imitating the voice of a grim old woman.

“I don't think I sound that way. The tall blonde woman sat beside him. "Could you bring me a cappuccino, please?"

I look back and nod my head in assent to the request.

"How did you find me, Mom?" he asked, more annoyed than when one of his exes showed up.

Ah, the mother... Christina. At first, mother didn't seem like the right term (she was far from it). She was more of the refined, highly independent businesswoman type who was made even more dazzling by the divorce. Her tight-fitting dress and purse, which probably cost more than I could have dreamed of earning there, illustrated what many women wanted to be.

She was very young. It was easy to see that she was a mother during her teens. Her nude painted nails and superior look made me smile politely. I started making your cappuccino even before I finished Sam's.

“We have lunch with the Cohens, but first we have to go out and buy you something to wear. Something with sleeves, preferably, to hide all those scribbles you've put on your body.

"Mom, I'm not going!" For the first time, he sounded like a child. He no longer had that flirtatious tone in his voice.

“Of course you will. Thalia will be there. You know how she adores you, and she told me you don't respond to her messages. What is wrong with you?

“Mom, she sends 37,000 messages a day. She is the neediest and insufferable person there is.

"You don't talk about her that way," Christina reprimanded grimly. "She's a lovely girl. You just never gave her a chance. - There was a tenderness in talking about the girl.

"Do you even hear what I'm saying?" "Sam was a teenager again.

I leave the glasses in front of them and go to the other customers. I didn't want to be part of the discussion, but when I come back, they're still on the same topic.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't give Thalia a chance.

Right now, I'm close enough to them to see the early apology in Sam's eyes. If his mom had turned around, she would have seen my lips moving in repeated "no's."

"I can't give her a chance because I've met someone. I didn't want to introduce her like that, but"—he holds out a hand asking me to come closer—"I and Aurora are dating.

I see the way Christina looks at me. There was no disdain, but a certain uncertainty, as if it was all a joke. Which, in a way, it was (I just don't think she would laugh at the end).

"A waitress?" she asked, not sounding offensive. She knew her own son. He was more likely to date a lazy socialite, not people who cared about paying bills.

"She's a writer, actually. He intervened as if he needed to apologize for my job. "She's writing a book about a waitress in a cafe. It's all about research, commitment to the art if you know what I mean.

The certainty in her words made me question if that wasn't really my life.

"An artist?" She smiled as if the bad story made more sense than the truth. "Have I read anything about her?"

My instinct would be to say no, but before I could speak, Sam interrupted me, handing her the cell phone with a short story he'd sent him. I continued to serve tables in an eternal wait to have my material evaluated. When I came back with some dirty mugs, she gave me her opinion.

"Looks good. I would like to see when it is finished."

I felt a pang in my chest. She didn't mean to, even though this was my fiftieth rewrite and, in my opinion, the definitive one. But she was right: it still wasn't good enough.

In a way, that was my first criticism, one that wasn't from a friend or teacher, someone unrelated to anything. A bad review, but at least a genuine one.

Her string of words was to invite me to such an event. I only had to refuse once (she was the type who understood that people have commitments). With a handshake, she said goodbye, and Sam and I watched her walk away.

"So why exactly is it so important to her that you have a girlfriend?" I asked, finally feeling that I had articulated a whole sentence during the entire conversation.

"She thinks I'm going to end up like my dad: with a different girl every day and, without meaning to, I'm going to get one of them pregnant... And you know the ending.

"You know you're going to have to tell her the truth, don't you?" I say, already feeling that I had done my part and that prolonging it would only bring problems.

"Nooo..." He mumbled childishly. "You can help me wrap this up just a little longer until it's gone. Please Aurora, you have to help me.

He widened his falsely sad eyes.

"No," I say seriously, no time for that. "I don't want to be part of your drama and your lie. It just grows up, faces reality, and stops thinking games are the solution to anything.

Sam stared at me scared. I was being slightly rude, but I wasn't there to facilitate the easy life he already had, either. His problems were his problems, I didn't need to add any for myself.

There was no romantic comedy ending between Sam and me, but after this reality check I gave him, we became friends. Best friends. Someone I could talk to and have fun with (much better than the summer romance he hoped to achieve with all this drama).

07 - [Craig]

He was a painter. He wasn't good with words, but he was excellent at his strokes. He spent hours at the cafe with a huge cup and an endless search for inspiration. On days when our shifts didn't match, he could make out his presence at one of the tables where an over-sharp pencil was always left behind. Sometimes, when his imagination flowed, he would leave behind scratched scraps of paper and napkins as well.

He had had a brief moment of glory three years earlier, right after graduating from college. He couldn't make it last. His long search for great innovation kept him from moving towards success. On the other hand, I don't think he was too worried about it. He was one of the few who still loved art for its art rather than recognition.

"It's just a sketch," he said, when he caught me admiring the sketch he was leaving aside, using as a coaster. - It is not very good.

"I like it. Sometimes a draft manages to say a lot more than the final work."

I kept them, each of the scribbled napkins. He couldn't throw away those beautiful designs he despised in his quest for perfection. Perfection that he seemed to seek through his muse, the girl from the clothing store across from the cafe. If not for her, he probably wouldn't have made it to the Blue Cup. His seats near the window were the perfect position to admire Laura during her breaks.

"Here," he said, pulling out of my notebook a cake of drawings he'd been gathering.

He flipped through it, surprised.

"It's just draft. Why are you saving this?"

"Maybe you can see something different now." I leave, leaving him to face the remains of his incomplete art.

As I take a few orders, I see over his shoulder that he stares at the papers as if he expects something inside him to change, or for his features to move into something extraordinary.

"By the way," I say, coming back after delivering a few drinks, "I have one of his pieces in my house. I love how you just scribbled over mistakes.

"Do you have a piece of mine?" He looked me up and down, and even though he was camouflaged, I could see a certain disdain in his voice.

"*voux*," I named his piece, which at that moment was on the wall of my tiny apartment. "It was a gift.

"It was my favorite." He sounded distant.

"It was probably your best piece, and maybe if you weren't obsessed with every detail, you'd be able to make better ones than this.

"Ouch! I said, with genuine grief at my words. "Tough love?"

I feel a little guilty about the harshness, but I realize I've gone too far, so why not go further?

"Your last show was three years ago, and every time you throw away a great cartoon.

"I've been trying to find inspiration, to create something new and magnificent," he'd reply as if he owed me some kind of explanation.

"Maybe you've already created it and ignored it." "I fill his glass one more time."

"And the girl across the way"—I point across the street—"you should talk to her.

I get away from him without waiting for him to say anything. Whether he would listen to me or not, was no longer important. I had tried. From that moment on, it was up to him to try.

It took three months for things to change, and in a weird way, what I said was both good and bad. Craig spoke to the girl, and they were together: two long months before she broke his heart. Enough to give you a new perspective on your art. Although it took another four months before he had a complete new collection, his work had reached new levels, just as he had envisioned. A great exhibition of imperfect and unfinished pieces that brought its name back to the lips of art critics.

08 - [Aurora pt.1] - by Rob, the waiter/barista/manager

Of all the short stories Aurora has written, I think we know very little about her. Getting to know her wasn't an easy task, which is ironic, given her nosy and curious way, that she expresses opinions at inappropriate times as if she had a right to have a say in other people's lives.

To find out what was on her mind, I had to hunt for clues and play Sherlock, still leaving a plethora of loose ends.

As a good writer, Aurora and her notebook were a single entity. If we could call the poor object a notebook. The pile of sheets held together by glue, clips, and staples, which no longer closed, was embraced by a leather cover that fought against the chaos it had to hold.

I never got many chances to spy what she was doing in there. Aurora even showed me some of her stories, but always in printed sheets after some editing. The day she left her notebook behind on the table, in the corner where she liked to hang out before she left, she called desperately, wanting to make sure she was there, and that I would put it away carefully.

I kept it on the high shelf, among the glass coffee pots we had for decoration. Even though it was her day off, Aurora warned that she would stop by early in the morning to pick up the item before leaving somewhere.

I had no idea what she was doing outside. I knew I was in college, that I was studying to become a writer, but that was where my knowledge of her ended. Aurora was a ghost that only existed inside the cafe, as one of the customers once said. Thinking of her in a different environment was an absurd idea.

I opened the Blue Cup with the sun rising and waited for my first customers. I was packing up some things when I quickly stirred one of the pots with the coffee beans, and the notebook fell off the shelf, scattering papers to the farthest places on the counter.

I muttered the worst words I could think of and quickly collected everything. Curiosity isn't my worst fault, I'm very good at not putting my nose where I wasn't called. But... seeing the envelope with the end of a check coming out I felt compelled to look at the amount. I choked on my own saliva when I saw the number of digits. I gasped again when I saw the date the check was written: it was almost a year old.

I kept everything back, afraid she would come and catch me in this serious breach of privacy. A few minutes later, Aurora took what, to me, became a treasure chest.

Asking why she had such a big check or why she never deposited it was out of the question. I kept the question for a long time until the answer appeared at the door: Mrs. Brooks (a name I only associated with the lady with blue eyes and imposing posture in the late afternoon, when I linked my face to the name on Aurora's check).

I took her order before Aurora noticed her presence: a hot tea. She emphasized the last information as if I couldn't understand it. She was in her fifties and wore pretty clothes, but very old-fashioned (almost a sullen lady from children's movies).

I hastened my work to serve you as soon as possible. I hate customers with their noses up. The sooner he delivered her hot tea, the sooner he was gone. Aurora was serving the last coffee in an endless line when she saw Mrs. Brooks. Not knowing their relationship, I asked her to wait at that table, just so I wouldn't have to deal with the lady.

She just nodded and took the tea to the table. I would serve a few tables nearby, listening in on what they said.

With a slight gesture of his hands, Brooks urged Aurora to be seated, but after placing the cup in front of her, Aurora remained standing.

"I can't believe you chose this over everything I offered you. The gruff tone didn't seem to affect Aurora.

"You didn't offer me, you tried to bribe me.

"No, Aurora. All I did was show you what you can have, after all, it's yours. And stop being that spoiled girl! She raised her voice but breathed back. "You know I don't make the rules. I've been waiting patiently, but after a year, you still haven't accepted the check I gave you. For that reason, I brought this to you.

The lady took from her purse a fat envelope that looked very important because of the seal used to close it.

"Thank you," she replied, in an oddly polite tone, regardless of the uncomfortable situation. "Now would you please leave?"

A mocking smile she had never seen spread across Aurora's face.

"I could." She opened her wallet, took out a hundred, and left it on the table. "You might need some extra cash."

Without thinking twice, Aurora took the note and tore it in two, placing it back on the table. The movement hurt my soul.

"It's on the house," she said insolently.

"And after doing that you still think you're better than those kids you grew up with. Aurora, if you're going to act like a spoiled brat, at least let yourself be one.

With that answer, Aurora fell silent and the lady left the cafe. The harsh response was a punch to the stomach. I didn't have the heart to ask her what it was all about. She put the envelope away, and everything went well for another six months.

We had closed the cafe. Aurora was in her corner. I thought I was writing something, but on the table was the envelope, and on it papers with markings of places to sign. I walked over and sat down at the table. I was able to see her complete the last subscription.

"All right?" The question sounded automatic, but this time I really wanted to know the answer.

"Yes and no." She paused for a long time and then continued as if it no longer mattered. "I just sold my soul to my aunt. Now at least I'm not just going to act like a spoiled brat, I'm going to let myself be one." She mimicked Mrs. Brooks's voice with frightening precision.

"What do you mean by that?" I ask, not understanding.

"My aunt raised me after the accident with my parents. They left a will that, even after death, still wanted to control every step of my life. I'm here because I refused the terms of the will, but not anymore. Virginia Brooks won once again.

"And why accept it now?" I asked.

"I lost my college scholarship," she said as an accusation. "And without her, I can't go on."

“Uhn...” I say, not knowing what to say. She was good with advice, I wasn't — Are you sure you're going to give up after all? I thought you never gave up on anything.

"I don't think it's giving up, but maybe fighting in another way," she said, displeased but believing her words.

"Does that mean you're leaving?" I asked, saddened by the idea.

“Soon, but at least I'll be able to finish the semester here.

Aurora stayed at the cafe for another four months, until we hired a snub-nosed girl named Clara, focused and speechless.

Customers, for a long time, still asked about Aurora, but it was not the end. I don't know what happened when she sold her soul to her aunt, and over time we lost touch until I was asked to write something about someday in the cafe for her book to be published.

Then I tell her about the end, so she goes with the beginning and everything else in between.

09 - [The Group]

There were five of them. Poets, I would say. Bohemians who seemed to want to be taken back to Byron's times to experience all that melancholy (not that the pretentious group was able to live in times like that).

They were young people fixated on their cell phones, loved high-end coffees, and for some reason had an aversion to gluten. They met on Sundays, in the middle of the afternoon, when the cafe was at its emptiest. They made noise and laughed loudly, but we never complained, after all, they only did that when there was no one but them. They argued fervently about books and poets. I loved to listen to them passionately declaim their poetry. And by “yours” I mean the authorship itself.

Ted, Mariana, Clara, Paul, and Veronica.

Veronica was the oldest. Not far from 30, she stood out in the group. Her curly hair mingled golden and brown streaks in a high ponytail. She was the only one who appeared to have a very well-organized life. With a very expressive look in her eyes, she seemed able to speak to you telepathically.

Paul was the funniest one in the group. He liked to joke and relax during heated arguments. However, his poems were the most intense, which made me wonder what else he was hiding behind his comedy.

Clara and Mariana were obviously sisters. They had similar features and loved to disagree with each other. Clara was the oldest (her superior attitude gave her away). Mariana was the rebel who didn't take negative comments very well.

Ted was the "leader," with confidence levels so high they would make people question their own names. It was to make direct and concise comments, without preamble or flourish. He was the youngest, in his early 20s. Out of all of them, he was the one I didn't like very much. He was cocky as if fame was following him and he continually rejected her for being too good for her.

Thus, at each meeting, I observed a dynamic that developed as in Drummond's poem:

Mariana loved Paul who loved Veronica who loved Clara who loved Ted who loved no one. Paul knew about Mariana's sighs for him. Veronica knew that Clara would not respond to her feelings. Ted watched, absorbing the deep feelings he lacked.

However, they were all poets and admired the suffering for art. After all, reciprocated love doesn't give masterpieces to romantics.

Clichés and predictable, won me over, not on Sunday afternoons, but Monday mornings, Tuesday nights, and Friday afternoons.

Paul and Clara arrived early with takeout orders. They waited, sitting at the counter while they whispered. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but it was obvious what those guilty faces and yesterday's clothes indicated. The secrecy of that act was implied, and when I looked at them, whether at next group meetings or on subsequent mornings, I shared that secret.

On Tuesday nights, Veronica would get her iced tea for the trip with two slices of lemon. As much as she wrote beautiful poems, I questioned her essence of inspiration. I couldn't see her as a romantic until the day it was two iced teas with two slices of lemon.

As a tradition at Blue Cup, the customer writes their name. Veronica wrote hers and, in the second, named "Lyli" with a tiny heart in the corner.

So she was left with Ted to surprise me on a Friday afternoon. Accompanied by a girl with black hair who was too sandy for any small truck, they spent hours talking about poetry. I wouldn't say it was a date, but the looks were curious. They wanted to know what the other was thinking as they competed to see who could quote the most poems by heart.

For the first time, I saw something other than arrogant Ted. He was just a boy who didn't understand anything about life and believed that if he quoted Bukowski enough, he would make sense of every thought that ran through his mind.

I never found out if two unrequited loves could work. If moving forward was the best option. Or if, still, taking the first step brings results. On the other hand, I have a penchant for not happy endings that end in happiness. And the best thing about uncertainty is that it is up to a mere point of view to predict what ended up happening.

10 - [Those Who Passed By]

There were many who order to go, that busy lives did not allow them more than a few minutes wasted at breakfast.

I liked Mary. She used to arrive not long after the cafe opened. It varied between bagels and doughnuts. She had a peanut allergy, but she couldn't help her passion for that scent. She said it was the karma she carried from other lives.

There was Kate. I don't think she saw her eyes once, they were glued to her cell phone screen. She must have been in her early 20s and, more than coffee, she loved having Twitter followers. Her requests were narrated at intervals so that she could divide her attention between me and the keyboard. She was just a normal girl, but she was sure there was something special about her. Everyone has.

One of my favorites was Jaden. He had a calm, introverted profile. He carried an old camera for the mere love of this art. One day he asked if we could exhibit one of his photos. I wasn't allowed to decide that, but I still said it would be my pleasure. Jaden's photo has become an integral part of the cafe's decor. A beautiful photograph of a child playing in a pile of autumn leaves. Maybe he was destined for greatness or maybe his art was just a hobby.

Mr. Bill was the lover of riddles. He liked to place orders with Rob and leave a riddle with his tip for him to unravel. I'm not sure if Rob had unraveled them all by himself or if he was doing some internet research, but I do know that Mr. Bill's morning joy was getting the right answer with his warm croissant, which reminded him of something in his past.

The most intriguing was Mr. H. I don't think he can have a full name since I've never seen him. His car stopped across the street, and a security guard came to buy his coffee. The security guard's eyes were always watchful over my hands as if I was about to put some sort

of poison into the food. I always wanted to understand if Mr. H was really that important or just really paranoid.

I loved the fast ones, they were my personal riddles. I noticed their clothes and choice of words and features. I wanted to know everything about each of them. All the untold stories that deserved my full attention. I probably wouldn't discover everything, but just like in life, I discovered something new with every coffee we shared.

11 - [David]

"I lived a Wednesday as if it were a Friday." David at the counter was thinking aloud.

I looked at him for a moment, hiding my smile at his comment. It was the first time I had seen him in the cafe, but not the first time I had seen him.

He caught my gaze and continued as if the comment had been directed at me as a conversation starter.

"That says a lot about someone's life...don't you think?" he asked rhetorically. "The way the day of the week didn't interfere with what I would do, or how I just realized it now because there wasn't anything specific about my day to alert me to what day it was.

"Maybe you should do something different," I suggested, still not having an opinion on the idea.

"But I do, that's the problem. I don't have schedules or a routine. And if I did the same thing every day, it could still have happened.

"So where's the problem?"

"I do not know. I think I'm looking for a problem where there isn't one."

"Probably." I handed him his coffee.

He walked away, giving me a smile before walking out the door. He knew where he had seen him before, second grade of high school. We hadn't been friends, anything like that, but he was famous in the gang. He sometimes spoke to me while we waited for our guardians.

On impulse, I ran to the door. I wanted to talk to him, tell him we knew each other, but I stopped on the threshold between leaving the cafe or not. In my mind, a stupid thought took me, like a little devil on my shoulder whispering, "If you leave, this won't be a tale

anymore." I wanted to ignore the thought and listen to the little angel that appeared: "You won't have another chance. Who knows what might happen?"

My foot moved to leave, but I backed away, sacrificing for the art. Bullshit. I backed off because one of the customers called me, and I knew I wasn't into a romantic comedy. I couldn't run after a boy listening to imaginary voices in my mind.

I didn't see David in the cafe anymore, but that wasn't the last time I saw him.

12 - [A Spoon]

Sometimes I needed to remember that not much happens in a cafe. That people come and go quickly, with their drinks boiling, and may never come back. It wasn't a restaurant, people didn't celebrate important dates there. It was a small place with few tables, and without the power of wi-fi, we had little chance of holding people back for more than a few minutes.

Mike and Charlie were an exception. They didn't come often. The cafe wasn't close to work, let alone home. There was no reason for them to show up around here.

Still, the cafe held the memory of when they first met. Nothing too romantic: they met on the internet and arranged to meet at the café. I think they both wanted a safe place in case the other was a serial killer. I didn't work at the cafe when this happened. All I know is because Mike told me before announcing that he was going to ask Charlie to marry him. He placed a teaspoon in my hand, in which the order was engraved in the center of the metal.

I wished I could see them in the not-too-distant future, where that spoon would be something far more valuable than the very ring they would exchange. It wasn't supposed to be anything grand, it wasn't a big flashy surprise. All Mike wanted was to spend the rest of his life with the person he loved most on the entire planet.

My part was to put the spoon into the china cup and pour it when you gave me the signal. I served them and watched from a distance, pretending to work behind the counter.

A tear escaped along with Charlie's "yes". Nobody around knew what happened there. Ironically, they don't want attention, during the modern times of total sharing, they wanted the marriage to be all about them.

I showed this story to Rob as soon as I had the full stop, and the only question that came out of his mouth was:

"Is Charlie a man or a woman?"

"Whatever you want it to be." I don't think it makes a difference to what I mean.

I continued serving tables.

13 - [Matilda]

Matilda was a fair-haired lady in cotton candy as if a drop of lilac dye had fallen into that thing that was spinning the sugar. But, for sweets, Matilda had nothing. She was a lady at times, even a bit irritating. The kind where she liked to fight with the neighbors and meddle in other people's lives.

He didn't know much about her. She appeared unaccompanied and infrequency. All I could absorb from her were three things: she hated coffee, especially the "cool ones". She thought it absurd. After living through the war, she valued the simplicity of things. She thought this generation was lost behind cell phones, makeup, and swear words.

I also absorbed that, during the war, she saved hundreds of lives. She liked to tell and relive this moment with pride of what she did for her country, always making comments about my degenerate generation. I always served her very well and showed my respect for her. Even though she was not a very lovely lady, it was quite an admirable life story of hers.

I always listened to her stories with great attention, she was an expert in the art of narrative: she could describe details so well that it made me feel part of that moment.

The third thing I knew about her that always caught my attention was, on her wrinkled, blemish-covered skin, a name fading into the black ink of her old tattoo. Alexander.

"The greatest love of my life," she said when she caught me watching. "The only person I couldn't save," she commented thoughtfully as if it didn't make sense.

Before the guilt caught me and I could apologize, she completed:

"It's all right, Aurora. We love each other, and I still have that feeling we shared. I'll always have him with me, even if no one knows who he was, and what name of him dissipates as fast as that day's rain..." She looked tenderly at the name on her arm. 'I have the memory of him until my own name is completely forgotten. Because unlike your generation that...

And she followed once more, going back to her morning criticisms.

Matilda didn't come back after this time. I don't know what happened to her, but I think I owe her the chance that her name won't be so easily forgotten. And that maybe Alex and Matilda don't dissipate as fast as that day's rain.

14 - [Meg]

I never had a problem with little Meg. She was a little girl of 8 or 9 years old who had learned very quickly how to be a spoiled child. She was accompanied by her nanny, who was not much different from a medieval servant. There was no “please”, “thank you” or “excuse me” in their restricted vocabulary. All the sentences that came out of her mouth were orders and commands. To the driver waiting outside, not even words were exchanged.

Rob hated her. Every time Meg dropped by to buy muffins or hot chocolate before class, he'd dodge and let me serve her. Until the day I was too busy for that. So we had the first discussion where "the customer is always right" was not an argument.

“Hot chocolate,” she said, being too small to reach full counter height without tiptoeing.

Rob didn't expect a thank you hug or a big tip, but he thought a modicum of politeness was essential.

“Hot chocolate, please,” Rob corrected her and waited for her to repeat it like that.

The nanny beside her held herself rigid, like a soldier waiting for orders.

“What?” The question came out genuine, not understanding what Rob wanted correcting her.

“Please. It's a simple word people use. It won't kill you to say it once.”

"Give me a hot chocolate," she said, her face turning red.

The nanny had expressed her concern and was looking at me as if I could contain the bomb.

"I'll serve you when you manage to be polite." I don't even want a “please”, but you can have a kind tone. I am not your slave. Rob leaned across the counter to level with her.

"Give me my chocolate now!" She stomped her foot, drawing everyone's attention in the cafe.

At that point, I was worried. I took the hot chocolate I was making for another customer and placed it on the counter in front of her. Before Meg could grab him, Rob intercepted him.

"Do you want to know something? You're banned," he announced. "You can leave."

"You can not do that!" Meg said, looking at the nanny and waiting for a reaction in her favor that never happened. "Tell him he has to give me my chocolate."

Rob and the nanny exchanged looks.

"Can you get her out of here?" Rob asked, and the nanny immediately picked the girl up and carried her outside while she kicked.

Rob glared at me as if I had challenged him. I lowered my head, getting back to work. I knew that could get me into trouble.

Obviously, the great chocolate drama didn't end there. Meg returned, this time, accompanied by her mother. Mrs. Kellet was proof that the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. In her false elegance, she wore her impatient gaze, and her superior attitude stood out. She was the kind of person you could hate at first sight.

"I want to speak to the manager," she told Rob directly.

"You're talking." He turned away, dropping his glass on the counter.

Mrs. Kellet looked at Meg, who nodded, showing the reason they were there.

"I want to talk to the owner, then."

"You can't, he doesn't like to be bothered." I'm in charge here, anything can be resolved with me.

"All right." She accepted with some revulsion at having to deal with the 'rabble.' "You banished my daughter. What authority do you think you have to do this? I can buy this place and fire you. So from now on, you will serve her without feeling that you have the right to want to educate her. That's my job, and if she doesn't want to say "please," she doesn't have to, because she's paying for her service, not the conversation.

Rob was furious and somehow even speechless. I could see he was struggling not to yell at that woman.

I had already prepared the hot chocolate as soon as I saw Meg walk into the cafe, so I walked in front of Rob and delivered the chocolate directly to Meg this time. She knew she was defying his authority, but a fight with that woman wouldn't do anyone any good.

Meg took the cup and looked at her mother dubiously. When Mrs. Kellet looked at me, her eyes looked like they wanted to pop out of their sockets.

"Aurora?!" "She didn't believe what she saw." "What are you doing in a place like this?"

"Hello, Mrs. Kellet," she said, somewhat embarrassed to meet her. "I think you should go. My words came out as a whisper. I didn't even want Rob to hear it. "There are thousands of cafes around town, you'll find one that suits your daughter much better.

"He disrespected my daughter." He has no right. I can blow this place up, or, better yet, buy this dump and get him fired.

"Mrs. Kellet, we both know you can't. The allowance your ex-husband gives you is not that big. Besides, what would you do with a place like this? You've never done anything in your life. Maybe...except for that awful little girl you call your daughter. Now, please, I ask you to leave.

"You insolent!" How dare you? "For a second, I thought I was going to get slapped.

"No." He held out his hand so she wouldn't say anything else. "Before you go on, think about whether it's worth picking a fight with me."

Mrs. Kellet's face lost its angry red, turning pale. She knew me. At least the old me.

Mother and daughter left, resigned in silence.

"Wow..." Rob said from behind me. I turned to look at him. "Who are you, Aurora?" He said, impressed.

"Never mind that, Rob." I walked away, toward the customer calling me. My past was not something I wanted to discuss.

Meg must not have grown up to become a great person in society, very little do I believe her mother has changed. Few people change. I believe Meg became a not-too-distant version of her mother or father, which wasn't all bad but not much better either. She must be terrifying baristas and waiters all over the world. However, some people will teach her that she is not the center of the universe and that people like her don't have very nice endings. I know that very well.

It was my birthday. Nobody knew, but it was (although, for me, it was just an ordinary day). There wouldn't be a surprise party waiting for me at home, let alone someone showing up with presents.

Sam had dropped by earlier with a new girl, and after they were done eating, he paid the bill and left her behind, thinking, as always, that these were actions worthy of a gentleman.

The freckle-faced girl wore a hat that hid her sad features. She poked at the croissant in front of her, not wanting to bite into it, even though it was covered in succulent chocolate. She took an envelope from her purse, and as I passed it I could see it was a birthday card with a dedication on it.

Wishing her congratulations seemed like the right thing to do, but he couldn't be sure if this was the right day or if it wasn't just a card for someone else. I walked past her one more time, checking the tables. Luckily she stopped me.

"Do you have any kind of pie or cake here?"

A "no" almost escaped me. We didn't sell pies or cakes, even though they seemed like great options for breakfast (or all times of the day).

"Yes, but we only have one today. It's vanilla with blackberry jam.

"Okay, it can be.

I went back behind the counter and grabbed that perfect piece of cake I bought that morning. I didn't party birthdays, and it had been lucky (or maybe my subconscious). But anyway, I had the cake. All that was needed was a candle.

I opened some boxes and drawers looking for anything that would keep a fire going for a reasonable amount of time and wouldn't cause a fire. I found a forgotten candle in the old box where Rob kept the cigarettes he kept for Devon, and a lighter as well.

"Oh! Kate smiled in surprise, a little embarrassed by the piece of cake with the buried candle. "Actually, my birthday was yesterday, but that's very kind of you." She looks at me, finding it all a little strange.

"It was fun?" I ask, trying to light the candle that quickly holds the flame.

"Not a lot." Her face didn't hide her disappointment.

"Then try again today." I sat down and pushed the plate closer to her.

"I don't think that's how birthdays work." She says.

From that point on, she thinks I'm completely crazy.

“My family doesn't believe in birthdays. I start my narrative again, having already gone too far to turn back. “For my aunt, it was just a reminder that she was getting older. And my parents... I just don't think they like to celebrate anything. I grew up being taught that you shouldn't celebrate a birth because you didn't do anything about it. Only achievements were to be celebrated. I took a coin out of my pocket and tossed it into the air. When she fell, I covered the side. "I choose heads." "I showed her the coin and it came up heads." “I think you should blow out the candle and start celebrating the day you won the coin toss.

Kate blew out the candle, laughing at my madness, but enjoying my madness.

“Thanks.”

"Don't thank me." You won, you just go around bragging about this great feat. I got another laugh out of him.

I get up and go back to the counter, noticing Rob watching me.

"Why do you have a two-sided coin?" he asked me curiously as I approached.

"How do you know it's a two-sided coin?"

He just raises his eyebrows mysteriously. I roll my eyes, ignoring it.

“It's funny, but Grace gave it to me today. I think I'm lucky.

A two-sided coin. I think, after all, I had been given a birthday present.

16 - [A Coin pt.2]

Grace was my big mystery to be unraveled. She was exactly the definition of frequency. Every morning, Monday through Friday, he stopped by the cafe, placed his order, waited until his friend Fred arrived, and then left.

He was dressed in mid-length boots and the clothes of those who say they don't care about fashion, but that they still don't escape it. It wasn't talkative. Only with Fred, with whom she shared a strange relationship.

Fred was too neat and sat with perfect posture. He was constantly in a state of discomfort. Grace, on the other hand, was always comfortable. She was talking to Fred wearing a delighted smile. They were best friends, I just didn't understand why.

On a morning like any other, Fred had taken the lead, while Grace had come to the counter for something to take away. She chose one of the lemonades we had bottled. While she was looking for money in her wallet, we saw a man chasing his dog outside.

“It's not his lucky day,” I think aloud.

“Luck is just one way people have found to take responsibility for themselves. I like how the world blames its mistakes on bad luck. “She handed me the money and then a coin for a tip. “Life is better when we have control over it.

Grace left, leaving me intrigued: my favorite riddle. I was about to toss the coin into the pot when I noticed the two faces. Why Grace had a coin like that was something to unravel. I tucked the coin into my pocket and snapped out of my reverie, back to work. Within the Blue Cup, that coin was only used twice: once that same day, and, like Grace, the second time was supposed to be kept a mystery.

17 - [Runaway Bride]

It was the day The Force arrived. The one that keeps people sitting for long hours without asking for anything and forces us waitresses to repeat the same question every half hour: “Can I get you anything else?”.

Times were changing (not that they weren't before), and we needed to adapt. It didn't matter that we loved the coffee the way it was, we still had bills to pay. For that reason, Rob plugged in the cable and pressed the power button. We were online.

And, as expected, people stayed a little longer. What I couldn't say about myself, since I was about to leave in two weeks. All I had left was to enjoy the time left to enjoy my new frequent customers. I admit that I fell in love with everyone, every aspiring screenwriter, startup director, influencer, peace-seeking student, and those who came only to use our internet limited to two hours per request.

I sat watching the fast-fingered girl who typed a code into her computer. It wasn't as cinematic as I'd hoped, but it caught my attention for a moment. She had served him tea with honey and a cinnamon muffin.

I notice when Clara walks in the door swinging our little bell, wearing her pajamas. She sits across from me at the counter and says:

“I left him and all my stuff. Apart from the essentials. she announced, holding up a branded semi-transparent backpack. The computer, documents, and a jumble of cables were visible.

Clara had been a frequent customer for almost a month, and we had gotten along pretty quickly. Since then, she spent hours there talking and using the internet that she never signed up for at home.

"It's about time, isn't it?" I say, my attention divided with the girl typing.

"It doesn't even come with 'I told you so.'"

I wouldn't say it here, not least because I no longer had the patience to advise her and see her ignore every one of my words. However, I implied, wanting to see what she would say:

"But didn't I warn you?"

"Maybe" she didn't want to give the arm to cheer "but I've reached my limit. I didn't want to marry him.

"And you were going?" My attention turns completely to her.

"Yes, tomorrow." He wanted to run away and get married secretly.

"Oh, so you're a runaway bride?" I notice her pajamas, which consisted of long, loose pants with a big old Ramones blouse. It would have been more exciting if she had arrived in a white dress.

"I think so, but now I also have nowhere to live, how to pay my bills, and no belongings."

I start to make her an espresso, spying for a second at the girl typing. Her watchful look intrigued me.

"You could replace me." The high thought escapes me when I turn on the grain grinder.

"And why would I do that?"

I look back to see Clara typing something on her cell phone. I watch the girl.

"Because I'm leaving in two weeks. "I go back to preparing the express."

"Why am I only knowing this now?"

Clara puts down her cell phone. Something she only did when she had something really important at stake.

"You didn't tell me about your wedding before," I say, not wanting to get into the question.

"Touche. But it won't leave... Why would you leave? You are part of everything here. This place is nothing without you..."

I smile tightly and turn on the espresso machine. I say hiding a little pain in the pit of my stomach:

“It doesn't have to be so dramatic.

“Why are you going?” What's so amazing you got?

Clara lifts her cell phone with a quick glance and puts it back on the counter.

“Long story. But Rob refuses to hire anyone because he thinks I'm going to give up at the last second, and my apartment is still vacant. I hand Clara the espresso and go back to dividing my attention between her and the girl who types.

“Then you'll run away just like me.” I love how alike we are...

I wouldn't use running away as a definition of what I was about to do, it was closer to coming home.

A tall man in a suit approaches the girl, who lowers her notebook screen. He says a few words and pulls out what looks like a badge from inside his jacket. I can't know what he says, but I feel at the height of that story.

The girl gets up, puts her things away, leaves the payment under the cup, and leaves, putting the last piece of the cinnamon muffin in her mouth.

“...and are you sure I can stay with you for these weeks and then stay in your place?

I return to the conversation, assuming what she said in my reverie.

“Clear. I can start teaching you what you need to know about brewing coffee, and it would be great for me not to have to move furniture out of the apartment.

“Perfect. I will be the new Aurora!

“You can be the new you,” I say, heading towards the table where they call me, “because I can't stand new Auroras anymore.

18 - [The Ghost of Christmas Past]

Saturday mornings used to be weird days. Although it was not common to work on Saturdays, sometimes it was necessary, and I must not say it was bad, as I could observe something that was once normal in my life.

They came in two types, the after-party. An ordinary group in any cafe, with their dark glasses hiding the dark circles, and fleeing the sun with their vampire bodies on the verge of combustion.

As a group, the party-goers entered, who had not had time to get home and were dressed in the glittery clothes, messy hair, and smudged makeup of the day before. They ranged from exhaustion to outright hype from those who haven't had alcohol fully processed in their system.

That particular Saturday was the day after Christmas. I wasn't a fan of the holiday, but I knew how to enjoy it. He liked the way red and green took over everything, mingling with the white dots of the first snowflakes. I enjoyed watching the children prepare their orders for the good old man, and the adults planning their big suppers.

“OMG! Aurora! Alia smiled as she sat at the counter as if her presence were natural in that place.

I don't know exactly how I showed my surprise at seeing her after so long, but I was glad I didn't let that hot coffee fall to the floor. Alia was, or used to be, my best friend, in the best way possible. We weren't inseparable, but we went through a lot together. She was well connected and knew where to be, and when to be. An evening with Alia was guaranteed fun.

“That's why you disappeared...” She looked around the room naturally. "Still testing that whole theory of being a commoner?"

“I don't think I used that word, but somehow...” I replied, placing the coffee in front of the customer and turning to her.

"How's it going?" Don't you miss it? What did you do yesterday? Stayed at home eating a pot of ice cream in a tiny apartment, wondering if it's really worth all that effort to be that better person you don't know if you really are?

I felt the sting of that person who used to make me question my choices.

“I've always liked you for your brutal honesty, my favorite Grinch,” she said, knowing she didn't really expect an answer, and I didn't have one either.

“I was never a Grinch. Maybe a little Scrooge, but you know we've been visited by all the ghosts and we've learned to like Christmas,” she'd say, bringing the memories to me. “I carried our Christmas tradition even after you were gone.

Alia was from a Westernized Arab family and, although they weren't part of the Christmas circuit, she gradually came to love the date. The capitalistic tradition, not the real essence of the holiday.

We were, like, me, her and Azis, her brother. We exchanged gifts through a competition, donned random sweaters, and turned the air conditioning on at a minimum to eat ice cream.

"I continued our tradition, just not as glamorously as you," she said, referring to the black dress and the jewels that hung around her neck.

Alia tossed her hair back, looking like a model being photographed. It was hard to tell which group she belonged to. Even when she left one party, it felt like she was ready for another.

"How long are you going to keep this up?" she said, getting to the point and tired of the small talk and the nostalgia.

"I'm not sure..."

"When you finish this journey of self-understanding, let me know. I'm sure Aziz will be happy to have you back. She got up to leave, but I grabbed her arm.

"How is he?"

"The usual, maybe better." He didn't have to leave everything to you.

I felt a new, deeper sting. She, even though she didn't show it, was probably the one I hurt the most when I left everything behind.

"I didn't plan this," she said, feeling guilty again after a long time.

"You never planned anything. You always did what came to her mind. That's why we were friends. I wasn't angry that you left, it was that you left without saying anything. You were never like us, Aurora. You were my friend who thought too much. I just hope you come back.

Alia didn't give me time to say anything else. She blew two little kisses in the air and, as she left, took a bottle of juice. She had done it on purpose, forcing me to remember all the times she left without paying and I felt obligated to come back to cover the expenses. She always paid me back, but she had fun testing me.

At the end of that day, I was still thinking about Alia and Aziz, about how great we were together, but we needed to grow up separately. We brought out the best and the worst in us.

I started to reflect on what she said. If I was trying to be someone I didn't know if I ever would be if I could ever come back. I missed them, missed how easy everything before was, but I also hated what it would mean to go back.

19 - [Aurora pt.2]

It was my first day. I had no idea what I was doing. I didn't even know how I got that job, or why I thought this was the best thing to do. I took orders as I thought about where to spend the night, knowing I had nothing but my backpack stowed behind the counter.

"A small cappuccino and a chocolate doughnut," the woman was saying, waking me out of my reverie.

It was rush hour, and chaos had taken its place. Or maybe I should be fair and admit that my inability to wait tables created chaos. Rob helped me by doing the work of two and, of course, regretting having hired me.

That day I ran everywhere a thousand times, realized that every math class was good for something and that people paid bigger tips if I pretended to have fun with it all.

I wanted to go home, get under the blankets and ask Clair to bring tea and muffins. All I had to do was get in a taxi and come back.

I sighed wearily, placing the empty glasses on the counter and thanking the large group that had just left.

"It won't get any easier if you whine," a man at the counter was saying. — I was sorry too, I went through that. Trust me, regret doesn't improve anything.

"You were a waiter?" I ask, almost sounding insolent, but changing my tone before I finish the sentence.

"No." He laughed. "I also wanted to get by on my own, without help from my family.

"How do you know?" I looked at him in amazement, as if he were a wizard and there to sort everything out.

With another magical move, he pointed to my backpack lying behind the counter.

"It won't be easy, but don't go back. There's nothing better than being able to look at them and tell them they were wrong. He rose, leaving the payment on the table.

"And they were?" I back up on the counter before he was too far away and I had to scream.

"What?"

"Wrong. Were they wrong?" I ask, interested.

"No... But they weren't right either."

20 - [Backpacks pt.1]

She was ready to travel. She had a large backpack on her chair for breakfast companionship. She didn't look very happy.

"What happened?" I asked, doing my typical barista job: offering my ears to other people's problems.

"I'm leaving," she told me flatly. Normally, it would take a few more questions to get something out of someone. "I don't know if it's the right thing to do.

"Then why are you going?" I turn on the coffee grinder, the noise covering the end of my question, but she gets the idea.

"I'm afraid I'm going to get stuck here. What if I don't leave now, maybe I'll never leave again..."

I felt her words hit me. I had been in her place.

"What do you want to do?" I asked, putting the coffee powder in the espresso machine.

"That's the problem: I don't know..." Her eyes dropped to her coffee as if she was ashamed of her words.

"I didn't know either." The words resisted coming out of my mouth as she put the cup down, turning on the machine. "I don't know yet, but I'm going to tell you a secret you already know.

She leaned in, curious.

"The worst thing that will happen is you discover something else you don't want to do. This gets you a little closer to knowing what you really want to do. I place the drink on the tray and go to the table.

She gave a weak laugh.

"Actually, I didn't know that. Thanks. I hear her distant thanks, taking a quick look over her shoulder.

I would like to say that she reminded me of myself, after all, she was a lovely girl looking to find herself. But I was looking for the opposite: I wanted to lose myself. Getting so lost that I would eventually bump into myself. She was sad, resisting change. I had grown

tired, laughed ironically at the change. What we had in common was the need for the new, the despair with the every day and the relentless search for unnecessary approval from anyone.

“I learned something some time ago that I definitely don't fully understand: 'they're not wrong, but they're not right either.'”

I place the dirty glasses on the inner counter.

"I never liked them," she said as if we were talking about the exact same person.

“So you know what to do,” I say, watching her smile at me as she grips the strap of her backpack.

21 - [Backpacks pt.2]

Astrid was an American senior. She loved to say that she would never fully understand the British accent and that she missed the California heat. She complained about the constant rain and the cold. The only things she didn't hate about the dark town, where her parents forced her to live, were the Blue Cup Cafe and her boyfriend Henry.

Her hobby was complaining, perhaps because of the weekends, she spent keeping her mythical grandmother company. She complained about everything in sufficient quantity, from the climate to current politics, from everyday life to the chaos of the economy. No one was safe from her criticisms, which weren't bad, just disgruntled comments.

She came in late afternoons after school to study, and I helped her when she had time.

"Did I already say that I hate studying?" She lowered her head, sinking into a grim, melancholy moment.

“You hate a lot of things.”

“I know. I'm sorry...” She liked to prolong the end of her words, emphasizing her misery. “I promised myself I'll stop mumbling. I don't want to end up like my grandmother. She lives at home, complaining that she never leaves.”

For a moment she considered her own comment. Then she looked at me and laughed.

“What's it?”

“It's just that I tried to imagine my grandmother out and about. It looks weird. She is like a magical being that doesn't exist outside the house. Like you: I know you have a life out there, but it doesn't feel natural.”

“Maybe I'm not even real. I say, slipping into my reverie. “I can be a delusion of your mind, or perhaps a legendary being who shows up to help you study, and then I go back to my house in the woods.

She laughed.

“I hope you can exist outside of here. I really want to have you as a friend.

“Don't worry, we're already friends.

And Astrid continued to come, as usual. For a while, we resolved countless questions for her to prepare for her SAT and pass the test that would take her back to her beloved America. After taking the exams and interviews, she eagerly awaited the acceptance letters, which boiled down to two. They weren't her first choices, but they were good enough colleges. “Damn it!” It was the first word Astrid gave when she arrived at the cafe that day. “Do you know when I complained about everything in this town?

“Sometimes.”

“So...I found I love this city that rains constantly and the funny accents, and everything here. I don't want to go back. She lowered her head again, immersed in melancholy.

"Then don't come back." I say, solving the problem.

“I can not. I didn't apply to any university here and I might want to go. What do I do?”

“I do not know. It's your life.” Once again, I solve the problem.

“But you're the magical being who only exists to give me advice and you live on a cloud.

"I'm sure those aren't the exact words I used, but anyway." If you want my opinion, maybe you should go.

“What?!” She held up the backpack she carried, unsatisfied with my answer. “But I want to stay.”

“You just don't like change. You hated when you came here and you hate having to move there again. How about this time you see the bright side before it's too late to enjoy it?

She lifted her head.

"What about Henry?"

“It's his life, not his.

Astrid continued to look at me uncertainly. She had understood, but obviously, it wasn't what she wanted to hear.

She turned on the verge of leaving.

“Where are you going?”

“I'm going to complain to someone different. And then pack your bags, I think. Do you think you can visit me? There are clouds there too.

Astrid returned to say goodbye.

“Just remember not to end up like your grandmother,” she whispers, pulling one last smile out of her embrace.

22 - [How long has it been?]

In a way, the place was still the same. The tables, the decor, the aroma. Still, things felt more... homogeneous. Cohesive, perhaps, or aligned. Organized, easy to copy and paste into the two new branches Blue Cup had gained.

I would step on the floor of that cafe that was the original Blue Cup, and I wouldn't step on a different one. Not because I had anything against finding Blue Cups everywhere, but because none of them made me feel at home.

I sat at the counter after three years. I should have gone back sooner, and there were no excuses. Just a lack of effort on my part. I swiveled in the seat watching the people for a brief moment. Everything went as expected: there were no long lines and a girl served people at tables while a boy brewed some coffee right in front of me.

I still blended into the environment. If she put her apron on over her black jeans and a white blouse, she was ready to wait on tables and make some coffees.

"What can I get you today?" the barista asks me after serving the man who sat two stools away from me.

I turn to the boy and notice the name on his shirt: Kevin.

“A cappuccino, please,” I say uncomfortably like I should get up and make myself. I felt so at home there that it was hard to see myself as a customer.

“Anything else... ?” Kevin looks at me thoughtfully, searching his mind for something.

“Only that.”

He nods and turns back to the espresso machine. I notice the way he prepares the coffee, his movements.

“How long have you been working here?” I ask.

He turns to me, making sure I talk to him, then goes back to preparation.

“Six or seven months, I'm not sure. Why?”

“The way you make coffee is just like Rob's.”

He looks at me dubiously. My comment was, in fact, at least random.

“The hand spin, checking that everything is in place before you call. I explain it better, with a nostalgic smile slipping through me.

His face lights up suddenly.

"Now I know where I know you from!" Kevin almost jumps.

He leaves the glass halfway through the preparation and takes his cell phone out of his pocket. For a few seconds, it scans the device and finally shows me the Blue Cup Instagram page with a very old photo of me working.

I remembered that day. Sam had taken the picture with an old film camera he found in his mother's things. Two weeks later, he brought the developed photo, along with several others he took inside. After that, Rob and Sam created the Blue Cup page and never stopped posting.

“Rob always talks about you” he comments, returning to the half-empty cappuccino glass “Actually, everything here always has a little of you.”

Do not say anything. I am in doubt about the comment.

“So, what do you do?” I deconvert.

"Do I serve coffee?" "He hands me the glass."

"Beyond that," I insist.

"Do I need to do something besides that?"

“No...but I'm sure you do.

He smiles amused.

“You really are like in your book, aren't you?

This time it's me who smiles. He had read my book...

"In what sense?"

He leans against the inner bench.

“You treat everyone like they're your best friends. Has anyone ever told you something like “it's none of your business”?”

I give a short laugh. It was obvious that not all my attempts at interaction were successful. In fact, most were not. People don't want strangers giving opinions in their lives, but writing is the art of choosing what you want to tell.

"More than once and in less polite ways."

He laughs as if imagining the situation and continues:

Biology. That's what I do, answering his question. Marine biology is my focus.

A scientist... What have you been able to observe of the human beings that pass through here? Scientifically speaking.

“I don't know, I don't pay much attention.

“Which means you only notice the most interesting things. I'm sure you've seen some different figures that pass through here.

He stops for a second, turning his mind over.

“Maybe... There's the girl who comes here every day and spends hours writing on the computer. The guy who always takes a lot of pictures of the food before eating and the woman who must live nearby, because she comes here two or three times a day. And I would advise her to invest in a coffeemaker, but I like tips.

I smile, losing myself in thought.

“What's it?” he asks, noticing my silence.

“I don't know, it's funny how everything goes on, nothing stops. I knew that when I left here. I didn't expect the Blue Cup to be suspended in time, but seeing how there's always some more story is what I love the most, how these three people are their stories, and how I'm going to be someone's story, and the cycle never stops.”

He looks at me a little puzzled by the idea.

"It's clear how important and insignificant we are at the same time, isn't it?"

“Truth...”

I turn to the people in the cafe. Whole lives to be told, and probably none would be, still, a life full of adventures, loves, disappointments, surprises...

There were a lot of them, I think in every cafe there are always. It was hard to know if they were coffee hunters, or if coffees were magnetic places for them. In the case of the Blue Cup, I like to think it was a bit of both: that the few tables and moderate lighting made everything cozy, or how the counter inspired those in a hurry to take a second to rest.

They didn't always come in two, as was to be expected.

They weren't always what was expected.

Some came forever, others lasted forever.

I must admit I preferred to watch them from afar, as if they carried some kind of highly contagious virus. With some of them, I avoided even making eye contact, because it was too uncomfortable.

Still, I worshiped them, with or without names, unique in their beginnings and endings. Because there are many, I stick to a few.

There had been Amy and Fred. They both had their shy smiles behind their glasses. He had written her a haiku. I imagine they were beautiful words, and if he had understood your language, he would have written them here. I made a heart in her coffee as he asked me to, and even though that day didn't end with a kiss, their fingers intertwined, meaning so much more.

Jack and Guilla were already married: 15 long years. Reaching 16th was impossible. They got tired. It wasn't the fights that drove them away, but the happiness. One day, they simply realized that they knew each other too much, that the mystery was over, and that, even though everything was fine, they needed something more. Divorce papers were signed on the table closest to the door. They were happy, they hadn't stopped loving each other. They would only fall in love with other people.

Rob was one of the exaggerates. He shouted his love from above the counter for the whole world to hear. Chris shed some tears upon hearing her boyfriend's statement. They were the ones that lasted for many years, as far as I know.

Thomas came alone, but very well accompanied. The phone in his ears transmitted the voice of his beloved, who lived in a faraway place. They talked for hours, until they didn't talk anymore. I can't say what happened, but ironically I wouldn't blame the distance.

Becca didn't have a love or two within her reach. She had three and was bringing them to that same table in the back. The three Musketeers always kindly paid the bill and maintained a constant exchange of saliva that made everyone uncomfortable. Like the

beginning, the end also took place at the same table in the back. I don't think Becca was counting on one of them coming back for the delicious coffee we served.

Sally, the other waitress who worked there, had eyes only for Liam. Her eyes met so often that she was tempted to intervene, but she couldn't get close to me because the virus was too contagious (and, of course, Sally didn't like me very much). They didn't start or even less finish in the Blue Cup, but there was the middle. This included flowers, chocolate, and endearing words that made me want to pinch their cheeks.

A peculiar love that I witnessed was that of Casal Silêncio. They sat across from each other with cell phones or computers in hand and didn't exchange words that weren't short and quick. I wouldn't say they were distant because of it, much less that they were incredibly intimate, but for some reason, they worked.

There was the one I called The Couple, a single entity. Within that extreme passion, they merged, never seeming to have distinct personalities or tastes. Your friends made an intervention. They pointed out how she didn't even like coffee before meeting him or how he hated cream. They had an end as well as an epiphany.

One I will never forget is Benjamin. He was her eternal third-wheel, Gabrielle. It was obvious how much he loved her. He had bright eyes whenever he was with her, and his laugh took on a special tone. Gabrielle had never seen Benjamin as anything more than her friend, but she always put him before any boyfriend. It took some time for me to realize that she loved him, but it would still be a while before she did. What worried me was that it wouldn't take too long, and Benjamin would have moved on.

Lars, one fine day, let himself sit at the counter. It took five minutes for him to become aware of the world around him and forget about work. His eyes locked with the beautiful girl at the table in front of him. They smiled. Nothing happened. Still, he loved her for a long 10 seconds.

Judy and John were married, they had kids, they were happy, and I don't think I need to say more than that.

I had a bad habit in the beginning, well into my first few weeks in coffee. At times when we were empty, I would sit by the glasses and write a few loose sentences on the underside of them. All very small to fit in the small circular space.

There wasn't a reason, but he liked to see when someone noticed, even if there weren't many. They were random phrases. Some with meaning, others that seemed like mere lumped words. Most of them ended up in the trash without ever being read, but I didn't care. I didn't write for them to be.

I think they were like tweets on a page with no followers, or messages scribbled on a table where you don't expect a response.

"Those are beautiful wasted words," a man said, seeing me with my glass and pen in hand. I felt I had been caught doing something very wrong. - On here. He took a leather-bound notebook from his briefcase, ripped out the first two pages, and finally handed it to me.

I held the object uncertainly, noticing his way of speaking (Italian, I would say). I didn't understand what he wanted with that.

"Oh, no need. I can..." I say, finding the gesture a little odd. Back then, I still thought people were only kind when they wanted something in return.

"Don't worry, I have a bookstore. I have a lot of these, but I think you can put them to better use.

"Why are you giving me this?"

It was a nice, very nice notebook, it sure wasn't cheap.

"I don't like the idea of having nice words thrown away. Keep the cups, but a few words, keep them.

I looked at him, still confused, showing a certain suspicion. He continued:

"I can't write that way"—he placed the upside-down coffee cup on the table, showing me my own phrase—"but I can say I was part of creating some great pieces.

"As a Maecenas?" I ask, intrigued by the idea.

"Rich gentlemen, who sponsored artists?" "He seemed flattered by my interpretation. "I like the comparison, but I haven't got to that point yet. I simply believe in the potential of some people and let them do the rest.

"Where you are from?"

I top the pen, curious at his way of speaking.

“Florence. Already been there?”

“I love Florence.” I feel the nostalgia that that place emanated. “What is your name? I asked, dodging the answer.

“I feel like you don't really want to know.

He pointed to the glass, making me mentally read the sentence: “the best thing about not knowing is choosing what you want to see”. It wasn't the best of my lines, just a random thought that managed to say something.

“True, I like the mystery. Will I see you again?”

“If you can unravel the mystery.”

I called him Mr. Sforza. A somewhat worthy reference, although not geographically correct. In a way, he was my patron, sponsored the place where I started writing, and that, for a long time, kept all my stories and ideas that were no longer lost after a quenched thirst.

25 - [Mr. Destiny]

The meeting with fate was on an ordinary day. It wasn't my fate, it was Amanda's: a lovely girl who only showed up at the cafe twice and asked for the same coffee and cream. I found absolutely nothing about her, but what happened made me question what fate was.

Amanda arrived at the cafe with her eyes glued to her cell phone like any other customer. She followed the long 7:30 am line without paying attention to her surroundings. Her golden hair was tucked behind her ear, and light pink makeup marred her porcelain-doll face. The gray jeans looked new, but the slightly wrinkled black blouse didn't say the same.

That was the worst time to pay attention to other people's lives. All I wanted was not to get burned amid the piled-up coffee orders and avoid all the possible disasters that hour brought. Still, she couldn't help it: she caught a glimpse of each of the customers, being immediately drawn to the possibilities Amanda emanated.

The interesting thing wasn't how Amanda had come in as a normal person, got in line, and done something amazing. What brought me to her story was how she arrived at the cafe and became oblivious to everything, but everything was not oblivious to her.

Amanda took another step forward, her eyes still on her cell phone. She might not have seen it at first, but I had. She was right behind who I like to call Mr. Fate (even though sir is a bit formal, I needed a name that showed his importance).

Mr. D also only visited the cafe twice, and that very day he had chosen, from all the options in his wardrobe, a pair of gray jeans with a well-wrinkled black blouse. None of this was special, people dress alike, but they were wearing the same blouse. The same folded sleeve and two straps on the right arm. The gray of the jeans was the same, and they even chose black shoes to go with the combination.

Amanda looked up. She felt the person in front of her watching her. She looked at Mr. D's clothes with a wide smile, which quickly infected him.

I admit that there is nothing I love more than an exchange of smiles between people. No words to communicate, just a smile: a genuine one, a sad smile, one of pure joy, a tired smile... It didn't matter. Even if Amanda and Mr. D ended up there, I would have been happy. However, I said that it was an encounter with destiny and, therefore, I would not be satisfied that this was the end.

I ran with the orders while the two talked. The line went on, and with each step, they came closer and they caused me to panic. I wanted to give them time. So when your orders arrived, I took my time. In fact, I skipped theirs and made other people's coffee.

I felt that everyone there had witnessed that moment with me and was hoping for some kind of magical moment to happen. Expectation filled the air (my air at least).

"I'm heading towards Chelsea. Want to share an uber?" I heard Mr. D ask her.

I wanted to intervene and answer for her. Say yes and push her out the door. Instead, I had to listen to her response. I saw that Amanda had frozen. Maybe a little small talk would be easy for her, but when she heard that invitation, she looked terrified.

I have no idea what was going on in her head. She could be thinking the worst: that maybe he was a murderer (which was actually a valid thing). Or, simply, she'd just been polite all along and hadn't really liked the handsome Mr. D. Maybe she had a boyfriend, and I was the only one who didn't know.

"Uhn...yeah...I'm going the opposite way. I... Ahh... Thanks for the invitation. It was really nice meeting you. She squeezed his hand and walked away.

I could almost hear the disappointed sighs of the audience around me.

"She didn't even tell me her name," Mr. D muttered in a reverie.

"Amanda," he said before that moment could slip away once more.

He smiled, dissatisfied but grateful. She was gone, and they would never see each other again.

But...

Two days later, Amanda returned. She repeated her order and came to me behind the counter. I'm sure my eyes were glowing at that moment.

"You probably don't remember me, but I came here two days ago, and I met a guy... Uhn... I didn't ask his name... and I think that might have been a mistake, and..."

"Amanda," I said, surprising her.

I took a glass and handed it to him with a pen.

"Do you have a number?" he said, leaving her uncertain. "He wanted to know your name when you left."

Quickly, she wrote her phone number and name.

"If he shows up, I'll give it to him."

Amanda thanked me and left.

More than a week passed, and the glass sat under the counter waiting for him to appear. Obviously, someone I named Mr. Fate wouldn't disappoint. He placed his order and sat at the counter. I could see the way he looked at everything around him with that hint of hope that Amanda would show up there.

I took a cup, preparing the coffee he asked for, and, next to his name, I transcribed her number (I couldn't give him that cup, which had suffered by time). I must admit I checked it at least five times, wanting to make sure nothing went wrong.

"Don't wait three days. I handed him the glass with the number upside down, so he could smile when he realized what I was talking about. "Amanda has been waiting for this for a week.

I admit I expected them to show up the same day. That they would look at each other, and, finally, that magical moment would occur for which we've been waiting. However, I liked how it all happened a lot more. She took the initiative, didn't wait for the world to revolve around her.

With that, I could see that fate is just moments when we make decisions, and everything works out, even when the odds are against us. Which, in the end, is simply life, on one of its good days.