

[👁] The discreet and shy viewpoint of a woman – a mother – who attempted to document the passage from girlhood into adulthood of a girls' group, not yet women, no longer little cuties. Slices of life posed into their bedrooms, each girl by herself, among objects which were a reflection of their own inner selves, among frippery reminiscent of their past, between walls where it is easier to show their real essence to the point of tearing down every psychological barrier. In their expressions, an attempt to come to terms with personality adjustment and developmental change, while lightheartedness gives way to vulnerability, fear and lack of self-confidence.

## [ A GIRL AND HER ROOM ]

[👤][RANIA\_MATAR] > [👤][VANINA\_IODICE]



A thick curtain of silence was between them. Mara: slender, young, redhead, her eyes as tense and sharp as hands on the exact time. Geraldine: as rounded as ripe things and as fleeting as rounded things. The mess in Mara's room, that morning, was appropriate. Geraldine tried to make some space for herself on her daughter's bed, moving clothes whose function she couldn't really grasp; each time she tried to arrange them she eventually gave up. Even the basic motherly matters were too complex a task, inside that room. That environment was impossible to modify, there was no way of interacting with chaos, there was no room for her, but only for clothes, songs, makeup, dreams pinned on the walls, expressed in a language she could not decipher. In fact, she feared that language. She could feel hidden, crawling beneath it some sort of menace. Whatever inhabited that room was hard to understand, all silence, even the music that made the walls tremble. Silence. The mess in Mara's room, that morning, seemed appropriate. Strange that her daughter walked to the kitchen to call her. She usually howled from a small opening of a door she closed again immediately, Geraldine's replies bounced against it and kept floating in the hallway, useless, unasked for. That morning, instead, Mara popped up from behind the kitchen threshold in her pajama, with a pout soiling her face, together with the makeup of the night before, and her red hair, messy and dull – *I have to talk to you, mom. Come.* Geraldine tried to dig through the clothes looking for the bed, to sit on it; Mara did not care, she just sat, her back against the wall and her knees against her breast. That mess was perfect, Geraldine thought, because she wasn't sure she wanted to discover if a threat was really hidden inside the fabric of her silent bonding. What was there to talk about, so suddenly? A tragedy, maybe, a child in her belly, an old lady hit while driving, dropping out from college, a sum of money needed? Maybe. But in the safety of that *I-have-to-talk-to-you-mom-come* Geraldine had heard the beginning of a precise statement, thoroughly thought, developed from within their silence and had not been able to see it growing: it was some accusation, the final stage of a battle fought with invisible arms, in the long and dark shadow of love. The much despised messiness in Mara was now perfect: a metaphor to hold onto, a last hope. What a horror had everything been in place, clean and essential, to leave them naked one in front of the other to make accurate calculations, how embarrassing, what an unsettling

improvisation! On the other hand, it would have been easy to find among the clothes on the bed, the anarchy of shoes on the floor and in the crowded city of glass built on her dressing table some excuses, accusations, exceptions, allusions, propositions, vagueness to be defined, lessons to be given: Mara's messiness was Geraldine's strength, her superiority, lived life she long ago tamed and ordered, by titles, by years, by faults. In that mess she would have led her game, hijacked messages, found determination. – *I am afraid, here.* Clean and essential the sound came out from behind Mara's knees, covering her lips. Geraldine felt the curtain being torn apart by those words, in one gesture, silence receded under the blade of this truth. She felt stupid, old without having lived, whatever remained of that curtain was now hanging from her hands, the other half who knows where, not in Mara's hands, she seemed so free, and so brave. She could hear the noise of her daughter's emotion being slowly chewed, her teeth white and perfectly regular. Why was she left so behind? Geraldine asked to herself. What can one answer to that question that does not want any answer nor other questions, a question that is only the late signal of a long cultivated distance, day after day, misunderstanding after misunderstanding? Mara added something, before she stood up to go to the closet and bring the suitcases down: – *There's a time when things begin to appear for what they are, not for what one wants them to be. It's the time of solitude. The turning point. And your room is all wrapped and placed inside, in your soul, so that you can fly without forgetting.* A few hours later, Mara's room, cleansed of everything, appeared to her mother as a place without any sense. Geraldine went to the kitchen; she opened the tap and stood staring at the afternoon outside of the window. She thought she would have found her daughter now, day after day, awareness after awareness – petal after petal of an infinite flower – in the mess Mara left inside of her: thoughts, disordered certainties and memories badly stored. She was worried. What if, in the end, she would have found she had never understood anything about her? The temptation of wrapping everything and hide in the rage, offended, abandoned. She was good, to resist this. It was about Mara, her daughter. It was about the possibility of meeting again, outside of their rooms, in the air, in the newness of experience and in the lawless unpredictability of life. From the tap the water kept running, and Geraldine left her side of the curtain drop. She chose the mess. She chose the fear.

[👁] A community of former convicts, vets with bitter feelings about their perceived rejection by society, and hippies, who settled down in the midst of the ruins of an abandoned World War 2 base in the Colorado Desert of southeastern California. They live in campers, caravans, prefabs – sometimes in a car. In spite of dreadful and overpowering environmental conditions, many of them stand up for their lifestyle. It is at the same time a romantic and horrific landscape, and a perfect frame for such enduring human entities who act the part of beauty as much as hideousness.

## [ SLAB CITY ]

[👤][CLAIRE\_MARTIN] > [👤][DARIO\_PAPPALARDO]



Imagine if it wasn't like this. Imagine if I covered up all the mirrors. If I let go this grey line of hair I keep moving behind my ear. Imagine if I wore that R.E.M. shirt forever, that of the 1991 album; if I stopped blowing out the candles of the birthdays you force me to celebrate. Imagine if we did like those California squatters. You and I, getting old in the clothes we have now. Pretending we can stop the time. Never mind our home is too small. Never mind the rent at the end of the month. The phone calls from work. Never mind there's no more detergent for the washing machine. As if the wrinkles that will come were just the lines of a pencil we could erase with our will. Maybe we will become as that posing couple: you ecstatically staring at the void from within that black dress, and I sporting a long grey beard, the hat and the eyes of a baby Moses, and on my side a dog with a wiser expression. Imagine if we decided to set ourselves apart from the rest of the world...imagine you and me, into the wild. Sixty, seventy year old teenagers. I don't know when, I don't know if it happened, maybe it is happening. Crossing the shadow line. In line at a toll booth you don't ever want to cross. Then one day a salary, thank god, comes regularly. You are in a bar getting a coffee you hardly drank before. In the pool your stroke becomes wider and your head sinks deep into the

amniotic fluid of your thoughts. At sea you lose yourself, watching underwater the moss on the rocks, caressing it with your hand. Tell me it isn't so. Tell me I am not crossing it. Tell me that I will be young next month too, at thirty-three, thirty-five, forty years. My whole life. Tell me you will be too, and I will touch you forever and you will never wither, and neither will I. And our desire will be the same. Tell me I will not need to buy the third and the fourth tie to keep company to my only two. Tell me the secret. I don't want rings on my fingers. No contracts. Is there any place halfway between our home and the Colorado desert? Forever young. Naked, wilted and toothless in the pond of our perpetual hippyness. I would be scared, maybe. What if instead we were happier that way? The shadow line. The shadow line. May Conrad's specter help us. The shadow line is my waiting for you. It's me looking at you from the threshold. I embrace your shoulders. There is something with us, someone, I don't know what, don't know who. A potential of life. The thought of another existence which insinuates that the toll booth of the shadow line is maybe behind us. This highway is there to be driven upon and conquered. Because we can't be wrinkled kids forever in a standing trailer.