

# *Lost in Transitions*

By Nicoleta Dvornicov

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**Dedication**

*To my Mother, Valentina Dvornicov, for her unconditional love.*

*Your memory brings a smile to my face and tears to my eyes.*

*All my achievements are due to your constant support.  
Thank you for believing in me and in my dreams.*

*Te iubesc, Mamă.*

## Preface

*Lost in Transitions* is my personal healing project in response to the death of my mother, Valentina Dvornicov, who passed away unexpectedly on December 27th, 2016 at the age of fifty.

I would like to thank my husband, Ion Leahu, for his love and support, and my family and friends who have held my hand throughout this heartbreaking journey.

This memoir, which aims to show the therapeutic effects of memories when coping with the loss of a loved one, is meant to comfort those whose lives have been touched by death.

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**1. I am a prisoner.**

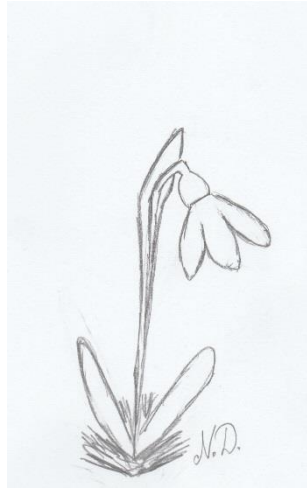
It's 1 a.m. I close my eyes, and I see darkness. I open my eyes, and the darkness is still here. What is this? Is it just my inability to see the light or is it the fear that haunts me?

I can't find peace. I am constantly searching for it, for the feeling of comfort that is associated with a mother's unconditional love, with the heartbeat of a loved one, with the nostalgia of a leaf falling off a tree on a rainy October day, with the warmth of a fireplace on a cold winter night. Now, when I need this peace the most, I am the furthest away from it.

I am lost.

I have always followed the path. When and how have I arrived here? I don't know. I believe I have done what I was supposed to do, though. If this is my destination, then I am not lost...

I am terrified of this overwhelming feeling of loneliness caused by the abundance of unfamiliar faces and lack of clarity. Why? For how long? Will it get any easier?



On my way, I used to savor the color of the blue sky, the chaotic journey of a butterfly, the pristine existence of flowers, and the purity of a snowdrop because there was light that allowed me to see. Here, my eyes are

covered and the darkness reigns.

I am a prisoner.

## 2. I love you, Mama!

– *Good morning, my sunshine.* I hear a divine sound that transcends time and space. It is my Mama's sweet calming voice, which syncs with the song of the birds that built a nest by my window. This melody is an ointment that



soothes every ache, pain, wound and sorrow. Her voice, as her eyes, is a window to her immaculate soul that spreads hope, faith, and

love in our family. I am strengthened and empowered this summer morning.

I feel her hand go through my hair, and I smile. This precious moment, an act of unending unconditional love, is the foundation of my world. It is the pillar that gives me support, strength and perseverance when I shiver in front of life's challenges. The warmth of her hand reveals her

positive outlook towards life, her sincere smile and the contagious spark in her eyes. I hope I have inherited at least a small percentage of her love of life, her faith, her warmth... My Mama's hands were never cold.

As she hugs me, I smell the scent of Mama. I search for this aroma in perfume shops, in beauty journals, on different continents, but it only exists when Mama hugs me or when I look through her clothes. Its uniqueness cannot be captured in a perfume bottle nor artificially created because true love cannot be reproduced.

*– I love you, Mama!*

### **3. Your face and T-shirt are covered in cherry juice!**

*– Make sure you only play in front of the apartment block, or let me know if you go somewhere else!*

*– Okay, Mama!* Now my friend, Mary, and I can play outside on this sunny morning. It's 7 a.m. and there are no other children to play with, but we know how to entertain ourselves.

All of a sudden, we hear a voice coming from a balcony.

It is a neighbor addressing us:

*– Girls, why are you up so early? It is the summer break, you should be resting and staying in bed till late! We ignore the comment, thinking how foolish it is to stay inside when the sun is shining and when there are so many adventures awaiting us.*

Mary and I are going to the cherry trees from the street to the left of our apartment block. The cherry trees were planted in a line as if they were meant to guard our

neighborhood. Our favorite tree is the first in line. It is the easier one to climb and the first one that serves us delicious, succulent dark cherries.

We are sitting on the bottom branches, swinging and singing a song about Tarzan. Unfortunately, there are no more cherries on these branches because our older neighborhood friends picked them already. As I am looking up at the morning summer sky, I notice that there is a branch full of cherries at the top of the tree. Mary hesitates to climb up, but I take the risk. As I get to the



top, avoiding looking down, I grab the branch full of cherries, eat some, and pick some and put them in my pockets so I can share

them with my friend. As I turn my head to see my

apartment from the top of the tree, I hear Mary's mother and my Mama calling our names and saying:

*– It's time to come home! It's time to eat!*

This is the line my friends and I don't like. It seems as if the parents know when we are in the middle of a captivating activity, and decide to interrupt us. Don't they know that if we get hungry we come home by ourselves? Why do they interrupt our games?

Since I can't protest the decision of my parents regarding the time of the sacred intake of food, I am thinking about how I can get back down from this tree. The way down is always rougher than the climb.

Mary is already on the ground. Keeping in mind that my Mama is waiting for me, I manage quickly to get to the bottom branches. Now I need to jump from here:

*– One, two, three and go!* I land first on my feet, then on my belly.

I open the door, and I smell a delicious summer dish,  
freshly made tomato paste with fried sweet peppers, that  
my Mama has just prepared. She sees me and says:  
*– I can see where you have been. Your face and T-shirt  
are covered in cherry juice!*

#### **4. I have a purpose!**

The alarm clock rings and I am too tired to even press  
snooze. Such mornings are already a norm, marked by the



feeling that I don't want to get up  
nor go to class nor go to work. I  
am not depressed. I am caught up  
in a system that keeps me busy  
and distracts me from what's  
meaningful in life.

I went to sleep late last night because, although I finished  
my homework early, insomnia hit me once I started  
thinking about the fact that I have not seen my parents, my  
sisters, and my boyfriend in about a year. I have not been  
home in so long. Where is home, actually? I am sad that  
Moldova, my beautiful home country with hard-working  
people and a rich history, is captured by corrupt  
politicians who play with it as if it were a toy. I am angry  
and tired.

I am here to study and build a prosperous future for me, for my family, and, hopefully, for my country. I will be so happy when my Mama comes to my graduation. She has never flown, but I will make her dream come true. Maybe three dreams at once: 1. She will fly. 2. She will step on a different continent. 3. She will see me graduating. I need to remember these when I lose my direction or my energy.

I can't give up now. I can overcome any challenge. As long as I have my Mama and my dreams, I can make it through and succeed.

I have a purpose!

## 5. It is magic.

It is a cold December morning. I wake up, and I instantly



think of the Snowman that my friends and I built yesterday. I rapidly run to the window. He is still there with his orange nose and a heavy metal hat. I feel relieved that he is alive. I thought that the older

neighborhood friends destroyed him, but they actually built some snow companions for our Snowman. He has a family now.

I love when the snow covers the roads, the trees, the roofs of the houses, and when there is a scent of warmth intertwined with the smell of mandarin oranges inside.

My sisters are decorating our room and dancing to *Coco Jamboo*. We started the ornamenting process when the

first snow fell, but today is a special day: it is New Year's Eve. Santa Claus, in Moldova, comes on December 31<sup>st</sup> and the children find their gifts under the Christmas tree on January 1<sup>st</sup>, in the morning.

– *Happy New Year!* I hear my Mama's voice.

– *Did Santa already come?* I quickly ask my Mama and my older sisters. I am so excited that I can't even wait for their responses.

– *Look what Santa brought us!* I tell them as I bring the gifts to Mama's room.

I will always remember this morning on January 1st. It is magic.

## **6. Why aren't they making honey?**

– *Mama, can you give me an empty jar, please? I need it with a lid! We are playing outside and I need one. It's important for the experiment!*

Now that I have a jar, I am making holes in the lid so the air can flow because I heard somewhere that air is an essential element to sustain life. My friend Kate and I are catching bees, of all sizes, and putting them in this jar. We are adding flowers, of all colors that we can find, so the bees can start crafting. Now we need to give them time to create their delicious honey.

Since it is early in the day, Kate and I are visiting our mysterious old friend, the pine tree. He is mysterious because although he understands us when we talk to him, he never speaks back. Isn't that strange? I noticed the other day that he chatted with the wind, with the squirrels, and with that annoying old dog from across the street.

Why is he talking to all of them but not to us, the children? Maybe he grew older and forgot our language. It happens to most of the adults.

The pine tree is our refuge from boredom. He offers us a creative space. Did I tell you that two of his branches look as if they form an elliptical workout machine? The pine tree created it for us so we could work out when we visit him. We purposefully don't use the machine because we try to annoy him, hoping that this will force him to talk to us.

Kate and I are sitting on different branches, since we like to claim that the branch we sit on is our house. She has her own little house in the tree, and I have mine. We are talking about life as we make ourselves comfortable here.

– *Whom do you love the most in this world?* Kate asks me. I knew the answer to this question since I learned to speak.

– *My Mama.* I say without hesitation. *I love her more than anything else in this world.*

My eyes start watering. What will happen when my Mama dies? How will I live my life without her? I don't want this to happen! Never! I love her and I need her! I don't want to lose my Mama!

I realize that my Mama is at home now...ah, what a relief! I see her as a human-ant, working to ensure that her daughters don't lack anything. For her, the state of her children's happiness is worth any sacrifice. I will give her a big hug and a kiss as soon as I get back home.

I love you, Mama!

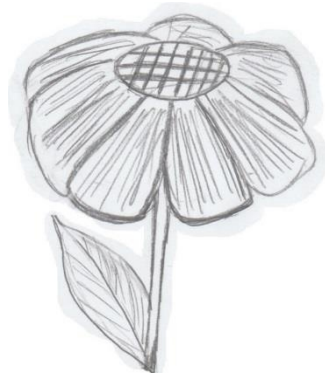
Since the pine tree does not even thank us for the visit, we say goodbye and leave.

We are going back to the secret place where we hid the jar filled with flowers and bees. We can't wait to liberate the bees and taste their honey! Maybe if they make enough of

it, we will sell it and raise some money. We can give the money to our parents, so they don't have to work as much.

We take the jar and carefully analyze it. We see the flowers and the bees, but no honey! Why? We gave these bees beautiful colorful flowers, air and time to craft their honey! Why isn't there honey? Maybe these bees are not hard-working. I guess there are lazy people in this world; I suppose there are lazy bees too.

I keep wondering. Why aren't they making honey?



## 7. Did you talk to me this morning?



I am finally home. After travelling for almost two days, I am finally here. It is early morning in Moldova, which means it is midnight in the USA. I am jet-lagged, but it

feels so nice to be in my bed, to breathe in the scent of my home, to hear the birds by my window, to feel the Moldovan sun rays as they land on my sleeping face.

I hear my door being opened, and some stealthy steps coming to my bed. By the aroma, I can tell that it is my Mama. She kisses my cheeks, and comforts me by playing with my hair. Even though I am not awake, I can feel her angelic presence. She protects me as I sleep.

– *I love you, my darling. I am so happy that you came home.* She whispers in my ear as she gives me one more hug before going to work.

I am so tired that I cannot even open my eyes nor my mouth to tell her that I love her. I am sleeping.

I always wait for my Mama to come home from work.

I hear my phone vibrating. I see dozens of messages from my Moldovan friends. I respond to all of them, planning meetings throughout the day, the week, the month. I can't ignore my friends, right? Is it a friend who only writes you once a year when you are home? Why do I spend so much time with them, and not with my family?

– *Mama, did you talk to me this morning?*

### **8. Come here, and taste the bread we made!**

It is a cold, rainy and windy October day. I analyze the outside ambience through the window, and I notice two people running to their cars. They are afraid of the madness of nature. Even the trees want to leave their roots and go to warmer lands, just like many Moldovans who try to escape from this problematic country to uncover new lands of opportunities.

The power is off. I am not afraid because I am home with my Mama. She is kneading the dough while teaching me a



poem, on autumn, by *Mihai*

*Eminescu*. Even though I am just a first grader, I can state that every single person in Moldova knows at least one poem by *Eminescu*.

My Mama loves poems. I think her favorite one is about spring written by *Vasile Alecsandri*. We always recite it

together when the winter snow melts and the storks come back from the warmer regions.

The dough is ready, and it is left to rest. Mama and I open a book and start reading more poems. She gives life to words, to poems, to books. How did she develop these super powers?

I look into her brown eyes, and I see so many worlds, but I can't understand much yet. I wonder, what was my Mama like when she was young? What dreams did she have?

*– Come here, and taste the bread we made!*

## **9. A special discount for you, only today!**

I prefer cold days over hot ones. The heat slowly exhausts my energy levels by draining the water from my body, leaving me dehydrated and hopeless.

I am dreaming of the Moldovan fall days as I am discovering the wonders of the culturally rich country of Mexico.

I am staring at these architectural gems. How did the



Mayans build this pyramid? The temples? What architectural strategies were they using? What inspired them to erect these wonders? What were their daily

thoughts? Did they worry about the same things we do?

We tend to think that people from the past were not as smart or advanced as we are. How foolish! The secret of the success of the past generations is their connection with

Mother Nature, while our failure is the dependence on technology. As long as we rely on devices to do things we can't figure out ourselves, we are at a great disadvantage.

I am walking through this site, and I am feeling a pain in my chest. How I wish I could share these moments with my Mama! What is she doing now? There are thousands of miles between us! I will see her this December, though... the winter break, one more semester, and then graduation!

*– Handkerchiefs, magnets, traditional outfits! A special discount for you, only today!*

## 10. Maybe you should find another mother?



The phone is ringing. It is a beautiful red rotary phone placed in the hall. I am running quickly from my room

to pick it up to check who it is. My goal is to respond to the phone calls before any other family member. It is my mini competition.

It's my friend, Mary.

*– Hi! Would you like to come over? We could hang out at my place.*

*– Mary, let me ask my Mama if she will allow me to come.*

I scream from the hall so my Mama can hear me from the balcony. I know that she thinks it is better to play outside, but she allows me to go over to Mary's apartment.

Since we get bored quickly inside, Mary decides to entertain us by showing the videos she made last summer at the seaside in Ukraine.

I have never been to the seaside. I know that my family's financial situation is not the best since I heard Mama and Dad mentioning once that the economy was in a terrible shape. When my parents are with their friends, they often talk about the lack of money in the governmental budget because this is the reason why everybody who works in public institutions is not receiving a salary. The government, I heard, is to blame. Why doesn't the government have enough money? With such behavior, they don't seem responsible to me.

After spending some hours with Mary, I am back home. I am sitting comfortably on a chair by the stove while Mama is preparing some delicious Moldovan soup.

*– Mama, when will we go to the seaside? Can we make a family trip this summer?*

*– I am sorry, but not this summer, my darling. Remember though, when you are older, you will be able to travel anywhere you want.*

*– Mary's mother took her to the seaside. Why can't you take me?*

*– Maybe you should find another mother?*

### 11. Mama starts crying.

I have just gotten home from school. My Mama is making the Moldovan traditional dish, *mămăligă*. I knew it from the moment I entered the apartment block. This enchanting smell breaks any barriers and reaches the person for whom it is being prepared.

– *Mama! I am home!* And I start sharing with her my thoughts, what happened throughout the day, who said what, what I feel, how my classes went, what I ate for lunch, what stresses me today, how much I want to sleep, and how happy I am to be home.

I did not have a particularly great day today, and I think I will comfort myself by eating in my room and watching TV. It's cold and dirty outside, the snow is melting and there is too much slush on the streets.

The TV is on. As I am covered in blankets holding the food tray so I can savor the *mămăligă* with fried fish, sour cream and goat cheese, the house phone starts ringing.

– *Who is calling me now? When I am finally comfortable, somebody decides to bother me! Today is not a good day!*

I scream as I am approaching the phone.



– *Congratulations! You are a FLEX (Future Leaders Exchange) Finalist! You won the scholarship to spend an academic year in the USA and live with an American host family!*

Mama starts crying.

**12. Are you that famous actress from the TV series?**

I know that I am only in fifth grade, but I need to think of my future. Who do I want *to be* when I grow up? What do I want *to do* when I grow up?

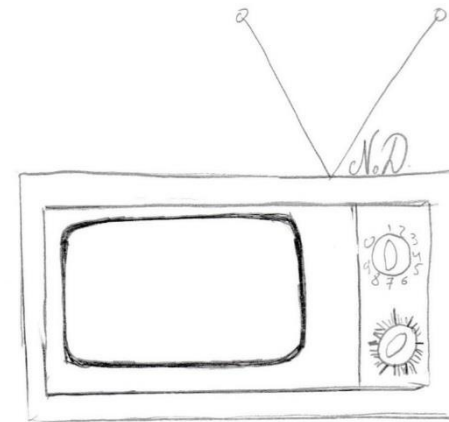
I need to choose a path in life that will bring me joy. I don't want to be stuck in "just a job" since there would be no excitement. I can't be always waiting for Friday every week, right? How can I choose the correct path?

– *Mama, I want to become an actress. Through quality movies that address noble topics I can make the world a better place. I would play different roles, discover new places, and become famous. My family, my relatives, my friends and teachers will see me in movies and say, "I know her!"*

– *Look, sweetheart, there is a story in this gazette about an American who intends to invest in the Moldovan film industry.*

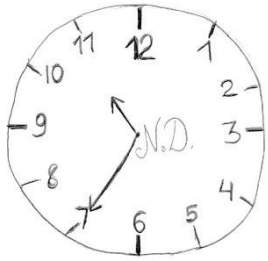
I read it carefully.

I imagine myself working with actors from all over the world and speaking to them in foreign languages. I appear on TV, on the radio, and on the billboards in the capital city. I walk on the streets and people stop me and ask:



– *Are you that famous actress from the TV series?*

### 13. Good morning, sunshine!



It is so quiet that I can hear  
the clock ticking and my  
heart beating. I am too tired,  
but I can't seem to fall  
asleep. I am analyzing in my

mind every single detail of the charity concert that we are  
organizing. It's only two days away.

The concert hall is booked.

The tickets are sold out.

The artists confirmed their participation.

The volunteering team is still energetic and optimistic.

The scripts are written.

My family and the entire community is supportive.

Why do I think of all of these now? Why isn't my brain  
collaborating with the time of day? How can I stop my

thoughts? I wish my brain were so active during my  
morning classes!

– *Why aren't you sleeping? It's too late and you have to  
get up early in the morning.* Mama enters my room as she  
speaks to me.

– *I don't know, Mama. I really want to rest, but my brain  
is working non-stop.*

I feel her hand go through my hair, massage my head, and  
take all my worried thoughts away. My eyes are closing.  
The clock is not ticking, or, at least, I don't hear it  
anymore. My heart keeps beating, but without bothering  
me.

– *Good morning, sunshine!*

#### 14. Mama, he brought me snowdrops!

– *Should I go on a date with him? I feel nervous.*

– *Of course, you should! My Mama and my older sisters advise me. Based on what you told us, he seems well-mannered and very interested in getting to know you better.*

– *You are right! I will text him back agreeing to meet on March 10<sup>th</sup>.*

Although the calendar shows that it is already spring in



Moldova, the temperature outside does not indicate that. The winter, almost every year, tends to extend its visit because it enjoys the widely known Moldovan hospitality. Well, winter,

maybe it is time to go!

We have just entered the car, after walking through quiet streets listening to the wind put a magic love spell on us.

We did not realize we were cold during the walk.

We are in front of my apartment block and I am ready to leave. As I open the car door, I hear his voice:

– *I have something for you.*

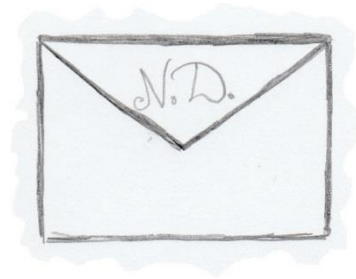
I enter the apartment. The lights in my Mama's room are still on. She is waiting to hear my impressions of the date.

I smile. I can see the spark of my eyes reflected in hers.

– *Mama, he brought me snowdrops!*

## 15. Thank you, girls!

The anniversary of my parents' wedding is the celebration of the creation of our family. It is difficult for my brain to process the idea that my parents existed in this world without me. I am jealous to think that they had my two sisters and I was still not there. Where was I then? I can't remember or I don't know. One thing is for sure, my brain is not smart enough to give a reliable explanation.



This anniversary is special.

My sisters and I planned a surprise for our parents. We wrote an invitation for them, but we did not specify the

location, only the time and attire.

My Mama is beautiful! She smiles and enjoys every single bit of this experience. Few times have I seen her as content and relaxed as now.

My Dad is impatiently waiting at the house as the surprise unfolds. Why is he not enjoying it?

– *Where are we going? Why aren't you telling us?* He keeps asking me and my sisters.

– *If we tell you, it is not a surprise anymore!* My sisters and I shout at the same time. Maybe he likes to keep everything under control. Or, maybe, he does not like surprises. I am not sure.

– *You planned every single detail: the car with a driver, the champagne on the back seat, the theater play, and the homemade dinner. Thank you, girls!*

## 16. You always make it work.



I enter my room. Throw the backpack on a chair, and myself on the bed. My brain is falling apart because of this finals week. I am so tired that I can't even remember what year it is.

Have I eaten today?

I don't even get to close my eyes, and my alarm is already ringing. What kind of nap is it? The quality of my naps is getting exponentially worse as the semester progresses.

My girlfriends and I are meeting in the cafeteria in ten minutes. This week's main topic is finals. How many more do you have left? How did your last exam go? Have you seen the Facebook posts of those who finished all their finals?

*– I have a feeling that finals never end.*

The stress level is high.

The quality of the food is low.

The desire to sleep is increasing.

My energy is decreasing.

Coffee does not help, but Mama does.

*– Mama, it is so good to hear your voice!*

*– How are you, my baby? You sound sad.*

*– I am just tired. Too much to do, too little time.*

*– Make sure you take a nap. You are more productive after napping. Don't worry, my sweetie. It does not matter how challenging it is, you always make it work.*

**17. I don't know.**

The tears are running down my face, and I am not even embarrassed. I hate crying in front of others, but today I don't care. My pain has triumphed.

I held it together, though, when I said goodbye to my parents at home. I never let them take me to the airport. It is torture to pass through the security check, sense how they crumble inside as their baby daughter embarks on a life-changing journey, and accept the uncertainty of the next get-together.

The years of experience in this business don't make "the goodbye" easier, they make it more painful and persistent. It becomes a chronic disease.

Three years ago, at the age of sixteen, I left the country for ten months. I would say that I was very courageous then.

The excitement was stronger than the fear. This time is different.

I already know the effects and consequences of leaving my nest. Home is never the same when I return. The more I am abroad, the more everything changes at home. I am nineteen and I am headed to do a four year B.A. in another country. When is the next time I can visit my family? I burst out crying!

I need my faith to survive. I hear a voice that alleviates my pain.

I don't know.



## 18. Why?

People are used to measuring everything: age, weight, time, distance...

How can we measure love? Can we love more or less?

Does love have a comparative or superlative form? Is there a system of measurement for love? Or a device that indicates the degree of love?

I love my Mama. There are not enough ways to show her how much. Maybe there are, but I am limited in time and space. I don't have super powers as she does. I can only hope that she knows how grateful I am to God for blessing me with her.



It is her birthday today. She wakes up early to prepare herself for work. She enters the kitchen and sees a beautifully decorated cake, balloons,

flowers, cards...she is loved. But does she know how much?

What is the source of love?

I open the browser and I scroll through the main social media platforms. I do not observe any manifestation of love there. However, I find enough evidence there to state that we are failing in some important ways as a society.

We, as a society, do not have many more values left, I think. As a collective force we often fail to discern the truth from the lie, and the good from the bad. I assume this happens because when we form a collective, leaders take control. How do they rise up to power? Who influences the public opinion the most and how? Why?

**19. I have not seen him in months.**

– *Mama, I am home. I have just entered the apartment...yes, I came through the park with the two classmates from our street.*

– *I will be home in two hours. There is food in the fridge. I am busy now, we will talk later.*

I hang up.

Why do people need to work? This thought quickly disappears as my nine-year-old stomach tells me that it is lunch time. I open the fridge and my sight stops on the bowl full of *sarmale* and on the jar with homemade sour cream from the village where my grandparents live.

Mama says I am responsible and mature. She trusts me to be alone in the house.

I need to make sure that I clean the dishes after me (Mama does not tolerate dirty dishes in the sink!), water the

plants, take out the trash, bring water from the well, and sweep the floor. On sunny days, I like the chores that involve being outside. I always invite my friend Mary to do them with me. It's nice when you have a companion; the chores become games.



It's 2 p.m. As I hear the door open, I drop my pencil on the notebook and run to the door to greet Mama.

– *Daddy!!!* I jump into his arms and hug him tightly. He has

been working abroad. I have not seen him in months.

## 20. It's 8 p.m.!

When is fall break? The semester has barely started and I am already thinking of vacations. I thought it would be easier to adjust to Moldova after spending an academic year in the USA, but my country never stops surprising me.

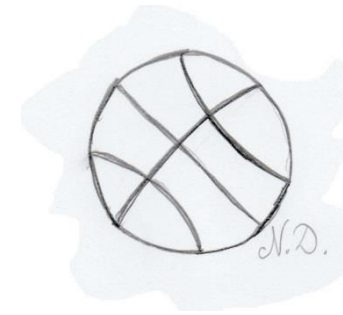
I have lived sixteen years in Moldova, and I have left this picturesque country for only ten months. Then why am I experiencing such a strong reverse cultural shock?

I am irritated most of the time. I have days when I complain for hours without interruption. My Mama listens and tries to comfort me.

*– Mama, I am taking a nap. Please wake me up later tonight. I have lots of homework.*

Since I returned to Moldova, I started bombarding myself with domestic, national and international projects. I discovered that when I keep my mind busy with creative

ideas and surround myself with positive people, I complain less and I smile more.



Today I had my basketball practice. I can feel every muscle in my body. I don't play on a team, though. I just train my resistance playing basketball with the boys' team during their practice time. I am getting in shape for the spring athletic competitions.

*– Wake up! I jump out of bed. I am late for class!*

*– Sweetheart, where are you going? It's 8 p.m.!*

## 21. My head hurts.

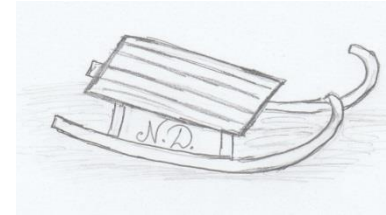
It is morning. My sisters are still sleeping. I share a bed with my oldest sister who tells me fairy tales almost every night. My middle sister has her own bed. She is the one who takes me outside to play when I am not allowed to go alone. I get up quietly, making sure I don't wake them, and look through the window. Winter has come!

It has snowed all night. Before I went to sleep, I observed the exquisite dance of the snowflakes. I even dreamed about them. The snowflakes transformed themselves into soldiers of light whose mission was to extinguish the kingdom of darkness...but I can't recall the details.

*– Get dressed! We are going to our friend's house to bake bread together. They have an excellent hearth oven!*

As the adults are in the house baking bread and other delicacies, Kate and I are on the peak of happiness: we have a snow-covered hill and two great sleds. To make the

ride more interesting, I choose to slide downhill on my belly.



I run and jump on my sled with courage to increase the speed of the take off. I go fast, but I can barely see. The snow falls directly on my face. As I try to clear my sight, all of a sudden, I see an iron cistern three meters from me. I can't turn! I can't turn! I can't turn!

There are red spots on the white snow. My head hurts.

**22. I ask.**

It is a sunny winter day. Mama and I woke up at 6 a.m. on this beautiful Saturday because I have an appointment in Chişinău. She prefers to reach the capital city early, before the city rush becomes unbearable.



Mama is preoccupied with my sight. I have been wearing glasses since eighth grade and my sight has worsened ever

since. I blame it on the amount of reading, writing, work and other college-related stress that I have. What a paradox! The more I study, the less I see.

I used to have a strong immune system. I was never hospitalized throughout my childhood, even though many times I thought I would die in all the experiments I managed during those early years. However, in eighth

grade, unexpectedly, an army of diseases attacked me and took control of my immune system.

Mama suffers knowing the health issues I have. Even though she does not like hospitals, she goes with me to every single examination.

– *Mama, how come you have time to go with me to the doctor's appointments, but you don't go to check your own health?* She does not like this question. She finds millions of excuses.

She stops, takes her wallet out of her purse, and gives some money to the street beggars.

– *Why do you give them money?* I ask.

### 23. We are going to the village.

– *One, two, three, run!*

I feel the wind go through my hair as I run towards the sunset. My eyes hurt a bit from the sunlight, so I keep them semi-closed.

I win the race.

The older neighborhood friends find it entertaining to see me beat other children at running. I like it too, though I



sympathize with them.

Winning these races boosts my confidence and makes me feel important. It's

enough for today. I am going home to tell Mama about my athletic achievements.

I open the door ready to shout about my successful career as a runner, when I see Mama holding the phone. Her angelic face is covered in tears.

My world is falling apart. My heart screams of pain every time I see Mama crying. When you love, the pain and the struggles of the other person become yours.

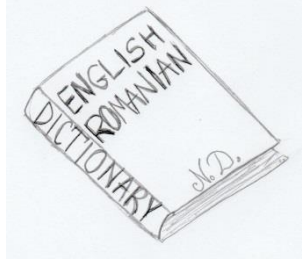
I am just six years old. How can I solve Mama's problems? I want to ask her what happened, but my sisters are telling me to wait. I can tell that they, too, have been crying for a while. I start crying without even knowing the reason.

– *It is your Grandma Tasia.*

We are going to the village.

## 24. You are in!

This homework is killing me slowly. I open the English-Romanian dictionary and look for another word. I need a



lifetime to translate this text because I don't know the meaning of any of these words. What do they mean?

A teardrop is falling on the book.

Mama passes by my room and sees me crying.

*– I know you are struggling, but one day it will get easier, I promise!*

*– When? I want it to be easier now...I will never learn this language!*

She kisses my forehead and dries the tears off my cheeks.

*– I believe in you! One day you will not even need a dictionary when reading a book written in English.*

Although the English homework is torture, the dictionary is a treasure. It is an expensive gift from my middle sister. She paid about 60 lei for it!

My entire family is supporting me on the journey I embarked on, being a fifth grader at the best school in the region.

One day this past summer my Dad happily told me:

*– I checked the admissions list today. You are in!*

## 25. Taste some!

My primary job for the past twelve years has been to study and be an excellent student. This year I am graduating from High School.

– *What are you doing now?* I hear my Mama’s voice from the kitchen. *Come and learn how to make plăcinte!*

– *I am coming!* I jump from my bed, that’s where I do my homework. Mama highly disapproves, saying that this damages my body posture and my back.

Since I am the youngest in my family, I never really had to cook for anyone. Everybody makes delicious dishes, except me. Well, I still haven’t learned how to cook real complicated meals.

Mama tries to teach me her secret art of making *plăcinte*, but after ten minutes she looks at my face and says:

– *I can see that you are not interested...*

– *But can I help you with anything?*

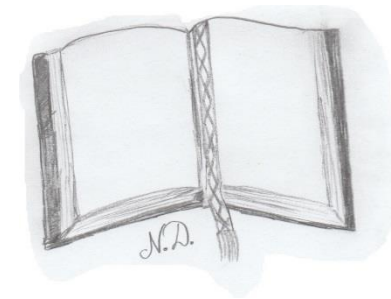
– *No, thank you. You can continue doing your homework.*

– *Will you call me if you need my help? I will be in my room.*

– *Of course!*

I sense the unmistakable smell of *plăcinte*! Mama is smiling as she enters my room with a plate:

– *Taste some!*



## 26. Stop the car!

It is the fourteenth of June. This year we initiated a new family tradition: to celebrate Mama's birthday camping by the lake, in the village where my parents grew up.

My parents have invited two more families to join us on this birthday adventure. There are too many of us, no less than fifteen people, to fit in two cars.

The women are packing the food, the men are buying the drinks, and the children are picking the best toys for this trip.

The village is only twenty kilometers from the city.



We, the children, have the most thrilling seats: the bed of the pickup truck. The wind is blowing through our hair. We

are singing at the top of our lungs, thinking that we are the luckiest children in the world. We will soon swim in the

lake, and play aquatic games. I am not sure if their mothers will let them swim, but I know that my Mama will. She trusts me because I am well-behaved.

In five minutes we should be by the lake!

The wind is getting stronger. Oops, I don't have my hat anymore. I start screaming:

*– Daaaddddy! I dropped my hat! Stop the car!*

## 27. Following careful review of your application...

I am still waiting.

I check, one more time, the Facebook group and I see the posts from the people who got accepted or rejected by the college I have applied to. I verify my e-mail. There are no new messages.

I am nervous. My pulse is going faster at the thought that I am not accepted.

*– If they haven't written to me, it means that I am not accepted. The lucky applicants always get the positive news first. I speak to myself.*

*– Mama, I am going to the stadium to clear my mind. I will walk a bit there, maybe meet Mary, and come back home.*

*– Before you go, write to the Admissions Office and ask them about your status.*

I am alone. I walk around the stadium and listen to music on headphones. I can only hear my thoughts, the music is just background noise.

I applied only to this college.

*– How was the walk? Come here. Stay with me a bit. I know that Mama senses my nervousness.*

I sit next to her, and she gives me the most comforting hug in the world. She plays with my hair and tells me:

*– Everything that happens is for the best.*

*– Following careful review of your application...*



**28. I am loved and cared for.**

I don't have any family members in the USA, but God always blessed with me with kind, loving people everywhere I went.

– *Margarita, where is my Mama? When will I see her?* I ask my professor as we are having lunch at her house.

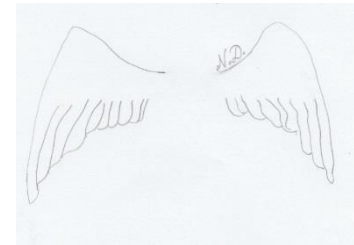
– *She is in Moldova waiting for you. You will see her just after you finish your semester abroad in Mexico.*

I give her a hug, expressing in this way my gratitude for her kindness.

Margarita has given me a roof over my head this past summer, has taken me to the dentist every month, and has taught me key life lessons. Why has she been so nice to me? What did I do to deserve this kindness? As I think of this, I remember my dear college friend, Pame, who often says:

– *God sends us angels everywhere we go. My family might be miles away, but I have angels looking over me here.*

How can I thank all the people who have made me a better



person? Who have sacrificed their time to help me? Who have chosen to spend time with me? Who have listened

to my soul? Who offered me a word of wisdom in times of trouble? Who have given me a hug when I needed comfort?

– *You, dear friends, know who you are, thank you!*

I am loved and cared for.

## 29. Now you have rollerblades!

It is Sunday afternoon.

My Mama and I are in another city today. I do not know how far it is from our home since I am too young. I am just five.

I am already in an excellent mood since this morning was my first time travelling by train! I had a seat by the window and only looked at the images that quickly passed by as the train rushed to take the passengers to their destinations.

We are here. Where exactly I cannot tell. There are too many people on this market square, and I am not able to see much. I suppose everybody needs to buy something



today.

As Mama is choosing a sweater for me, I see these beautiful

rollerblades:

– *Mama, can you buy me these rollerblades?*

– *Baby, I would buy them with pleasure, but I only have 100 lei with me. And this is how much they cost. Let's keep searching, maybe we can find something cheaper.*

I nod to show that I agree, but tears come out of my eyes.

I can't stop them. My desire to have rollerblades is stronger than my self-control.

– *There we go, sweetheart. I told you we would find something for you. Now you have rollerblades!*

**30. The...**

*– I have some gifts for you, Mama! I have chosen the things you like the most! I hope they all fit and that you like them!*

A lifetime would not be enough to thank my Mama for everything she did, continues to do, and will do for me. Happiness is having a happy Mama!

I believe that mothers should be given more credit for their years of service to the family.

The sleepless nights.

The meals prepared.

The daily chores.

The first tooth.

The first step.

The birthday parties.

The hand-made costumes for school plays.

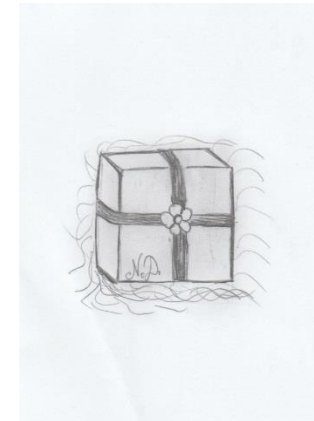
The scars and the wounds.

The whims and the stubbornness.

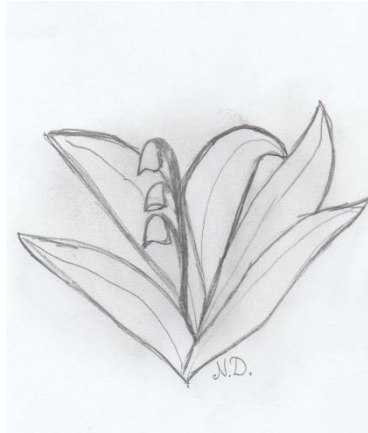
The first heartbreak.

The tests and the exams.

The...



### 31. She loved us, her grandchildren!



The air is so fresh that it feels as if I am in the mountains. I hear the sound of the bells that try to reach the hearts of the believers who forgot their way to the monastery. I take a deep breath and, suddenly, I sense the scent of the lilies of the valley that carry the memory of the person who planted them.

Mmm, the garden from the village!

One day, years ago, my grandmother stepped through this garden. My grandfather. My great-grandmother. My great-grandfather. Where can I find the cloud storage of this garden so I can retrieve the memories of those days?

I never met my great-grandparents in person. Only through the photographs that are displayed on the walls in

the village house. I look at these black and white pictures, waiting to hear their stories. The pictures are quiet.

*– Cut some flowers from the garden, darling, and fill this bottle with water.*

We enter the cemetery. We slowly walk to the graves of our relatives, greeting them with love and giving them flowers. We always make the first stop at my Grandmother Tasia, my Mama's mother. I have very few memories of her, but all are filled with warmth and kindness. She loved us, her grandchildren!

**32. Our apartment has been a target a couple of times.**

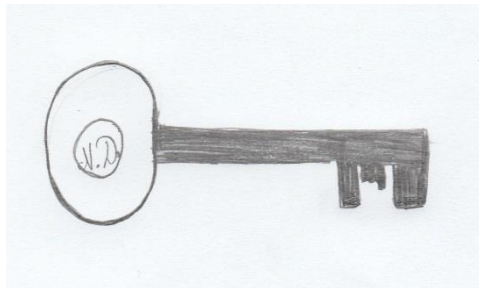
As I open my eyes, I notice that I am surrounded by my entire family and two neighbors. Everyone is staring at me.

– *Why are you looking at me? What is the matter?*

Everyone is smiling and hugging me. This confuses me even more. Am I still dreaming? My Mama comes closer to me, kisses me all over my face and says:

– *When you came home today from school you locked the door and left the key there.*

– *Of course! As you taught me!*



– *Since you left the key in the lock, we could not open the door. We called the*

*house phone, rang the doorbell, called your name by the*

*balcony, threw snowballs at the windows, and contacted all your friends. We finally entered the house because the neighbor managed to enter through the balcony and open the door for us. We were relieved to see you sleeping so calmly! I thank God that nothing happened to you!*

Mama taught me to lock the door this way since this past week a couple of thieves tried to break into some apartments in our neighborhood. Such behavior is not uncommon since, as I heard, a neighbor from our apartment block has been recently released from prison. Our apartment has been a target a couple of times.

### 33. I am a twenty-three-year-old child!

– *Should I sleep for forty more minutes or go to the cafeteria to eat?* This question is harder to answer during the last weeks of the semester. I think everything gets more complicated towards the end: be it a semester, a marathon, or life.



How I miss those mornings when Mama would wake me up! This makes me realize

that I can't stand the sound of my alarm anymore! I should ask my Mama to wake me up via phone, but the time difference...

I remember telling my Mama when I was about nine years old:

– *I can't wait to grow older!* She looked at me and said

with nostalgia:

– *How I wish I could be a child again!*

I thought that she was missing the point of adulthood, and was not valuing the benefits of being independent. I now realize that children have more independence than adults.

As long as we have parents, we are children.

As long as we live, we are children.

I am a twenty-three-year-old child!

### 34. Where do parents find the energy to deal with teenagers?

I am covered in blankets. I turn my face to the window so nobody can notice that I am crying. Of course, mothers do not need to see our facial expressions to understand what we are feeling. They just know!

– *Why are you crying?*

– *I am ugly. Look at this face!*

I have just been diagnosed with Vitiligo, which is a disease that causes the depigmentation of the skin. The source of it is still unknown and there is no treatment.

Due to Vitiligo I have a lighter spot on the right side of



my face. The eyelashes of my right eye turned white, and a white streak appeared in my hair. With all of these, how am I supposed to have a social life at the age of fifteen?

– *It is just an aesthetic problem, and it can be easily solved with make-up if you don't want other people to find out your health issue. You should be grateful that it does not hurt. You are beautiful inside and out! You are unique! Many people dye their hair to have a streak like yours, but you have it naturally! Remember, darling, God marked you this way, and He does not make mistakes!*

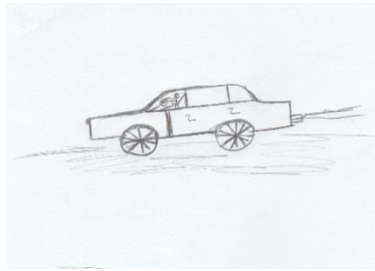
Where do parents find the energy to deal with teenagers?

### 35. It's good to have companions, isn't it?

We are running from the fifth floor downstairs ringing our neighbors' doorbells. I must confess that they do not find our ways of playing amusing. How boring are they? They just do not have a good sense of humor.

It is raining outside, and our parents are not letting us out.

We can play, though, in the hall of the apartment block.



My friend brought her dolls for us to play. Although I prefer playing with cars, the dolls are better than

nothing. We are organizing the toys on the window sill and are making ourselves comfortable by the semi-broken window. Unfortunately, we cannot finish our game.

– *Maaa-maa!* I scream as loudly as I can, keeping in mind that I am crying at the same time.

My Dad is repairing the window and cleaning the blood from the stairs. Mama is holding me in her arms, kissing me on the forehead and singing a lullaby.

I accidentally broke the window and cut my arm. Mama says that this scar on my right hand will accompany me throughout my life. It's good to have companions, isn't it?

### **36. I am moving to the other room.**

It is 5 a.m. on a Saturday morning. I am watching cartoons with my Dad and protecting Mama's dreams. She does not like waking up too early on the weekends.

I still sleep in the same room with my parents. I know that it is time to move to the other room, with my sisters, but I am trying to postpone this transition as much as possible.

Why? To be honest, I do not know.

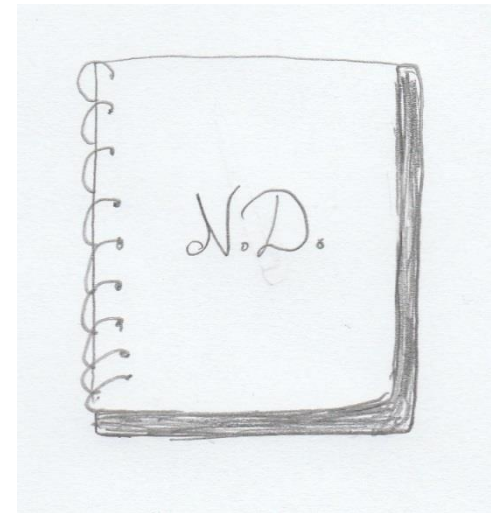
My sisters and I are mostly nice to each other. Well, we have arguments, but my friends say this is normal. I concluded from my friends' stories that everybody fights.

My parents highly disapprove of our conflicts, and emphasize the significance of family unity and the essence of the sisterhood bond. Why do they take our fights so seriously?

*– You are sisters, and this is more important than your disagreements.* From the tone, we can tell that they are disappointed.

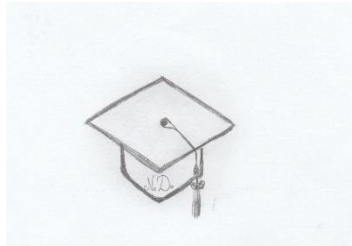
I love my sisters, but they don't want to tell me fairy tales or play with me all day long. Most of the time they just look in their books without pictures and write in their notebooks. How boring! I need to teach them how to play.

*– Mama! Daddy! I am moving to the other room.*



### 37. How can I help you today?

I am at the Post Office waiting in line. It's 9 a.m. in Moldova, and I am here to send some postcards to my professors from college.



I finished my college career this May. I waited four years for the graduation day, and it was everything except what I

wanted. Pure disappointment!

Now I am home for a couple of months. It is a hot July, and it has not rained in weeks. The unbearable heat can be felt even at this hour.

– *You are already back home, I see.* It is a woman who worked with my Mama for a decade or so.

– *This past winter your mother was talking about your arrival in Moldova with excitement. Her eyes were sparkling every time she would mention you.*

I try to not say much. I force a smile, and thank her for the kind words. I let her go ahead in line since I am in no rush.

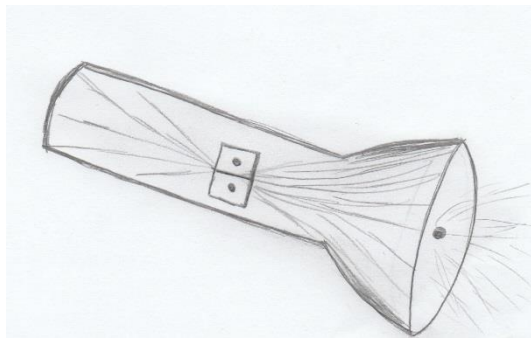
An avalanche of memories. I now think of the past winter and all the unexpected events that unfolded.

– *How can I help you today?*

### 38. Lucky you!

When spending my semester abroad I discovered that I am a nomad. For how much longer can I collect my possessions and move? When will I settle down? Will I find my way home?

Travelling to foreign lands seemed a dream when growing up in post-Soviet Moldova with power shortages, water shortages, energy shortages, but with an excess of optimism...



I was a happy child who was desperately waiting for the power to be off

to create a night club show with the flashlights in the house. The shortages became excesses when my friends and I used our imagination.

One of my closest friends was Happiness. We used to do everything together. However, as we all know, few childhood friendships are meant to pass the test of time. I don't remember when, how and why, but I stopped hanging out with her. We still talk, but this is nothing compared to our adventures as children. I am jealous that she has so many new friends, based on her current Facebook tags. How many of her friends are real, though? Does she still think of me or of our childhood memories?

I wish Happiness had kept travelling with me instead of choosing an online lifestyle. After a year of voyaging together through the Americas, she got tired and quit. Since then, I travel alone.

It might sound romantic in theory, but it is painful in practice. I gained knowledge and experience everywhere I went, but I lost pieces of me on the way.

*– You are back on campus! For how long will you be here?*

*– Next week I am flying home for the winter break.*

*– I am so jealous! You have been to Mexico, now you are going home, and then you are graduating! Lucky you!*

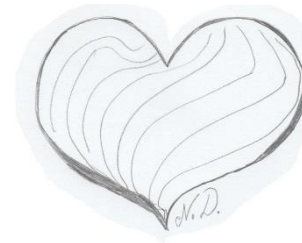
### **39. I am privileged.**

*– Would you like to go for a walk in the park or downtown? I am bored.*

*– Thank you, Mary. Maybe another time? Today I would like to stay home with Mama.*

*– But you see her every day...*

*– I would like to spend some quality time with her. You know, she works six days a week.*



Since I was little I thought that my friend was lucky to have a stay-at-home mother. Mary was privileged in the sense that she could spend with her as much time as she wanted. I only dreamed of that...of my Mama not working, not being tired, and not leaving at 7:30 a.m. every morning. Mama and I are home alone today. I am privileged.

#### 40. Her voice is more effective than medicine.

– *Can I talk to Mama, please?* Her co-workers already recognize me by the voice. Even though I am in the USA, I still try to call my Mama almost every day. I know that she is busy and that I should not interrupt her while she works, but this is one of my ways of showing her my love.

I hear running steps.

– *Hello!* Her voice, even from thousands of miles away,



has a soothing effect on my worried thoughts. I smile, remembering what a beautiful tradition I have created since first grade: to call Mama when I get home from school.

– *Why aren't you sleeping? Isn't it past midnight there?*

Her voice is more effective than medicine.

#### 41. I am here for you as long as you need me.



The winter break has finished, and I am back in the USA. For the first time in my life, I was eager to leave Moldova.

I wish I could spend some more days in the airport, to postpone reality and learn to embrace my brokenness before I face the world.

Well, if I had to choose, I would hide and not face anyone.

Unfortunately, I do not have this option since my last semester of college begins tomorrow.

It is unfair that the world does not stop when I suffer! Why don't I get time to heal? From whom can I ask a break? How much time is necessary to heal the wound caused by the loss of a loved one?

I am in front of the airport, and I see the car of my professor who offered to pick me up. I am moved by the love and care of the people who were strangers once, but

now they are close friends who comfort me on my darkest days.

*– There is a surprise waiting for you at Margarita's house.*

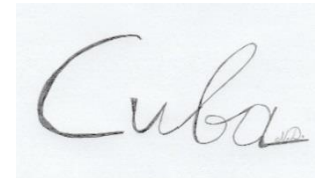
I see Gigantino, the enormous teddy bear of my college adviser, seated in an armchair holding a message for me:

*– I am here for you as long as you need me.*

#### **42. I am a memory.**

*– How do you feel?*

*– I am so excited that I cannot stop smiling! Even my cheeks hurt! I have been waiting for this moment forever!*



I see tears in my friend's eyes as the airplane is about to land in Havana, Cuba. It is an

extraordinary experience to see people's dreams come true. I feel privileged to witness this moment, a soon to become memory that will warm up the cold days filled with stress and worry.

My memory is set up in files, as the documents in an archive. There are shelves that I choose to visit regularly because they are vital for my survival. There are also files that I would prefer to set on fire, but memories do not burn. Too often I end up reading these files because they

pull me with a magnetic force. The more I try to avoid them, the stronger I gravitate towards them.

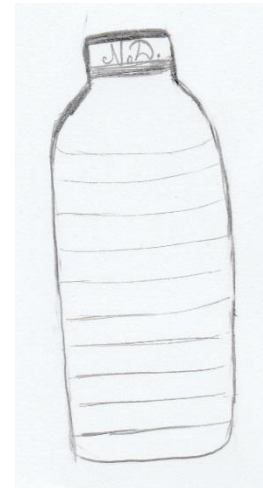
How do I get rid of such memories? Why do they haunt me? Why can't I remember the good ones more vividly than the bad ones?

I wish my memory was similar to a hard disk drive, where I could choose and pick what memories to keep or delete.

I am a memory.

### **43. We are home!**

I am in the airport. It is snowing beautifully outside. I am reading an article about Santa Claus in a Lufthansa magazine, as I am waiting for my boyfriend to bring me some water.



Why is the water so expensive in airports? Three euros for a small bottle of water is too much, I think. I wish there were water fountains everywhere. I believe people should have access to free potable water.

I savor the taste of mineral water, and I think of the upcoming Christmas holidays. I cherish the winter atmosphere in Moldova: the lights, the food, the relatives, the carols and the other traditions that are sacredly kept, particularly in the villages.

When I was younger, traditions were the gist of the holidays. Unfortunately, now they are not passing successfully the test of time and of technology.

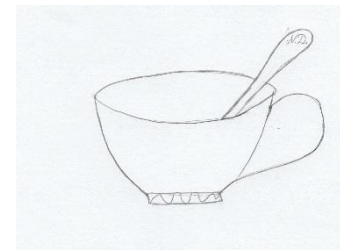
– *We are home!*

#### **44. Stay strong!**

How can I think of my capstone when my heart is barely beating? Why do I have to go to class when I don't even want to get out of bed? How can I stop my tears when I am in class? When will this semester end? The graduation day seems too far away!

I am only liberated in my room. When I am with people I feel the constant pressure to smile because my pain might disturb others. Since most of them know what happened this past winter break, they are concerned about me.

Nobody can help, though...



What a relief to be alone! As I shut the door I burst out crying! I hug Gigantino...he is allowed to be here because

he cannot talk. He alleviates my pain with his magical

hugs. He does not mind my sadness, my brokenness, and my grief.

I don't want to see anyone, and at the same time I feel lonely. I have cried nonstop for about an hour and I don't feel any better. Crying used to help.

An emptiness.

A longing.

An unfulfilled dream.

*– You are a role model, my friend! I admire you...I am here for you anytime you need me. Stay strong!*

#### **45. Just two more days!**

It is a hot summer evening, and I am at the house of my host family, sitting on the balcony. I have just finished my freshman year, including the eight-week summer program, which allowed me to make \$3,000 just in two months.



I savor a delicious cold chamomile tea as I Skype with my family.

*– We miss you, baby! How are you? What are you plans for the rest of the summer?*

*– I miss you all like crazy! How I wish I could come home for couple of weeks! Unfortunately, I can't make it this summer!*

My Mama nods and forces a smile. I can tell by her eyes that she is sad.

*– We understand. The plane tickets are too expensive.*

*Sadly, we cannot afford to purchase your ticket with our*

*salaries. As you know, the average salary is no more than  
\$200 per month.*

If only I could tell them my secret surprise. I am coming  
home! Just two more days!

**46-50. I cry.**

It is a Literature class of only four students, including me.

*Virtue.*

*Awe.*

*Love.*

*Essence.*

*Necessity.*

*Time.*

*Illusion.*

*Nostalgia.*

*Admiration.*

Too many questions were left unasked. Why so early?

I cry.

**\* I see her.**

It's 1:01 a.m. I am too tired of such nights when the past becomes the present. The memories of the winter break and the following ten months overwhelm me. Can I delete the memory files connected with the death of my Mama?

I am a living part of all that I remember, and a version of me is now with her...at the house, in the village, in the capital city, in... that version of me is lucky because she is liberated by Mama's presence, while I am imprisoned by an unscrupulous reality. I am struggling with the concept of her death, which has mutilated me. Yet, I am not defeated.

Mama and I talked about death once. She looked at me with begging eyes and said:

*– When I die, please let me go.*

*– Do you hear me, Mama? Now I am letting you go.*

I look in the mirror, and I see her.

Proof