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TRIP TO INDIA



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At Bologna's airport we found Nirvanananda and Max waiting for us.

“Right on time, as always!” I said to them, as they started to help Josè arrange his baggage on the trolleys.

While we walked on the inside to do the check-in, Josè pulled out our two tickets and he turned to Maximilian.

“Max, is it okay to you, if you and I do it for everyone? Nirva could keep company to Stefi in a dining area. She's still a little too weak with her legs, it would be better to let her avoid the unnecessary queue...”

Everyone agreed; Nirvanananda took me dearly arm in arm. He was still a little overweight, but slightly. Rounded face, brown hair worn really short. He was wearing an intense blue jumper and a dark blue colored jumpsuit in flannels, even though we were at the beginning of autumn. He constantly suffered the cold.

He pointed out a dining area inside the hall to the others and we set off.

“I'm so excited for this trip, and you?” I told him.

“It doesn't seem real...” he answered.

“Maximilian seems radiant as well!” I observed.

“Yes, he is. And it's our first journey together. He's very grateful to have let us meet and so am I. I love you...”

He squeezed me in a hug that filled me with beautiful energies.

“Are you crying?” I asked him. I noticed he had watery eyes.

He looked at me in silence. He saw the Stefania of all time, auburn hair of henné shorter than usual, hazel eyes, not so tall but slim, narrow hips and small breasts. I was wearing a kind of tunic with wide trousers, low heels to walk better (especially after the accident).

“It seems like starting a new life,” said afterwards. “I’m sure that this trip will be a great ‘honeymoon’ to me and Max but also a spiritual experience that will affect us. And there’s not a night that goes by that I don’t think about the words that the monk wrote... what do you think about it?”

“Even for Josè this is more than a ‘romantic’ journey, but by now you know me enough... I agree with you. Besides the shock of the devotion that Govindananda made to me and you on the booklet, I’m starting to think that chance doesn’t really exist. I feel something will happen. I often thought that I’d like to be a witch, you know?”

“Well, they say that in India there are still witches and they use brooms to move from one place to another. Maybe they sell them and I’ll buy you one!”

We both burst out laughing.

We choose a table large enough, since the other two would come to keep us company. Nirva asked me what I wanted and walked up to the cash register.

He came back with a huge glass of orange juice with ice for me and a diet coke with a slice of lemon for him. We would have ordered later for the others.

He sat and looked at me.

“Stefi, all of a sudden you look... distracted, I’d say.”

I shook my head, a little impatient. “While you were paying the orders at the cash register, a person that I felt to know walked by...”

just a weird feeling. I can't explain the reason. Anyway, cheers to our trip!"

"Can we do it with two soft drinks?" Nirvanananda wondered making a funny face.

"Why not?" I answered. And we had a toast.

Soon enough we saw Josè and Maximilian arriving, who waved the four boarding passes in coming closer. They only had their hand luggage and the wheelchair folded up.

The handsome Josè with dark skin and black, curly hair was taller than me and lately, thanks to home gym, also well-built. He didn't have nice features, but instead they were strong and regular with a pronounced jaw, Roman nose and bushy eyebrows. He was wearing a jeans and a bottle-green hoodie, on which stood up Atari's logo. The hoodie's color made his black eyes even deeper.

"Ready to get on board?" Max said happily, standing next to Nirva. Maximilian's slim and good-looking figure didn't go unnoticed; strong arms and legs, big hands, long blonde hair, blue eyes. Big nose and not so evident cheekbones. Overgrown beard as it was his habit. He was wearing a polo shirt with white cuff and neck that, together with his black trousers, made him look like a waiter (but no one had the heart to tell him).

Max looked at the time. "It's just eleven, the plane leaves in exactly forty-five minutes. We still have a great ten minutes, before the queue at the security control thins out. Let's have a coffee."

Josè nodded and proceeded to the cash register with him, coming back with two barley coffees, one normal for Maximilian and a savory croissant for me. I was feeling peckish and wanted to fill my empty stomach. Maybe it was stress-eating: I always suffered of claustrophobia and the idea of traveling in a plane gave me anxiety.

Josè's influence was also positive on this fear of mine. Recently I took the lift a couple times, always in his company. He held my hand and told me a joke- unlike me; he was very good at telling them. I burst out laughing, he kissed me and, without me noticing, we already arrived at our destination. Of course a plane is not a lift, but I was sure I could make it. And so it was.

At the check-in Max and Josè asked for seats away from the windows, in the middle row and they obtained them without too many difficulties. They shoved the hand-luggage in the appropriate compartment and we all settled for the flight. An elegant hostess came by with a tray of candies and a cart of ready-made drinks.

From the speaker a professional voice welcomed the passengers, inviting them to fasten up their seatbelt and switch off their phones. We were taking off!

Josè took my hand and I squeezed it hard. The engines started to rumble and the big vehicle moved. "It's not that different from a big bus, which travels not in two but in three dimensions" he said smiling. "Not only far and wide, but also in height. And it's only a one-hour-flight, honey."

The plane was now rolling on the runway at a good speed. I glanced worried at the line of windows, trying to see something of the outside world, but they were too little and distant. All of a sudden I felt a sort of lift upwards - the vehicle was now up in the air, in the third dimension... An unintentional little whimper slipped out of my mouth and Josè squeezed my hand smiling. It was joke-time!

"A man is walking along the Californian shore when he trips over an old lamp. He picks it up, rubs it and out pops the genie that, with a quite bored look, says: *Okay, okay. You've freed me from the lamp, blah blah blah. It's the fourth time in a month and all these*

wishes are starting to annoy me. So you can forget the classic three wishes, you only have one.

The man sits and tries to think. Then he says: *I'm scared of flying and suffer seasickness. Can you build a bridge to Hawaii so I can go by car?*

The genius laughs and replies: *It's impossible! Think of the logistics. How could the piles reach the bottom of the ocean? Think about how much reinforced concrete and steel would be needed. No, think of another wish.*

The man tries to think. In the end he says: *I've been married and divorced four times. My wives always said I did not give them enough attention and that I am insensitive. So I wish to understand women... to know how they feel and what they think when they don't talk to me... why they cry... what they really want when they say no, it's nothing... and to know how to make them really happy...*

The genius: That bridge, do you want it two or three lanes? ...”

Despite the fear and tension, I burst out laughing. Even the people in the row next to us giggled and the atmosphere cheered up.

A few minutes later the plane stabilized at its cruising altitude and the passengers relaxed, unfastening their seatbelt, reading newspapers and magazines, or getting out diaries and books from their hand-luggage.

Time passed quickly, thanks to Josè's loving and funny conversation and we landed right on time at the national terminal of Leonardo Da Vinci's airport, in Fiumicino.

Our plane for India was leaving at 3:26 pm, flight EK0098 of the company Emirates Airline. Just one stopover in Dubai for shorthall passengers and refuel, then late-night boarding for Delhi. Overall about twenty hours travel... but Josè explained to me that three of them were just due to jet-lagging and at least another four were

spent waiting for the connecting flight in Dubai, so we would have stayed in the air for only about ten hours, of which we would have spent mostly sleeping.

The check-in for the international flight opened two hours before the departure, so we organized with trolleys and had lunch in a diner at the airport. At 2 pm Maximilian's phone started ringing - he had set the alarm to avoid risks - and all of us headed to the hell of international departure's acceptance. A friend suggested to book two separate tickets, so two check-ins, one in Bologna for the national flight and one in Rome for the international departure, because when you change flight and especially airlines during a trip, there's the serious risk that the luggage doesn't arrive in the right place at the right time.

I was quite tired so I sat down on my trusting wheelchair, letting Josè push me up to the departure's queue.

Again Max took care of everybody's check-in, asking for seats near the middle row and for vegetarian food. I noticed that our luggage was light, especially in comparison to other travelers, with somatic Indian features, who seemed to have been shopping in Italy.

At the security check the agents examined carefully our hand-luggage and our passports. Luckily the travel agency had informed us on current legislation, therefore there were no complications.

At 3 pm we were sat in the waiting area at the gate with other passengers, waiting to get on the little bus that was going to take us to the aircraft on the runway.

It was then that I recognized the guy that I'd spotted in Bologna airport whom looked familiar. It was doctor Giuliano, sat a couple of rows away with a tall and heavyset bloke with olive skin. He seemed to realize that someone was staring at him: he turned his head, saw me and smiled even if a little surprised.

We greeted from a distance and then he went back to his intense discussion with his friend.

The big doors of the departure hall opened and the passengers neatly got on two small buses, finally reaching the plane parked on the runway.

One by one we climbed the outside stairs and as soon as we were on board José gave my foldable wheelchair to a hostess, who put it in the service area.

Again we shoved the hand-luggage in the over head compartment and we took the seats that were assigned to us.

Soon enough all the passengers sat down and fastened their seatbelt and the stewards gave us a demonstration on how to use them, on oxygen masks for eventual pressure drops in the cabin and on emergency exits. I noticed that almost nobody was taking this information seriously and José recommended me saying that plane crashes were far fewer than car crashes. So there was no reason to be anxious.

The take-off went perfectly again, the motors of the vehicle rumbled more and more louder and the plane speeded up, until the push of the thrust took away the ground and the sense of gravity, handing the craft over to the air and then to the sky.

Within a few minutes we were at the cruising altitude. The most experienced passengers casually unfastened their seatbelt, some of them stood up to get objects from the hand-luggage's compartment.

The stewardess started a tour with drink trolleys: tea and coffee in thermoses, water, cans of coke and sprite, fruit juices. Together with drinks, they handed out packets of peanuts and crackers to munch on.

From the seat at our backs, Maximilian commented: “On long flights they give you food and drinks every three hours and you can

even ask for some extra soft drinks. I know they serve alcohol in first class but here, if you want it, you have to pay separately.”

I pulled a face. “No, thank you Max. I'm not bothered.”

Our conversation was interrupted by doctor Giuliano, who came closer to say hi.

“Hello, doc!” I preceded him, with a big smile. “Do you remember me?”

He smiled back. “Yes, you're a friend of father Sandro... Miss...”

“Stefania...” I fixed his visible amnesia. Then again it's been a while and I was already surprised he recognized my face. I remembered his name because it was related to a very particular day...

“Please, take a seat”, I said. There were a couple of empty seats in our line and Josè moved so Giuliano could sit next to me and we could talk better.

“In India on holiday?” he asked casually. “With friends?”

“Yes. This is Josè, my boyfriend,” I answered, while he smiled and raised his hand in the spirit of greeting. Clearly he decided that shaking hands would have invaded too much my personal space and Giuliano instantly understood, replying in the same way.

I introduced the rest of the company to the doctor: Nirvanananda and Maximilian were sat in the row behind us and they decided to stand up to greet him. The encounter was a pleasing distraction from the boredom of the flight that presented itself as very long and they all were obviously willing to show themselves friendly and open to socialize.

“So, what's new with you, Miss Stefi? It's been a while since our last meeting...”

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