

## **ALL WITHIN REACH**

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### **Chapter 1**

Those days have stayed with me as if we'd lived them amidst a frozen landscape, as if the images slid like jello, slowly and gracefully impatient as the slope of a desert sand dune. Never, during all the days to come, did I forget that the things that never happened were just as intense as those that did.

This is the story of a relationship that might not have ever been real. Every day and every encounter was bursting with the intensity and the constraint of feelings that might have been of joy, or might have been of solitude; it was impossible to tell. We used to meet, to talk. I watched the way the grains of sugar fall in her coffee, I watched the corners of her mouth. I watched the way she held the little spoon and her restraint within her dress, almost the way one looks at his parents' wedding photo. My memory of her modesty, which failed to conceal a certain type of tenderness, is as clear and close as a good black and white photo.

The landscape of the city filled in quickly with bars, restaurants and cafes which were almost homes to us. I've never been so isolated among so many people. I've never searched so fervently for something I didn't think I'd find. I've never been so invariably overwhelmed after each encounter, as though they'd been romantic dates.

My memory doesn't cheat me when it serves me our whole story on a tray. It was as if we'd been wheeled the dessert cart at an upscale restaurant – our days had everything two lovers could ask for: a theory of probability that put us in the hands of a working combination; a few innocent dates in which we wrote a new dictionary that would define, for the first time, the parts of the universe; the slow discovery of sacred objects; the trembling expression of curiosity that would end by giving itself to desire; the eternal game of building a bridge over a sea of guilt; and fear, the immense fear of picking a ripe fruit that's asked to be eaten for as long as the world's been turning.

No. The days weren't easy. But they had great thirst and a lot of velvet, and everything became a fleeting glance.

What do you do with your skin when it doesn't work as skin? You make it a word. You try to give it the music and the harmony of a tenor sax. You play it and watch, dance and spin, writing the fragments of a vanquished, solitary and impatient love.

"If I don't get any closer, it's because I'm too close," she said.

And he stopped the motor and turned the lights off, because he wanted to know if the wind would be kind to them.

### **Chapter 2: The Black Locomotive**

I often wondered why it was so tough for me to make her see how the world was. Why she avoided looking with open eyes at the things earth had created.

It wasn't just people who could talk. More often, it was things that spoke to them. They were parts of the creation of the universe that spread out inside and gave us meaning and messages as clear as the smell of freshcut grass, clear as the sound of rain on of poplars.

Suddenly, he was furiously and tenderly trying to make her understand that life was the choral work we had before us. At times it was like a play that acted itself out for us (I dare add: *just* for us). At others, life was like the sum of all the scenes in the play and *it* saw *us*, naked before it, as solitary characters obliged to act, to breathe, to move, to make, overall, something out of it, to be what we were.

Sometimes we played the role of the pianist on all the keyboards. Other times, we played the role of the keyboard amidst a chorus of other lives. We weren't always passive, we weren't always active. We were always the best version of the play we had to act in.

Only those who want to play their roles with their own hands can give themselves totally to that moment; a moment of touching the sky.

The musical stage stirred me and I thought I'd go find her right away and show her what it was to live *swing*. That desire to grasp memories, feelings, words and bodies with bare hands.

The world was a puzzle and I wanted to put it together so that she could make sense of it. But I couldn't do it quickly. My tempo frightened her and each time we met, we had trouble breathing, breathing with lungs that had to adapt to new pressure, to a new shortness of breath.

In spite of everything, we found ourselves with the bewildering regularity of stars in a new solar system. Things have a pull, like planets, like people in a new-born world.

The stage had spoken and given me a big piece of the puzzle. When I brought it to her, I noticed a trembling in her that – later she'd tell me – awoke in her memories of a summer in which she discovered that in some not so distant future, she would be the center of a day of romance.

I sensed her agreement and she spoke to me of an old friend from her adolescence, who it seemed I reminded her of.

"That summer in Britain was beautiful," she confessed with the tenderness of trees that she made mine forever.

### **Chapter 3: It's a Beautiful Summer**

To be in love is to feel the passing of time in a new way. Proportion and nature radically change with a secret tenderness. The cardinal points shift. They're still there, but they've moved. And the words north, south, east and west no longer mean anything.

One lover before the other is no trial: everything is possible, everything is natural, everything silently explodes, like in an underwater photo.

Everything is easy. Everything is understood.

More open and more sensitive than ever, you open unknown doors and understand music that you didn't think you were ready for.

Lots of times, unaware of the concurrence, each one said independently of the other that the relationship was making them more generous with the world, and more importantly, with themselves.

That desire, all that marinated time, had prepared them for a relationship that they weren't familiar with, a relationship that had more faces than they would've guessed. It was more than they knew to handle; it was the grandness of it.

We smiled, yes - continuously. Because the first sign of being in love is joy, an instinctive, animal, virginal joy, like watching the first sunrise after a terrible accident. Being in love was looking at the world through the eyes of someone else, someone reborn, someone who wants to give and doesn't expect anything in return. Someone who makes no demands, no impositions. There are no conditions, there is only stripping oneself of words, glances, silences, in memories, in hands.

Hands, in touch with the air between bodies, were stronger than they'd ever been before. And nothing was quiet. Everything squeezed itself out, like rain in an African savannah, in which suddenly, nature, unstoppable, wants to give itself unconditionally, with the conviction of things without souls.

Yes, the relationship was sprouting. He had wanted to be the bridge and she had crossed it, not towards him, but towards herself. She had left other things behind. Some with confidence; others with fear; all of them with a trembling certainty.

Becoming a bridge for one's lover to reach herself on was beautiful. But even doing less can give meaning to a whole life, a whole existence. There's no need to be greedy: there were other reasons to live and soak up the beauty of the relationship and more reasons appeared every time we met. It's funny to watch essential things move so lazily.

When he wanted to keep up his good behavior more than ever, he told her that if she gave him just one square meter to dance in, he'd take half.

And she, smiling, gave him a look that was almost like the chords of the music that would always follow us, and told him, "Ever since I met you, my sensuality's been reawakened. The world, its skin, its glances, talk to me."